



THE BULLETIN

NEWS AND VIEWS FROM THE RICHMOND HILL NATURALISTS

October 2009 No. 483

2008-2009 EXECUTIVE

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Events calendar

Executive Meeting **Tuesday November 10, 2009.**
7:30pm

Location: McConaghy Centre

General Meeting **Thursday October 15, 2009.** 7:30pm – Get your garden off drugs – YREA president Gloria Marsh talks about organic lawn and garden care. Location: Richmond Hill Presbyterian Church

Botany Group **November 2, 2009.** 12:30pm.

Bird Group Meeting **Wednesday November 11, 2009.**
7:30pm

Check for more Events and Outings on Page 2

Save a Tree! Get the Bulletin by Email!

If you have internet access, and are currently getting the Bulletin by “snail mail”, please get yourself on the email list. Enjoy the full-colour pictures, clickable links and more. Please email editor@rhnaturalists.ca if you would like to receive the Bulletin in your In-Box instead of your Mailbox.

Markham Council passes Resolution Supporting Protection of Observatory Lands

At their October 13 meeting Markham Council unanimously passed a resolution recommending that the entire Dunlap property be set aside for conservation and preservation purposes, and supporting the Town of Richmond Hill's efforts to nominate the David Dunlap Observatory as a National Historic Site.

Have Your Say on Development of the David Dunlap Observatory Lands

The Town of Richmond Hill is holding the first public consultation for the planning and conservation management study for the David Dunlap Observatory lands. The meeting is Tuesday, October 20 from 7 to 9:30 p.m. in the Yorkshire Room of the Langstaff Community Centre. The Langstaff Community Centre is located at 155 Red Maple Rd., east of Yonge Street and north of Hwy. 7.

For more information, contact Joanne Leung at the Town of Richmond Hill's Planning and Development Department at 905-771-5498 or by e-mail at jleung@richmondhill.ca



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: Denise Potter

Mailing Database: Mike Turk

Distribution: Athena Antiochos

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/>

EVENTS FUTURE



- **Tuesday November 10, 2009. 7:30pm. *Executive Meeting*** at the McConaghy Centre.



Thursday October 15, 2009. 7:30pm. *General Meeting* – Speaker: Gloria Marsh will discuss how to get your lawn and garden off drugs in light of the recent provincial pesticide legislation. Executive Director of the York Region Environmental Alliance, Ms. Marsh will also give a short presentation about the YREA. 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.



- **Wednesday November 11, 2009. 7:30pm. *Bird Group meeting***. Topic: Northern Flicker, Red-Bellied Woodpecker and Yellow-Bellied Sapsucker. Host Mike Turk 217 Romfield Circuit, Thornhill 905-731-8380. New Members Welcome!



- **Saturday October 17, 2009. 9am *Beaver Creek Walk – Part 2***– 2.5 KM walk on good path to explore Beaver Creek - Leader: Joe Agg. Meet at 9am sharp at Weldrick Rd. and Spadina in Richmond Hill. Spadina runs south off Major Mackenzie about 1km east of Bayview. Weldrick runs east off Bayview about 1km south of Major Mackenzie. There is a large beaver dam on the walk and rabbits, foxes and muskrats have been seen as well as plenty of birds. See the story in this issue about Beaver Creek Walk – Part 1.

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



October 14, 2009. 7-9 PM *West Thornhill Stormwater Flood Remediation Class Environmental Assessment Study*

Study Objective: to determine a preferred solution to improve the stormwater system performance in West Thornhill to an acceptable level of protection. This is the second of two meetings: PIC #2 is planned to present the draft preferred solution for the study area. Visit: www.markham.ca

Time: 7-9 p.m. Presentation starts promptly at 7:30 p.m.

Location: St. Rene Goupil - St. Luke Catholic Elementary School, 135 Green Lane, Thornhill (east of Bayview)

 **Toronto Ornithological Club Jim Baillie Memorial Walks –**
These outings are aimed at the intermediate birder but beginners are also welcome. Free to the public.

Waterfowl and Winter Birding: West Toronto Lakeshore & Beyond

Date: Saturday, December 5, 2009

Time: 8am (all day)

Leader: Dave Milsom

Meet in the parking lot at Humber Bay Park East. Bring a lunch. Carpool if necessary

 **Tree Planting on Oak Ridges Moraine**

Saturday, October 24th, 9:15am. Meet at the corner of Chalk Lake Road and Busek Lane in south Uxbridge. The location is about one kilometre west from Lakeridge Road along Chalk Lake Road.

