



THE BULLETIN

NEWS AND VIEWS FROM THE RICHMOND HILL NATURALISTS

March 2010 — No. 488

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Turtles, salamanders and snakes with John Urquhart

Join Ontario Nature's John Urquhart at our General Meeting on Thursday, March 18 to learn about the Ontario Reptile and Amphibian Atlas Project and how we -- as citizen scientists and naturalists -- can contribute.

Urquhart started mucking about in wetlands looking for reptiles, amphibians and invertebrates at an early age and went on to



The meeting will take place at the Richmond Hill Presbyterian Church, Wallace Hall. 10066 Yonge St., North of Major Mackenzie Dr., West side starting at 7:30PM.



earn degrees in Ecology and Zoology before working on numerous conservation and stewardship projects. He will share with us the work being done across Ontario to gather data on these creatures, help us learn to identify species that we can find locally, and explain how to report our findings as we travel around Ontario this year.



Spotted Turtle Photo by Joe Crowley, Ontario Nature



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.

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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.

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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 by clicking on the Membership link at:
www.rhnaturalists.ca



New Members

Lawrence Wing, Rick Berry, Toomas Karmo, Anthea O'Regan

Back by Popular Demand - Frank Glew's Nature Picture Books!

Little Ladybug Earns her Spots is the latest title in Frank Glew's series of Nature Picture Books.

Several members were disappointed to have missed our last order so all Frank's books will be on display for sale at the March and April Meetings with delivery in May/June in time for summer reading.

Frank Glew, a retired teacher and naturalist incorporates accurate information about nature in each story. He has given us a discount for fund raising purposes. The last order brought in \$176.00 for our club. \$12.00 per book includes taxes, shipping and delivery to your door.

Go to
www.kw.igs.net/~fsglew
 and "description of books"
 to preview the story lines.



Coming Events



Thursday, March 18, 7:30pm. General

Meeting – Speaker: John Urquhart - Turtles, Salamanders and Snakes! 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.



Saturday, March 20, 9:30am. Winter Walk through Jefferson Forest with Joe Agg. Meet and park at the Lake Wilcox Parking lot just west of Bayview near the lake. **Duration will be about 90 minutes. Wear appropriate footwear!**



Tuesday, April 13, 2010. 7:30pm - Executive Meeting, Phyllis Rawlinson Park. Anyone interested in taking up any of the vacant positions is welcome to join us. For information contact Marianne Yake at 905-883-3047, or visit www.RHNaturalists.ca.



Wednesday, April 14, 2010. 7:30pm - Bird Group Meeting - Black-Billed and Yellow-Billed Cuckoo - Potluck starts at 6pm. Hosted by Barbara Jackson, 20 Fashion Roseway, Suite 311, Willowdale. For information phone 416-224-2563.

Please note: Richmond Hill Naturalists welcomes anyone to volunteer as an outing leader. Contact trips@rhnaturalists.ca if you would like to organize or promote an outing.



Tuesday, April 6, 8PM - Richmond Hill Horticultural Society Meeting - Bio-dynamics:

Gardening in Harmony with Nature, Douglas Wylie Introduced into our vocabulary in 1924 by Rudolf Steiner, "bio-dynamics" is now a world-wide phenomenon as humanity searches for sustainable methods of consuming nature's bounty. Douglas will introduce us to the principles of bio-dynamics and share his personal experiences applying these methods at the Carrville Community Garden in Thornhill. Co-founder of the Carrville Community Garden and Secretary for the Society of Bio-dynamics in Ontario, Douglas Wylie is an avid gardener and sixteen year practitioner of bio-dynamic methods. McConaghy Seniors' Centre, 10100 Yonge St., (north of Major MacKenzie and south of Arnold Crescent. Parking is available at the Centre (enter off Arnold or Yonge St) and in the church parking lot south of the Centre (enter off Yonge St.).



Sat. May 8, 2010 - 10:00am - 3:00pm: NATIVE AMERICAN PLANT SOCIETY

SALE. Markham Civic Center. Free Presentations: Rachel Gagnon "Identifying and Controlling Invasive Plants" and Gavin Trevelyan "Prairie Plants for Your Garden." The plants sold by NANPS have all been carefully grown from ethically collected seed or are from NANPS approved plant rescues. The annual NANPS sale offers one of the largest selections of native plants available in Southern Ontario and is eagerly awaited by hundreds of native plant enthusiasts. The money raised by the sale is used to support NANPS' many programs.



