



# THE BULLETIN

NEWS AND VIEWS FROM THE RICHMOND HILL NATURALISTS

June 2010 — No. 490

## Inside:

The Curse of  
the Baillie  
Birdathon

Carden Nature  
Festival

Dendroica -  
New Bird ID  
website

A Birding  
Guide to the  
Long Point  
Area

And more!



Warbler Season: A Chestnut-sided Warbler returns from Costa Rica

## Celebrate the Don: 2010 Mill Pond Splash

Calling all water lovers to the Mill Pond Splash - this Sunday, June 6 from noon to 4:30pm. Organized jointly by the Don Watershed Regeneration Council, Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, the Town of Richmond Hill and the Richmond Hill Naturalists, the Splash is now celebrating its 12th year.

The family festival features displays, presentations, native wildlife shows, nature walks and children's activities dealing with all aspects of conservation and our natural environment.

Here's your chance to meet some native mammals, reptiles and birds of prey from southern Ontario, find out what fish live in the pond,

build a birdhouse and take part in scavenger hunts and rubber duck races, among other activities. Listen to music by live performers, shop at the organic food fair and the 'green' products stalls.

Bring the whole family to the 12th Annual

**RICHMOND HILL**  
**MILL POND**  
**SPLASH**  
**DON RIVER ECO-FESTIVAL**

Parking is available opposite York Central Hospital on Trench Street.

Our own Valerie Kent's adult students are also having an arts

show and sale at Mill Pond Gallery across the street from Mill Pond Park from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Oil paintings, acrylics, and watercolours will be available in a variety of subject matter, including florals, landscapes and figurative work.

If the sky is clear, the AstroNats will have telescopes set-up for safe solar and Venus observing and astronomy instruction. You will find them at the Richmond Hill Naturalists table.

For more information on Mill Pond Splash contact the Toronto and Recreation Conservation Authority by calling 416-667-6295 or visit: <http://trca.on.ca/millpondsplash>



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](http://www.rhnaturalists.ca)



## Carden Nature Festival - this weekend June 4th to 6th

Spaces are still available for many events at the Carden Nature Festival. As of press time, numerous topics for Friday June 4th, Saturday June 5th and Sunday June 6th still had room for more people to register including: Calling in Birds, Birding by Ear, Moths, Butterflies, Ferns, Lichens and many more.

Since June, 2007, a three day Carden Nature Festival is held on The Carden Plains near Orillia to celebrate the natural wonders of this place. This year the festival is on Friday, June 4th to Sunday, June 6th. Sign up for outdoor workshops on topics from birding and butterflies to wildlife photography, alvar flowers, trees, ferns, visits to quarries and lake boat trips (to name just a few). Special speaker this year is Bridget Stuchbury with her new book, The Bird Detective.

Visit [www.cardenguide.com/Festival](http://www.cardenguide.com/Festival) to view the smorgasbord of environmental programme selections (over 100 to choose from) and to browse the lists of impressive leaders.

And please if you do decide to go quote and enter the Richmond Hill Naturalists group number of 0610. This will provide us with a rebate - a great source of funds.

## Coming Events

### Learn the Night Sky

Every Friday night, weather permitting, until the end of August, as soon as the sun sets – if the sky is clear, or partly cloudy, the AstroNats will be there. So bring the kids, the grandparents and the dogs! Come out and learn to navigate your way around the universe. "The AstroNats" is the astronomy branch of the Richmond Hill Naturalists.

Participants should dress warmly: layers, outdoor shoes, hats, gloves, and consider insect repellent. Telescopes will be provided. If you wish you can bring your own binoculars and telescopes. Red filters will be available for your flashlights. Location: David Dunlap Observatory Park – The Solar System Park, 350–16th Avenue: east of Yonge St, west of Bayview Ave, north side of 16th, behind the Elvis Stojko Arena Follow the lanterns up the steps to your night sky journey. Parking is available on site.