RSVP to bill-mcmartin@rogers.com

The Purvis property owned by the Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust needs trees. And those trees need YOU to get them into the ground so they survive. Please join us for a fall morning planting which will ensure that unauthorized access from Busek Lane to the property will be prevented.

Depending on the number of eager planters who show up we could be done as early as noon.

You don't need to be an experienced planter, instructions will be provided. The digging won't be overly strenuous. Children are welcome and everyone should be outfitted with sturdy outdoor shoes or boots - and clothing suited to the weather. The planting takes place rain or shine. Trees can't wait!

As always we will provide shovels, pails for moving mulch, work gloves and refreshments as a thank you to you, our important volunteers. Mulch mats and tree guards will help the trees and shrubs improve their chances for survival.

 **Tree Planting on East Don**

Fall Tree Planting – **New Date – now**
Saturday October 17 10–12noon East Don
Parkland, at the wetland 200 metres south of the
Cummer Ave Bridge.

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 **Tree Planting at Russell Tilt Park**

Saturday October 24 – 10am–12 noon - All residents are invited to participate in this neighbourhood tree planting event at Russell Tilt Park. Email naturalheritage@richmondhill.ca to confirm date, time and location. Bring sunscreen, bugspray, gloves and drinking water!

MEMBER SUBMISSIONS

Interesting Insects and Pollinators of the David Dunlap Observatory Park, 2009

By Deborah Chute

My camera and I are still at it and what a lot we have been privileged to find this summer.

-  A female Black Swallowtail feeding on Dandelions in June
-  Mourning Cloaks on the grass, on log stumps and on tree trunks in June



- 🦋 A Red Admiral by the Dome in May and a White Admiral in the trees lining one of the fields in August
- 🦋 Northern Pearly Eyes beautifully camouflaged in a bushy area in July
- 🦋 Black Wasps on bright pink Thistle in July
- 🦋 A Painted lady sharing a huge field of Thistle and Knapweed with bees in late July. Dragonflies were darting overhead. The bees were harvesting nectar as if it were their last day on the job.



Perhaps the bees knew something that I didn't because on August 2, 2009, Metrus began mowing the fields (about 100 acres of them). Thinking of the Monarchs' food source, I made a quick survey of one field and counted about 1500 milkweed plants. Monarchs had been recently feeding on these. Although the Monarch is not considered an endangered species it is considered a natural phenomenon at risk. Its flight path is long and arduous. Threats include loss of breeding and feeding habitat. This loss is often because of development.

Insects have truly perfected the skill of camouflage. It is very difficult to spot them unless you see them flying or rustling around in the flowers. This seems to be especially true for the dragonflies.

However we managed to catch:

- 🦋 A Common Green Darner in May hanging vertically on a greenish stick near the ground. The only thing that would give it away was its bright blue and yellow imitation eye spot
- 🦋 Common Whitetails in June. When fully mature, the male exhibits a bright white abdomen (tail)
- 🦋 Saddlebacks in July which, in fact, do look like they have a black saddle on their backs
- 🦋 Twelve Spotted Male Skimmers in July with white wing spots catching the sunlight
- 🦋 Canada Darners in August with their striking shades of blue and black
- 🦋 A Familiar Bluet in August in the grass by the Dome. Its thin, translucent blue-black/silvery body looked very much like a blade of late summer grass shining in the sun.
- 🦋 Male Autumn Meadowhawks in August with their stunning bright red abdomens

In June, while walking along the edge of one of the fields, I was hit on the head by what turned out to be an Eyed Click Beetle, an amazing fellow with two big imitation eyes on its back. Later that month, a Hermit Flower Beetle appeared in my pathway. It was shiny black with stag horn like antennae. Then there was the brilliant blue-green Six-spotted Tiger Beetle jumping across the road. All of these beetles apparently do no harm to trees according to my references.

It had always been my idea that moths are to be avoided. Their caterpillars eat our clothes. Then, in June, I met the Ctenucha Moth with an iridescent blue and orange body as attractive as any butterfly. Its caterpillars eat grasses and sedges. The adults sip on nectar. My clothes are safe.



The fields are sadly quite quiet this fall as a result of the mowing in August. But my camera and I will keep shooting. We are now up to over 40 varieties of insects identified. I'm sure there are a lot more to be found. Anyone want to help?