Saturday, May 8, 2010, 9:30 am - 4:00 pm, Koffler Scientific Reserve THE SECRET LIVES OF SPRING WILDFLOWERS: AN ALL-DAY WORKSHOP

at Jokers Hill, 17000 Dufferin Street (between Hwy 9 and 19th Sideroad): Instructor: Richard Aaron. Learn the answers to questions such as: why do some wildflowers smell great, others awful, while some have no scent at all? What purpose do stripes on the petals serve? Are they edible? medicinal uses? Registration starts April 12 2010 for this all-day spring wildflower workshop. The \$60 fee includes a delectable catered lunch. See <http://ksr.utoronto.ca> for registration information. The Koffler Scientific Reserve is a research and teaching facility of the University of Toronto.

Trumpeter Swan, Snow Goose - Bird Study Group

by Gene Denzel

The Richmond Hill Naturalists Bird Study Group met on Wednesday evening, 10 March, at the home of Martin and Judy Chen. Fifteen people attended (counting Martin's son Gregory), and enjoyed the usual warm hospitality and nice treats provided by Judy.

The evening's goal was to review key aspects of the Trumpeter Swan and Snow Goose. Various individuals had been assigned different areas of research, and we took turns presenting our findings, and elaborating on or asking questions about the information. A few points of interest follow below. The discussion of these two birds was followed by a challenging set of quiz questions prepared this evening by Joe Agg.

Most people in the Richmond Hill area who are interested in nature are familiar with the Trumpeter Swan, quite distinct from the introduced Mute Swan. One of the long-time members of the Club, Harry Lumsden, has been instrumental in reviving the local Trumpeter population in Southern Ontario. There is now some controversy about whether they were present here historically. The Trumpeter is the largest swan in North America, and its name is indicative of its very distinctive call. A group of them can sound like a marching band warming up! Although most North American swan species migrate between summer breeding territories and winter grounds, our Ontario group has never learned (or felt the necessity) of moving much further than the shores of the Great Lakes when other bodies freeze over. Although hunted almost to extinction in the US by the early 20th century, they have recovered pretty well.

The Snow Goose occurs locally only as the odd hanger-on with a

flock of Canada Geese, or in flocks passing through on migration back and forth from their Arctic breeding grounds. They occur in two colour phases, one almost completely white and the other a mix of black, grey and blue with a little white. The latter was thought for many years to be a separate species (the 'Blue Goose' in historical records) but turned out to be just what is termed a 'colour morph' of the Snow Goose. The Snow Geese also vary in size, with most of those which breed in Greenland and NE Quebec and migrate down the Atlantic Coast for the Winter being larger than the others. Once again, though, it turns out that there really is no dividing line between the 'Greater Snow Goose' and the 'Lesser Snow Goose'--- they are currently considered to be the same species.

The next meeting of the Bird Group will be the annual potluck supper and bird study evening, to be held at Barbara Jackson's apartment on Wed 8 April at 6:00. The birds on the agenda will be Black-billed and Yellow-billed Cuckoos.

Bird Studies Canada Invites Teen Birders to Apply for the 2010 YOW!

The 2010 Doug Tarry Natural History Fund's Young Ornithologists' Workshop will be held at Long Point Bird Observatory near Port Rowan, Ontario, from Friday, July 30 to Sunday, August 8. Participants will receive hands-on field ornithology training, including bird banding, censusing, field identification, birding trips, preparing museum specimens, guest lectures, and more! Six of Canada's most promising ornithologists between the ages of 13-17 will be selected to attend, and will receive the Doug

Tarry Bird Study Award to cover all on-site expenses. Applications are due April 30, 2010. For more information and an application form, email lpbo@birdscanada.org, or visit the Bird Studies Canada website at birdscanada.org/longpoint

National Nocturnal Owl Survey

From Bird Studies Canada

All across Canada, adventurous volunteers are getting ready to conduct owl surveys. The Canadian Nocturnal Owl Survey is a roadside survey conducted by volunteer citizen scientists, primarily targeting nocturnal, forest-breeding owls (e.g., Barred Owl, Northern Saw-whet Owl). The target owl species differ by region, and in some cases special protocols have been developed to sample poorly-monitored species (e.g., Flammulated Owls in British Columbia).