### Council Meeting for Richmond Hill Official Plan

WEDNESDAY June 9, 2010 at 7:30 p.m. Town of Richmond Hill Council Chambers, 225 East Beaver Creek (North of Hwy #7, East of Leslie) Richmond Hill, On

Bring along a friend or carpool. We need you there to show you and others are concerned about the proposed new Official Plan. If you need further information please email or call Marianne Yake (905) 883 - 3047.

You can also visit the town's website at:

[http://www.richmondhill.ca/documents/meetings/cpublic/6\\_9\\_2010\\_19\\_30/meeting\\_6\\_9\\_2010\\_19\\_30\\_agenda\\_cpublic.pdf](http://www.richmondhill.ca/documents/meetings/cpublic/6_9_2010_19_30/meeting_6_9_2010_19_30_agenda_cpublic.pdf)

A SPEAKER'S LIST is being compiled and anyone interested in addressing Council at the meeting is being requested to advise the Office of the Clerk ([clerks@richmondhill.ca](mailto:clerks@richmondhill.ca)) no later than noon on June 9, 2010.



#### Toronto Ornithological Club Fall Outings

The TOC is kicking off their fall birding program with a High Park survey of migrants on raptors on

Saturday, September 11, 2010: High Park, 8:00am- 12 noon. Leader: Steven Favier

Meet at 8:00am in the parking lot inside the Bloor St entrance to High Park at High Park Avenue. Fall migrants, raptors. For more information, please see the TOC website:

<http://www.torontobirding.ca/club/outings.php>

RHN Corn Roast and 2010/2011 Program  
Watch your mail for details. It promises to be delicious!



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



## Teaching and Learning with Monarch Butterflies

Each fall, monarch butterflies from the U.S. and Canada begin a 3,200 km migration to Mexico. The following spring, their great grandchildren return.

This summer the Monarch Teacher Network is offering two (2) workshops in the Toronto area, each having a capacity for 40 participants. The dates and locations are as follows:

August 9 -10, 2010 - Lake St. George Field Centre, Richmond Hill

August 11 - 12, 2010 - Black Creek Pioneer Village, Downsview

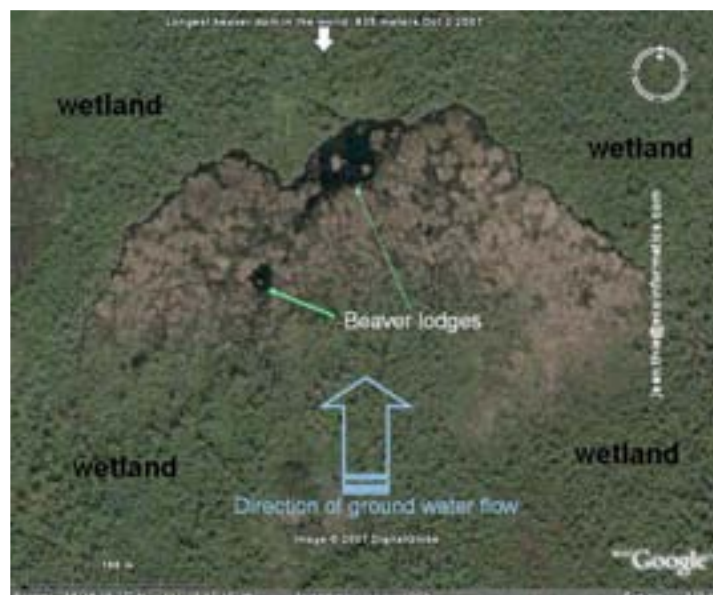
Workshops will run from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. for each day of the workshop. Spaces are limited and available on a first come, first serve basis. Please register early to avoid disappointment! For more information, go to: <https://www.signup4.net/Public/ap.aspx?EID=MONA10E>



## World's Largest Beaver Dam Found thanks to Google Earth

Clearly this story about the giant beaver dam has caught the attention of a lot of people. This story was submitted to the Bulletin by several Naturalist Club members and several urbanites who don't consider themselves Naturalists.