Thank you for identification assistance from Robert Bowles, a Naturalist and Leader met at The Carden Festival in June, 2009 and the Nature Conservancy of Canada's Carden Alvar Dragonfly Count, July, 2009.

www.cardenguide.com

Events Past

Beaver Creek Walk Part 1

Who would have thought that right behind the Walmart parking lot in Richmond Hill would be such a wide variety of wildlife? Beaver Creek Walk --Part 1 began across the street from the Walmart automotive centre on a sparkling September day. A member of the Don Watershed Council, Joe Agg led the small group of Naturalists along the storm drainage system designed to protect both new and old development from flooding and to protect Beaver Creek itself from the worst ravages of runoff (see Salmon Spotting later in this Bulletin!). The series of ponds captures runoff before it flows into the creek, in the process creating a mini-ecology with fish enough to feed a hungry Great Blue Heron, a Double-crested Cormorant, and a Belted Kingfisher; we also saw Spotted Sandpiper, numerous Canada Geese and Mallards, Goldfinches and a group of migrating Palm Warblers. Dragonflies, damselflies, butterflies and crickets also abounded.

Crossing to the south side of Major Mackenzie Drive, we continued nearly to Weldrick on the paved walking/cycling path that follows the creek. Susanne Stark provided insight into the many shrubs, trees and flowers along the route. The birders in the group were happily surprised by large pockets of warblers and other small migrants who were also travelling along the semi-wild corridor. Brown Creepers and Blue-Headed Vireos joined dozens of tail-twitching Palm Warblers, and a smattering of other warblers including Northern Parula, Magnolia, Chestnut-Sided, Black-Throated Blue, Black-Throated Green, Yellow-rumped, Black & White, Nashville and others we weren't able to identify with certainty. Currently working their way to Central America, these tiny birds appeared to be finding plenty of calorie-packed insects in the diverse trees along this naturalized corridor.

We're looking forward to the Beaver Creek Walk – Part 2 on Saturday, October 17 at 9am, taking us further along the creek south of Weldrick.

SIGN UP!

The Richmond Hill Naturalists and community groups such as the DDO Defenders and Observatory Hill Homeowners Association continue to advocate for the complete protection of the David Dunlap Observatory and Park. Please call your local councilor (905-771-8800), write a letter and/or buy a sign. Tell Town Council you want LEADERSHIP & ALL Dunlap Parklands protected! If you support the community drive to preserve the entire Dunlap Observatory property, please purchase one of our beautiful lawn signs. Our volunteers will be happy to deliver a sign to your door. Buttons and T-Shirts also available.



Books

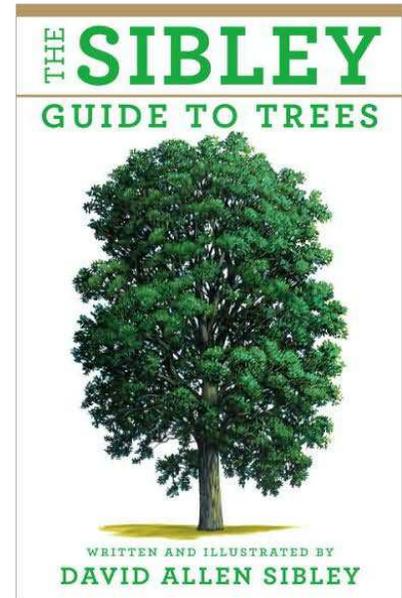
"Books" is a new feature in the Bulletin. If you've recently read a Nature-related book and want to recommend it (or otherwise!) please submit your review to editor@rhnnaturalists.ca. Please keep reviews to a maximum of 250 words!

The Sibley Guide to Trees

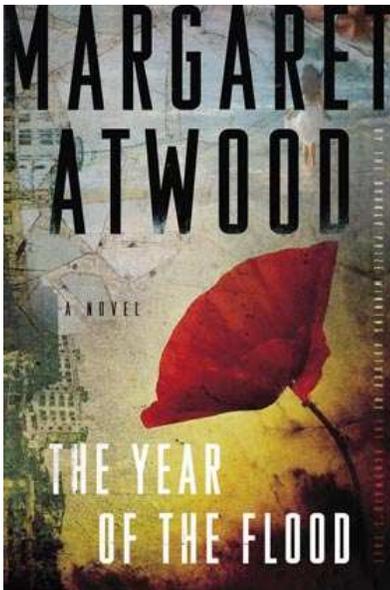
Written and illustrated by David Allen Sibley; publisher Alfred A. Knopf, New York.