The national Nocturnal Owl Survey operates through a network of regional surveys that contribute data to a central database. Regional partners include government and non-government organizations. The main objectives of the survey are: to determine the relative abundance and distribution of owls in Canada; to monitor changes in owl populations over time; to determine habitat associations; and to investigate the impacts of forest management practices and other types of habitat change on owls.

Most surveys take place on a single evening in April or early May – a time when owls are most vocal. The owl survey is one of Bird Studies Canada's most popular programs, because it provides a unique glimpse into the lives of these mysterious nocturnal species.

Jefferson Forest Revisited

by Sue Mallinson

David and I occasionally walked the Jefferson Forest area in the 1980's with our three children. We would approach from the south, parking at one of the few spaces on Stouffville Rd where Bayview Ave ended. The terrain was hilly and great fun for young children to climb up and down the sandy hills along the informal trail. We were never sure what land was private property, so were leery about venturing too far into the woods. In late December of 2009, David and I decided to revisit this area again. I had gone to two of the meetings about the corridor park east where the Toronto Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) is developing conservation and trail plans. This time knowing the boundaries of the private and public lands we followed the

trails north; it was a steady, but gradual climb through mature and mostly hardwood forest. Though the area is surrounded

We returned to the Jefferson Forest on a beautifully sunny day, March 6th. The texture of the snow was typical crystalline corn snow – crisp in the morning and heavy in the afternoon. The forest was still beautiful with the trees casting long dark shadows on the pure white snow. We went further this time to the north east and had our picnic lunch on the shores of Swan Lake beside the old boathouse. There is a beautiful dense spruce plantation that you pass through in this area.



Winter lunch at Swan Lake, March 6 2010. Photo by Sue Mallinson

by busy roads the forest was surprisingly quiet. We saw fresh rabbit and deer tracks as well as heavily-used vole trails and the rodent-chewed remnants of corn husks from the nearby fields.

The Jefferson Forest is full of hillocks -- moraines -- dry kettle lakes, wetlands and sensitive areas of scientific interest. There are no formal trails so taking a compass is advisable. It's a beautiful walk not to be missed.



It's a Mink!

Mystery Mammal seen around Cumber Bridge in the East Don Parklands several times this winter has turned out to be a mink. East Don's first tree planting of the year will be on Saturday May 1 10am – location TBD. The annual spring wildflower walk will be on Saturday May 8 10am meeting at the Second Cup on Steeles at Laureleaf. Check out East Don Parkland Partners Facebook page for an up to date list of events.

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The Richmond Hill Christmas Bird Count - What has Changed in 55 Years

by Theo Hofmann

The total number of species we have recorded at least once is 122. Of these, 10 species were observed in each of the 55 years (see Table, col. 4). The number of species found each year ranges from 37 to 60, with an average of 51 species. Our count of this year, 2009, is therefore 4 sp. below the 55-year average.

Twelve species were only seen once (see Table) and another 14 twice (Table, col. 4).

During the countdown at Joe and Berthe Agg's several people expressed their surprise that

two Great Blue Herons and a Belted Kingfisher, birds that depend on open water, were observed. In fact, both species turned up in 37 of the Counts, but not always in the same years. In 2002 there were 6 Great Blue Herons, and 6 Belted Kingfishers.

Remarkable Birds for Richmond Hill 2009 Count Bird species rarely found on the Christmas Count were a Northern Shoveler, found only once before in 1998. Green-winged Teals had never been observed on the Richmond Hill count, the Barred Owl seen in the valley of the Shepherd's Bush was only the sixth in the 55 years of the count; Red-bellied Woodpeckers used to be rare, but have been found more often in recent years, such as the two this year. A very welcome guest was the Carolina Wren at Jim and Sharon Bradley's feeder. The previous and only Carolina Wren was reported in 1959 for the count. Fox Sparrow, count week, and Chipping Sparrow were reported five and four times respectively since 1955, the start of the

Richmond Hill count. The count of Northern Mockingbirds by Roy Smith and Winnie Poon at two only was low for recent years.