Ecologist Jean Thie says he spotted the dam by using Google Earth satellite imagery. Thie says the dam spans 2,788 feet (850 metres) and has been seen by Nasa from space. "It might be hard to believe, but there are a few things that are visible from space, and beaver dams are among the few animal-made structures that are," the ecologist said. "It would not have been possible to view it without something like Google Earth." The dam sits in a corner of a park "the size of Switzerland" in an area surrounded by heavily forested marshland, Wood Buffalo National Park spokesman Mike Keizer said. Using past Nasa images and park aerial photography, Thie worked out that the beavers began their work four decades ago - meaning the monster construction must have been worked on by several generations. Aerial photos of the site from the 1945 show no evidence of beaver dam construction. The ecologist points out that overtrapping and habitat loss had left the beaver population threatened. This dam shows just how far the beavers have been able to rebound from their near-extirpation.



See Jean Thie's own post at:

<http://bbs.keyhole.com/ubb/ubbthreads.php?ubb=showflat&Number=961698>

# Growing Grub in a limited space - this summer's offerings by the Horticultural Society

by Susan Biensch

Growing Great Grub

To be presented by Gayla Trail on June 15

In her recently released book *Grow Great Grub - Organic Food from Small Spaces*, Gayla Trail celebrates the ingenuity of gardeners who stray from social norms and benefit from growing food plants irrespective of the amount of space at their disposal. At the Horticultural Club's June 15 meeting, Gayla will show how to grow delicious, affordable, organic edibles virtually anywhere, including patios, balconies, rooftops, porch steps and windowsills.

Inspired by the potato plants her grandmother grew in a bucket on a senior centre's fire escape, Gayla has always gardened in whatever space she had available. Now living in downtown Toronto, she splits her gardening time between a rooftop deck, a community garden plot and a formerly barren patch of public land on a busy street corner.



Glenn's Top 10 Herbs

To be presented by Glenn Brunetti on July 6

Professional herb and food educator, Glenn Brunetti, asks us to consider which herbs we would grow if restricted to only a few; a reality for gardeners with limited space. My first choice would be lavender, as it has a wonderful aromatic scent, plus medicinal and culinary uses. But how would I narrow down subsequent choices from so many options? Genovese basil, lemon thyme, sweet marjoram...I have many favourites! How about you?

On July 6 Glenn will reveal his picks for the ten most versatile herbs to grow and use in the kitchen, and share with us his rationale for these selections. Chances are, some fresh food pairing ideas and recipes will also be shared, as Glenn enjoys sampling the herb-enhanced cuisines of every continent.

A resident of Hamilton, Glenn professes to being an avid gardener all of his life. He started teaching at the Royal Botanical Gardens in 1995 and has since offered hundreds of herb, food and gardening programs for venues including Mohawk College, McMaster University, Canada Blooms, the Ontario Garden Show, and the Harbourfront Festival of Herbs.

*Horticultural Society Meetings take place Tuesdays at 8pm at the McConaghy Senior's 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 immediately south of the Centre (enter off Yonge St.).*

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### Aerial Insectivores – Ontario Sightings Wanted

As a first step in identifying factors behind the significant range contractions and population declines of aerial insectivores observed during the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas, Bird Studies Canada is developing research projects targeting three species of concern: Bank Swallow, Chimney Swift, and Whip-poor-will. To increase our understanding of the current distribution and abundance of these species in Ontario, and to identify their habitat needs, we are compiling reports of breeding locations from anywhere in Ontario.

Report Bank Swallow colonies online through the Ontario Bank Swallow Project on the Nature Counts website or contact Myles Falconer, [mfalconer@birdscanada.org](mailto:mfalconer@birdscanada.org). Report Chimney Swifts entering a chimney or other structure through the Ontario Chimney Swift Project or contact Elisabeth van Stam, [evanstam@birdscanada.org](mailto:evanstam@birdscanada.org). Report observations of singing Whip-poor-wills to the Ontario Whip-poor-will Project or contact Audrey Heagy, [aheagy@birdscanada.org](mailto:aheagy@birdscanada.org).

More information, and additional resources such as observation forms and online reporting tools, will be posted on these project websites as they become available. In the meantime, keep track of sightings (date and location), and consider reporting all your bird records through eBird Canada.