Bird Guide guru David Sibley branches out...twigs to a new idea...turns over a new leaf...and convinces the reader that trees are a vital part of all our lives. Even if you're a birder who just wants to be able to say WHICH tree exactly the bird is in, this guide is an excellent introduction. Sibley deliberately eschews botanical terms such as canispid or strigose for more accessible words such as "hairy" or "woolly". His goal is to get the budding tree-lover to quickly identify families of trees (such as the White Pines vs the Yellow Pines), just as novice birders learn to tell a duck from a shorebird or a warbler from a sparrow. Range maps for each species will be familiar to his Bird Guide maps. The focus is on "native" trees but he also includes some naturalized introduced trees.

The book is printed on FSC-certified paper.



Year of the Flood



Margaret Atwood's latest novel "The Year of the Flood" is a disturbing but compelling vision of a not-too-distant future where giant corporations have supplanted the world's elected governments and re-engineered the natural world with genetically modified crops, animals, insects and virii. As the "Corps" vie for greater power they unleash more and more dangerous lifeforms into the wild, poison some of their own people with dangerous drugs and generally nudge the world closer to the brink. Cities have been carved up into protected corporate compounds and unregulated slums that are run by the "Pleebmobs". To cope with such an impossible situation, the people of this world form a complex array of criminal, tribal, religious and extremist groups. The novel traces the fate of a group of characters belonging to one of these groups: an eco-survivalist sect known as the *Gardeners*. Atwood cleverly combines the group's core belief in a "Waterless Flood", a global pandemic that will do in most of the human race, with a set of "religious" principles and practices that just might help them survive the prophesied cataclysm. In fact, for naturalists, the novel is brimming with interesting and useful knowledge of the natural world and will have many readers smiling as they learn about the Gardeners many Saints (at least one of which will soon speak to the Richmond Hill Naturalists!). The novel dramatically pits the Gardener's superior knowledge of the natural world: bees, mushrooms, plants, animals, predator-prey relationships against corporate forces that have

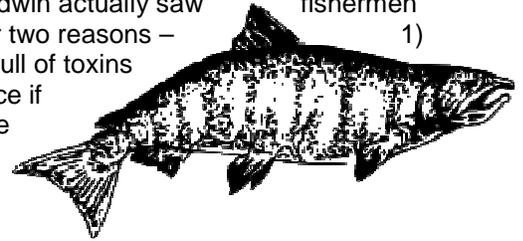
caused the Waterless Flood, wild hybrid animals and roving thugs armed with "sprayguns". Though the novel paints a bleak world that is littered with unravelled DNA, it still offers a few strands of hope through its portrayal of human life and love in a radically altered natural world.

McClelland & Stewart, 431 Pages.

NATURE NEWS

Salmon Spotting on the East Don River

According to Phil Goodwin of the Don Council, salmon have been spotted recently at several locations on the East Don River including just north of German Mills Creek in the East Don. Goodwin actually saw fishermen carrying their caught salmon, although he recommends catch & release for two reasons – 1) these fish have grown up in a polluted river and lake system and are likely full of toxins and 2) they are struggling to make a comeback and will have a better chance if they aren't being captured. However, as long as the fisherman has a license there's no law against taking the fish. If you see any salmon swimming around Richmond Hill, please pass the information on to Phil at pccgoodwin@bell.net or to Joe Agg at joe.agg@hotmail.com



Ontario Streams Humber River Brown Trout Spawning Surveys, Caledon

When: Saturday October 31st and Sunday November 8th, 2009

Time: 10:00am to 12:30pm

Where: Castlederg bridge

(Take Hwy #50 north from Bolton and turn west onto Castlederg Rd. The Castlederg bridge is located on Castlederg Rd just west of Duffy's Lane and east of Humber Station Rd. See flyer for a more detailed map.)

Ontario Streams is once again recruiting interested volunteers for our annual brown trout spawning surveys in the Humber River watershed! Volunteers will be lead by experienced biologists and fishermen. Each group will walk a section of the Humber River, spotting brown trout redds and recording their locations. No experience necessary!