Trumpeter Swans are a re-introduction into Ontario, managed for over 20 years by one of our member, Harry Lumsden. Until 1995 the few that were seen were not recorded because they were not considered wild. In the last few years they are considered a wild species, since the population seems large enough to maintain itself.



Carolina Wren, Christmas Bird Count, photographed by Sharon Bradley

Canada Goose Once Rare in Winter

Canada Geese deserve special attention. Single ones were seen in 1965 and 1970. From 1977 (4) they turned up annually in greatly varying numbers ranging from 4 to 4585 (2006), showing the dramatic settlement as residents, from their original strictly migrating habits.

Bald eagles are clearly recovering. They were seen for the first time in 2006 and 2008.

Red-shouldered Hawks have declined, having been observed regularly in the 1960's, but only rarely since.

Pheasants traded in for Turkeys?

Another species which has dramatically declined is the Ring-necked Pheasant which was observed annually from 1955 in numbers up to 107 until 1995, but have turned up 4 times only singly since then.

No Wild Turkeys were seen until 1994, but are turning up regularly now since they have been reintroduced in Ontario.

Gull populations rise and fall with Maple Dump

Ring-billed Gulls were not observed until 1972 when the Garbage Disposal Site north-east of Maple (Maple Dump) was opened. Herring Gulls were observed almost annually, in large numbers until the Maple Dump was closed in 2001. The largest number, 12,871, was reported in 1990. Glaucous Gulls, Iceland Gulls and Great Black-backed Gulls were observed in significant numbers almost exclusively during the time when the Maple Dump was open. During this time the two difficult to identify species Thayer's Gull and Lesser Black-backed Gull were rarely seen, mostly by expert birders like Gerry Bennett.

Long-eared Owls were seen predominantly during the 1950s and 1970s, but only rarely since. Note this year a long-eared owl was seen just days before the CBC Count Week.

American Crows were undoubtedly present in 1955-1959, but the compiler at that time considered them too common a species to be worth recording.

Table 2 (next page) also shows



Christmas Robin - many robins now spend the entire winter in Richmond Hill and surrounding areas. This photograph by Rod Potter is from the David Dunlap Observatory.

Species	Year seen	Total # seen
Red-throated Loon	1990	1
Northern Shoveler	1998	1
Green-winged Teal	2009	3
Bufflehead	2006	2
American Woodcock	2007	1
American Coot	1979	1
Franklin's Gull	1978	1
Boreal Chickadee	1972	4
House Wren	1992	1
Eastern Bluebird	1990	1
Varied Thrush	1963	1
Dickcissel	1973	1

Table 1: Birds seen only once on Richmond Hill Christmas Bird Count Between 1955 and 2009

that Eastern Bluebirds are early fall migrants (and early spring ones). Only one has been reported although for many years we had an active Bluebird trail in the fields near Bathurst and the King-Vaughan Road.

Robins no longer harbingers of spring
 American Robins, although supposedly messengers of the arrival of the spring season, (which should really be the Bluebird) have been observed since 1955, but only individually or in small numbers until 1983 when they turned up annually, with 306 in one count.

Northern Mockingbirds are newcomers to the area. Although only 4 single birds were observed between 1976 and 1996, and none before, they have been recorded annually - except in 2000 - in numbers up to 13.

Eastern (Rufous-sided) Towhees were seen regularly in the early years, but have been absent since 1987.

Many participants express surprise when they note a Song Sparrow, a migrant, but many of this species prefer to overwinter in our area. They were recorded

in 53 of the 55 years of the count, with a highest number of 51 in 1962.

An apparent worldwide phenomenon is the decline in the House Sparrows [Lindo D. (2010) RSPB BIRDS 23,(1) 65.] In our counts from 1960 to 1990 the annual numbers were usually in the 1,000s to 2,000s. They ranged from 801 to 2695 with an average of 1,383. Since then the range has dropped to between 161 and 720 with an average of 300 per annum.

Watch for Ravens!