## Naturalist's yard really is all it's quacked up to be

*Photo and Experience by Susan Biensch*

David and I first noticed our unusual visitors on Saturday, April 3rd, while performing annual spring garden and lawn maintenance. Since then, the pair has been spotted coming and going throughout the day, most days.

Mr. and Mrs. Mallard, as they are now known, frolic in both of our meagre ponds, enjoy walks and naps in the grass, and snacking on an assortment of bird food, including peanuts, sunflower seed and corn.

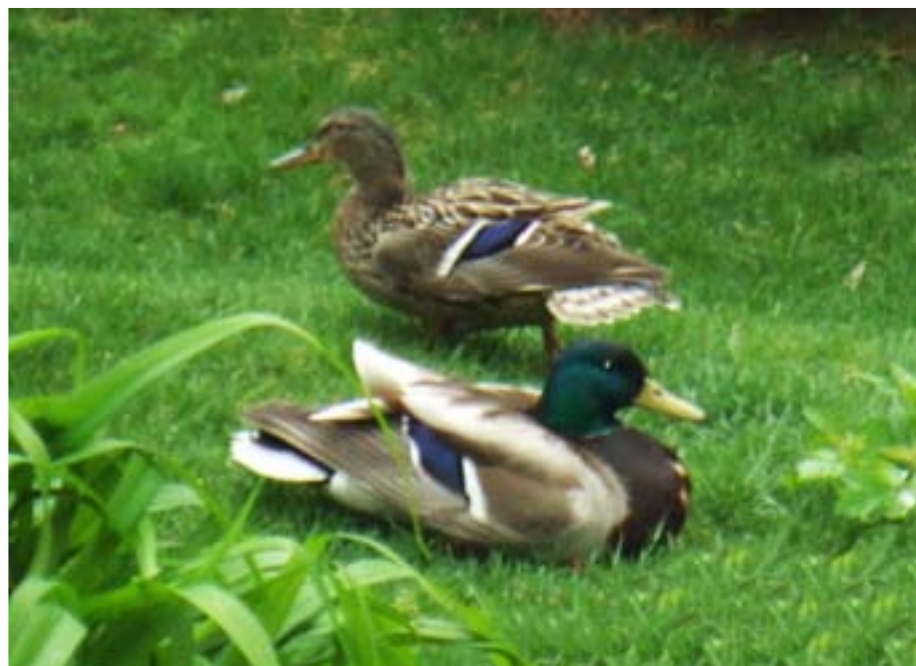
These visits are not always serene. Oh, no – sometimes there is high drama! Unwanted male suitors occasionally drop out of the sky and make daring attempts to have their way with Mrs. Mallard! Her mate is quite insistent that these intruders leave immediately.

Scuffles, shouting, running and flying chasing ensues.

Eventually, peace is restored...for hours or days!

It has been nearly a week since we have seen Mrs. Mallard. Prior to this, the longest period without a sighting was 3 days.

Could it be that she is a new Mom somewhere looking after her young brood? I look forward to the possibility that she will introduce the family to our tiny garden oasis in Richmond Hill later this spring!



## Marking of Eastern Loggerhead Shrikes

Loggerhead Shrikes are declining across much of their range. In Canada, the Eastern subspecies is critically endangered, with less than 35 pairs found in 2009. The majority now breed in Ontario, where a captive breeding program has been releasing about 100 shrikes annually since 2006.

To maximize chances of spotting these shrikes after release, Wildlife Preservation Canada is colouring the breast of the birds, which will be released from May-August. An extensive area of their breast or belly may be coloured green, blue, or purple. All released birds, and a large proportion of the wild population, are also colour banded.

If you see a shrike with a coloured breast and/or wearing bands, please report it to Wildlife Preservation Canada at [jessica@wildlifepreservation.ca](mailto:jessica@wildlifepreservation.ca) or 519-836-9314. Please include details about specific location (GPS coordinates are ideal, but not essential) and any colours (breast and/or bands).