Please dress appropriately for the weather. Chest waders and polarized sunglasses will be provided, however if volunteers have their own it is suggested that they bring them. Light refreshments will also be supplied. For more information check out our website at www.ontariostreams.on.ca or please contact: Christine Pritchard, Project Biologist, Ontario Streams Tel: 905-713-7399 E-mail: christine.pritchard@ontariostreams.on.ca

GENERAL INTEREST

Animal Vocabulary

Most of us are familiar with the varied sounds of the chickadee from the cheery chirps as they chat back and forth to the alarmed dee-dee-dee calls as a cat approaches. The more chickadees you have dee-dee-dee-ing the sooner they will be joined by nuthatches. It seems that the more excited the birds get, the more intense and faster the alarm calls get and the more small birds will come in to join. Birders know that "pishing" sounds can attract many species of birds -- sometimes! What sounds actually attract different birds, in what seasons and what times of day, is a fascinating puzzle that many of us haven't yet completely solved. It's clear though that many factors play a role -- weather, food supply, and the number of birds in the vicinity certainly all have an impact. In my experience, a solitary warbler will likely flee rather than come nearer when I pish, whereas a family of recently-fledged black-throated green warblers will often come for a close look. I sometimes get the impression that Ma and Pa BTGW are using me as a teaching opportunity for their youngsters. I'm pretty sure I'm being labelled but not sure if it's "Dangerous Predator" so much as "carries binoculars - safe and silly-looking".

Studying monkeys and prairie dogs as well as birds, researchers have found that different creatures may indeed teach their youngsters about different predators and even use different calls to indicate different types of predators. Prairie Dogs apparently even indicate human shirt colour in their calls.

I highly recommend Olivia Judson's New York Times blog "Leopard behind You" for a very entertaining overview of the research. "Vervet monkeys", she writes "use different sounds to warn of different types of predator. "Leopard!" is not the same as "snake!" or "eagle!". If you hide a loudspeaker in the bushes, and startle unsuspecting monkeys by playing recordings of "snake!" at them, they will look around at the ground. "Eagle!" makes them look up. "Leopard!" sends them scampering to the trees."

Different animals react to other animals' alarm calls -- as the Nuthatches react to the Chickadees, for example. Diana monkeys react to Campbell Monkeys' alarms, and Yellow-casqued Hornbills react to Diana Monkeys' "Eagle!" alarms but not to their "Leopard!" alarms.

How do the animals learn their own vocabulary as well as their fellow creatures? It's not fully understood but research seems to indicate that instinct combines with teaching and positive/negative reinforcement. A baby monkey calls out "snake!" when it sees a stick on the ground...but it might get a swat for doing this. Perhaps my Black-Throated Green Warbler Mom really is pointing me out as a relatively harmless birder -- so when baby grows up, and he hears me pishing, he'll just ignore me...

Judson lists several studies that you can go to for further information.
<http://judson.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/10/06/leopard-behind-you/>

I would love to hear your own stories of animal and bird communication. Please send 'em on to editor@rhnaturalists.ca

All Aboard the Moraine Train!

Celebrate 20 years with STORM and Monitoring the Moraine partners.

Join STORM for a special engagement of the York Durham Heritage Train
Sunday, November 1, 2009
11 am - 2:30 (Return trip)

Itinerary:

Depart and return to Uxbridge Station (former CNR train station on King Street in downtown Uxbridge) Travel over the rolling hills of the moraine.

Special ticket price \$35 (before October 14)
Regular ticket price \$40 (after October 14)

Ticket price includes: First class seats on heritage train, boxed lunch, Moraine in Focus photo gallery shows, commemorative programme and special guests to highlight past, present and future community efforts to save the Oak Ridges Moraine from 1989 to 2015.

For information visit STORM's websites:

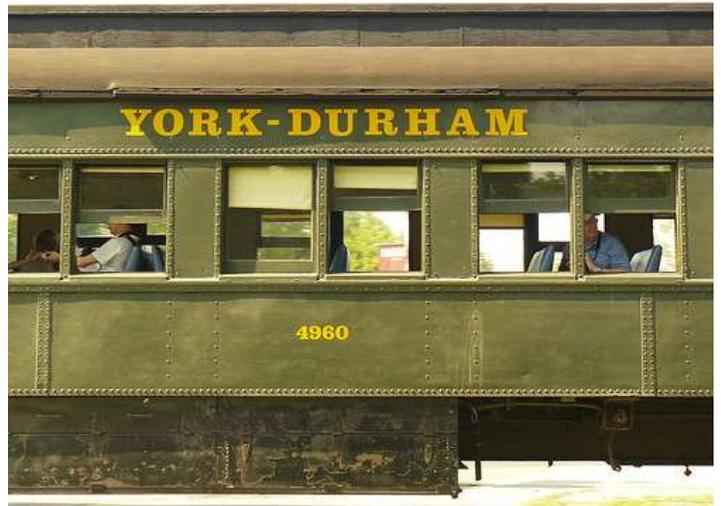
<http://www.stormcoalition.org> or <http://www.monitoringthemoraine.ca>