Lastly, I want to comment on a species that has never been observed on our CBC but that we could have expected in the last nine years, namely the Common Raven. During the data collection for the Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Ontario 2001-2005 Christel von Richter and I discovered a pair nesting in the North Tract of the York Region Forest, about 10 km directly east of Newmarket, which was in fact the first nesting pair in the Greater Toronto area in 150 years [Hofmann, T. (2004) Ontario Birds 23, 20-25]. Since then Ron Fleming and others have reported seeing single Ravens in

the Newmarket area, esp. south of Mulock Drive and west of Bathurst, i.e. in or near our count area. The Ravens have continued to breed in the York Region Forest since and there is evidence of more than one pair. **I therefore want to urge participants in future counts to carefully observe "apparent" Crows, if they are single, or in twos or threes and determine whether or not they could be Ravens! *

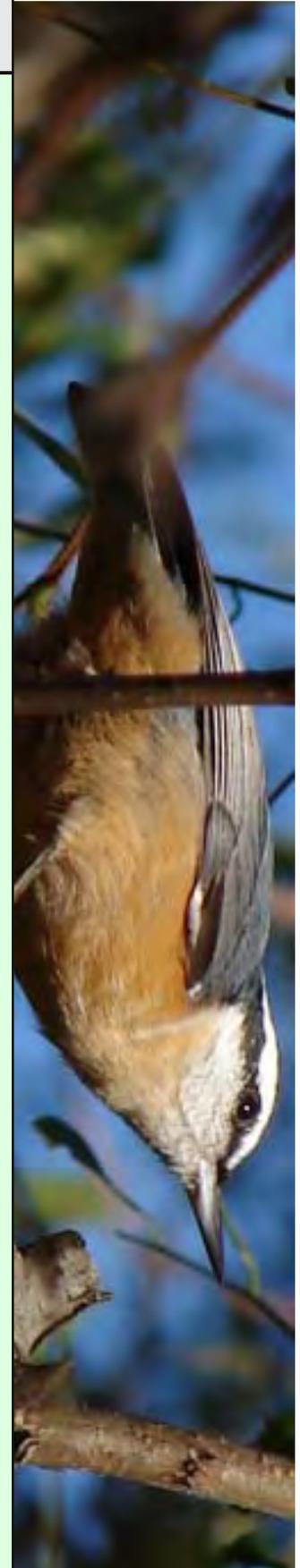
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Table 2: Birds seen in more than one year: Richmond Hill Christmas Bird Count 1955-2009

	Year First Seen	Year Last Seen	No of Years Seen	Most seen in one year	Year most seen	Total
Common Loon	1973	2002	4	1	1997	6
Great Blue Heron	1959	2009	37	6	2002	81
Mute Swan	1977	2009	7	6	2001	20
Trumpeter Swan	1995	2009	15	17	2006	150
Snow Goose (incl. Blue)	1965	1972	3	1	-	3
Canada Goose	1965	2009	34	2,136	1998	17,245
Wood Duck	1973	2005	10	8	1982	23
American Black Duck	1960	2009	42	100	1987	1,567
Mallard	1963	2009	42	1,847	1998	20,221
American Wigeon	1990	1998	3	2	1991	5
Northern Pintail	1999	2005	2	3	1999	4
Common Goldeneye	1973	1999	5	14	1995	24
Hooded Merganser	1991	2006	4	1	-	4
Common Merganser	1974	2007	9	24	2006	83
Bald Eagle	2006	2008	2	3	2008	4
Northern Harrier	1955	2009	29	4	1996	42
Sharp-shinned Hawk	1957	2009	34	6	1993	109
Cooper's Hawk	1955	2009	38	12	2009	110
Northern Goshawk	1961	2008	11	2	-	15
Red-shouldered Hawk	1960	2006	11	2	-	13
Red-tailed Hawk	1956	2009	53	118	1976	2,167
Rough-legged Hawk	1961	2007	44	75	1989	430
American Kestrel	1960	2009	50	50	1978	739
Merlin	1968	2008	8	1	-	8
Peregrine Falcon	1963	2004	3	2	-	5
Gyrfalcon	1966	1999	2	1	-	2
Ring-necked Pheasant	1955	2005	44	107	1970	1,076
Ruffed Grouse	1960	2009	41	18	1989	267
Wild Turkey	1994	2006	5	27	2005	65
Killdeer	1990	2007	2	1	-	2
Common Snipe	1974	1983	5	2	1980	6
Ring-billed Gull	1960	2009	38	2,180	1988	21,902
Herring Gull	1956	2009	50	12,871	1990	114,731
Thayer's Gull	1991	2001	5	4	1998	8
Iceland Gull	1972	2002	17	36	1998	108
Lesser Black-backed Gull	1990	1998	2	10	1998	11
Glaucous Gull	1967	2000	22	58	1991	208
Great Black-backed Gull	1973	2002	21	499	1998	1,589
Rock Dove	1955	2009	55	907	1989	20,623
Mourning Dove	1955	2009	50	1153	1988	17,785
Eastern Screech Owl	1960	2009	28	5	1991	62
Great Horned Owl	1956	2007	35	12	1991	91
Snowy Owl	1970	2008	4	1	-	4
Barred Owl	1961	2009	6	1	-	6
Long-eared Owl	1956	2000	17	11	1961	43
Short-eared Owl	1960	2006	5	10	1961	15
Northern Sawwhet	1973	1993	2	1	-	2
Belted Kingfisher	1958	2009	37	14	1980	87
Red-headed Woodpecker	1968	2002	3	2	1968	4
Red-bellied Woodpecker	1981	2009	9	2	2009	10
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	1965	2008	2	1	-	2
Downy Woodpecker	1955	2009	55	92	1987	2,692
Hairy Woodpecker	1955	2009	55	42	1961	859
Three-toed Woodpecker	1963	1965	2	2	-	4
Black-backed Woodpecker	1958	1986	6	9	1964	14
Northern Flicker	1956	2008	28	8	1972	63
Pileated Woodpecker	1957	2009	41	6	1988	97
Eastern Phoebe	1963	1982	2	1	-	2
Horned Lark	1967	2008	14	219	2006	563



	Year First Seen	Year Last Seen	No of Years Seen	Most seen in one year	Year most seen	Total
Blue Jay	1955	2009	55	349	1984	7,160
American Crow	1959	2009	50	464	1996	8,038
Black-capped Chickadee	1955	2009	55	989	1991	30,452
Red-breasted Nuthatch	1955	2009	50	46	1989	645
White-breasted Nuthatch	1955	2009	55	86	1987	2,095
Brown Creeper	1956	2009	44	10	1987	152
Carolina Wren	1959	2009	2	1	-	2
Winter Wren	1960	2009	12	3	1989	16
Golden-crowned Kinglet	1955	2009	35	130	1957	351
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	1967	2009	7	6	2009	15
Hermit Thrush	1965	1999	6	1	2006	6
American Robin	1955	1999	47	306	1998	2,833
Gray Catbird	1978	1983	2	1	-	2
Northern Mockingbird	1976	2009	16	13	2006	68
Brown Thrasher	1973	1995	5	1	-	5
Bohemian Waxwing	1975	2007	5	130	1995	209
Cedar Waxwing	1955	2007	39	280	1997	2,487
Northern Shrike	1955	2009	50	18	1976	242
European Starling	1955	2009	55	10,708	1984	134,325
Yellow-rumped Warbler	1957	1990	4	1	-	4
Northern Cardinal	1955	2009	55	132	1975	4,033
Eastern Towhee	1961	1987	9	3	1973	14
American Tree Sparrow	1955	2009	54	667	1973	10,472
Chipping Sparrow	1970	2009	4	1	-	4
Field Sparrow	1961	1995	7	2	63&67	9
Savannah Sparrow	1958	1967	2	2	1967	3
Fox Sparrow	1989	2009	5	1	-	5
Song Sparrow	1955	2008	53	51	1962	514
Lincoln's Sparrow	1982	1989	2	1	-	2
Swamp Sparrow	1959	2008	35	13	2003	95
White-throated Sparrow	1958	2009	47	20	1992	264
White-crowned Sparrow	1970	2008	5	4	1977	10
Dark-eyed Junco	1955	2009	55	426	1973	11,549
Lapland Longspur	1977	2006	5	130	1980	134
Snow Bunting	1958	2008	39	1800	1976	10,186
Red-winged Blackbird	1973	2007	10	2	-	13
Eastern Meadowlark	1956	1981	7	8	70&71	32
Rusty Blackbird	1973	1994	8	6	1980	17
Common Grackle	1962	1998	20	3	1985	36
Brown-headed Cowbird	1963	2000	18	26	1989	113
Pine Grosbeak	1956	2007	29	426	1971	1,778
Purple Finch	1955	2008	32	76	1985	305
House Finch	1981	2009	25	802	1991	6,211
Red Crossbill	1963	2001	8	12	1977	46
White-winged Crossbill	1955	2008	21	435	1971	844
Common Redpoll	1955	2008	24	394	1993	3,148
Hoary Redpoll	1981	2007	2	8	2007	9
Pine Siskin	1955	2008	40	296	1987	1,710
American Goldfinch	1955	2009	55	694	2006	12,171
Evening Grosbeak	1955	1998	34	441	1961	3,193
House Sparrow	1955	2009	55	2695	1973	50,596