or contact Debbie Gordon

Save The Oak Ridges Moraine Coalition, The Sheppard House

93A Industrial Parkway South, Aurora, ON L4G 3V5

dgordon@stormcoalition.org; Phone: 905 841-9200 ext 123



BIRD OBSERVATIONS

Fall migrants are passing through Richmond Hill and winter birds are coming back. Gene and Char Denzel had wood thrush, northern parula and other warblers and many white-throated sparrows in their Thornhill yard on the Thanksgiving weekend. White-breasted Nuthatches are back in Rod and Denise Potter's Richmond Hill yard after being absent all summer while a male cardinal was kept busy shovelling chunks from the suet feeder into a juvenile's plaintive beak for the first 10 days of October. Joe Agg has been seeing a purple finch in his yard.

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.

Project FeederWatch

From Bird Studies Canada

The 2009 - 10 Project FeederWatch season begins on Saturday, November 14, 2009 and ends on April 9, 2010.

Watching birds at feeders is a pleasure shared by millions of North Americans. No matter where you live, there's a good chance you can entice birds to your feeder and enjoy hours of entertainment. Turning this bird watching hobby into research for bird conservation is what Project FeederWatch is all about.

Project FeederWatch is an annual survey of North American birds that visit backyard feeders in winter. FeederWatchers periodically count the highest numbers of each species they see at their feeders from November through early April. These observations are then used by scientists to track broad scale trends in distribution and abundance of birds. This partnership between backyard bird watchers and ornithologists has resulted in a wealth of information about winter bird populations. Data from FeederWatchers have helped scientists learn about changes in the distribution and abundance of feeder birds over time; expansions and contractions in their winter ranges; the spread of disease through bird populations; and the kinds of habitats and foods that attract birds.

Project FeederWatch began as the Ontario Bird Feeder Survey in 1976, sponsored by the Long Point Bird Observatory. In 1987, it grew to become a continental survey that now attracts nearly 16,000 participants annually. Project FeederWatch is managed by Bird Studies Canada and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

Participating in Project FeederWatch is easy:

- Watch birds at your feeder weekly from November through March.
- Count the kinds and numbers of birds at your feeder.
- Record the data on line. Paper dataforms are available.

When you enroll in Project FeederWatch, you'll get:

- A full-sized, colour poster of common feeder birds,
- A six-month bird calendar,
- A comprehensive instruction book,
- useful handbook, and
- Bird Studies Canada's quarterly magazine *BirdWatch Canada*, covering the latest FeederWatch results, articles on bird behaviour, answers to your bird questions and more.

[Join Project Feederwatch](#)

Contact Information:

Project FeederWatch
Bird Studies Canada
P.O. Box 160, 115 Front Street
Port Rowan, ON N0E 1M0
1-888-448-2473
Fax: (519) 586-3532
E-mail: pfw@bsc-eoc.org



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Astronomy Group

Fireball seen on September 25

A spectacular fireball streaked across the sky on September 25, seen and reported by many around the GTA. RH Naturalists and Astronats Heide DeBond, Thomas Karmo, Carla Von Worden, Marianne Yake, Joyce Horner, and Karen Cilevitz all saw it from various locations in Richmond Hill. "I thought it was lightning initially," Karen reported shortly after the event. "Green streak and green explosion, but no sound, travelled from northwest to south southeast, streak and explosion visible for less than 3 seconds. Estimate explosion at roughly -2 mag to -3 mag, streak was less, but I only saw the streak from my periphery. Time of event was around 9pm."

If you didn't happen to have your camera ready, fortunately video of the event was recorded by Western University's "all sky" Southern Ontario Meteor Network (SOMN) cameras and posted to YouTube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6oYSEW0pWG8>

POSITIONS AVAILABLE ON THE EXECUTIVE

The Richmond Hill Naturalists are looking for volunteers to join the Executive. Join us for a meeting the second Tuesday of the month and consider becoming part of our executive. We meet 8 times a year, September to May. Available positions include Secretary, Environment, Events and Publicity.

Denise Potter, Bulletin Editor editor@rhnaturalists.ca
647-504-4586 Mailing Address: 128 Pugsley Av, Richmond Hill, ON