Crouching Lion Heralds Spring

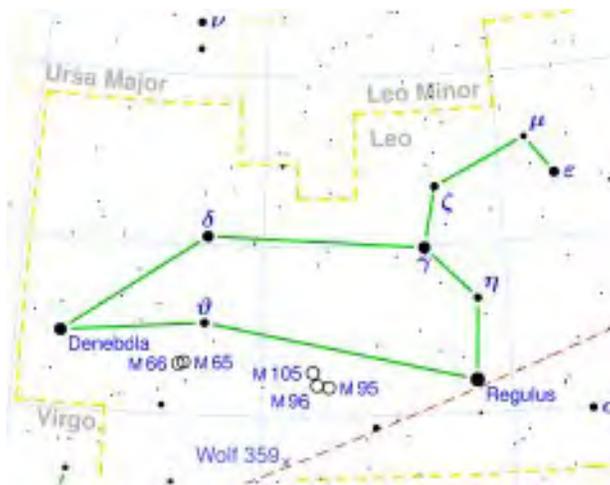
by Heide DeBond

Regal and resplendent in the spring night sky is the constellation Leo. Leo is thought to be the Nemean lion of mythology, whose skin could not be pierced by stone, iron or bronze.

The mighty Hercules slew the lion as the first of his assigned tasks and he was seen draping the lion's skin throughout many of his other adventures. To remind mortals of

Hercules' superhuman deeds, the gods placed the lion in the stars. Rising in the east shortly after sunset, Leo is distinguished by its famous "sickle" or backwards question mark, representing the head and mane of the lion. The rear of the crouching lion is marked by a triangle of stars.

At the base of the "sickle" is the brightest star of the constellation – Regulus or "Guardian of Heaven". Regulus is a blue-white star



The Constellation Leo - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leo_constellation

approximately 85 light years distant and has a surface temperature of about 13,000 degrees K. Regulus is a "visual triple" system.

The second brightest star in the constellation Leo is Denebola, 43 light years distant..

It is at the opposite end of the constellation, at the tip of the triangle aptly named as the "Lion's Tail".

Star fields in Leo are particularly rich in galaxies, including the noted spiral galaxies M95, M96, M65, and M66. The rate of recession (redshift) for M65 and M66 is about 600 kilometres per second and their approximate distance is 29 million light years.

The Leo Ring is a cloud of helium and hydrogen gas, about 35 million light years away, 620,000 light years wide, encircling Leo's M105 and NGC 3384 galaxies. The cloud was discovered in 1983 by radio astronomers and is believed to be left over from the Big Bang.

Mars and Saturn are still prominent in the night sky. Venus appears low in the west just after sunset and will become more visible as the month continues. Venus can be so bright it is often mistaken for an approaching airplane.

Watch your emails for Earth Hour activities!

Wednesday, March 31 6–9pm, Community Stewardship 101 Rouge Woods Community Centre, Aspen Room 110 Shirley Drive, Richmond Hill. Would you like to bring nature to your community? Sponsored by the Town of Richmond Hill in conjunction with Evergreen, this workshop will offer inspiring examples, tips and tricks, and practical strategies to help you get involved in local greening projects—or even start your own!

Individuals and community groups will benefit from sharing ideas about community greening initiatives and advice to ensure project success. Get step-by-step advice for undertaking stewardship projects. Learn about inspiring case studies of stewardship activities from across Canada.

Cost: FREE Sandwiches and refreshments will be provided.

Space is limited. Reserve your space by Monday, March 22. To sign up or for more information, please contact: Lisa Fisk, Richmond Hill Project Manager, lfisk@evergreen.ca, 416-596-1495 x226



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