Bird Studies Canada serves on the scientific committee of the Loggerhead Shrike recovery team.



## New Website helps identify Birds

Named after a family of Warblers, Dendroica could be a valuable tool for helping people improve their birding skills.

The federal Ministry of the Environment has introduced a new tool for helping people learn how to bird, and to enjoy the activity more. Dendroica is specifically tailored to Canada, although it deals also with other North American species. It is easy to navigate, and provides both pictures and sounds for all of the birds one is likely to encounter in our area.

Canadian Environment Minister Jim Prentice introduced the new site on May 8, International Migratory Bird Day. The interactive website was developed to help students, volunteers, professionals, and the general public improve their birding skills by learning to identify birds by song or sight, particularly so that they can participate in nature survey and monitoring programs. This innovative technology will enhance birders' ability to collect information for a large variety of Citizen Science programs, such as those administered by Bird Studies Canada. The site includes bird species from Canada, the United States, and Mexico, and

features photographs and sound recordings. Registered users can select lists of species to study, such as all the breeding (or non-breeding) species in a particular region, or species with a particular song type. Knowledge acquired on the website can be tested with the quiz function. Participants can contribute new photographs and sound recordings so it will continue to improve over time.

Dendroica allows you to browse through lists of species found in a particular region to see their pictures and listen to their songs and calls. You can then quiz yourself, based on songs or photos or both, to see how well you have learned the species. You can develop your own custom list of species for study.

To use all of the features of the program, including the quiz, or to submit your own photos or sound recordings, you must register and sign in. Registration is free, and only requires that you provide your name and a valid E-mail address.

If you prefer, you can continue as

a guest, without logging in. This will allow you to browse through the list of species, see the photographs and listen to the songs.

The place to go is :

<http://www.natureinstruct.org/dendroica/>

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# The Curse of the Baillie Birdathon

by Denise Potter

Rod and I were really looking forward to our Peak Bird Migration expedition to Long Point this spring. All of April the weather had been spectacular, and with the trees already almost fully leafed out by May 11 we knew we were going to have to depend heavily on our birding-by-ear skills. We squeezed a few days of vacation time out of our jobs during what is typically peak migration time, May 11-14, abandoned our garden and home repairs, packed up our binoculars and headed for Long Point.

At first we blithely thought we'd make our Baillie Birdathon target of 100 species in the first 24 hours then spend the next three days just taking our time exploring, hiking and cycling the Long Point area. All the best-laid plans!

We had a promising start with a flock of wild turkeys at the side of the road at 7:30am on the first day. By 9:30am we had added 30 great species including Sand Hill Cranes, Louisiana Waterthrush, Cerulean Warbler, Hooded Warbler, Blue-Winged Warbler, Rose-Breasted Grosbeak and Scarlet Tanager, all in the Backus Woods area. We hadn't even reached the Long Point Bird Observatory and we already had all those terrific birds.

And then it started to rain.

And rain.

And RAIN!

It was cold, the wind was fierce, the occasional tree branch crashed to the ground nearby us.

We held out until nearly 3pm before we trudged, soaked to

the bone despite our rain gear, over to the new Bed & Breakfast we'd booked, the Pear Tree House in Port Rowan. This turned out to be a delightful oasis with a comfortable living room with TV and gas fireplace, a kingsized bed and kitchenette. We thankfully wrung ourselves out and settled in front of the fireplace with hot drinks and counted up our pathetic 65 species, obviously as much as we were going to get that day with the wind shaking the shutters.

Through the window I could look out at a Pear Tree where a robin was staunchly feeding a hungry fledgeling, already on May 11, while the storm raged.

Over the next two days the rain continued on and off, and each day we managed to tot up somewhere around 85 species. Red-Bellied Woodpeckers seemed to be everywhere; but each hour passed without any sign of Yellow-Bellied Sapsucker. Green Herons kept turning up; every trail we hiked seemed to have its trio of Cerulean, Blue-Winged and Hooded Warblers. You can't mind seeing yet another Blue-winged warbler, but sometimes I caught myself wishing for something more exotic, something different. This is the curse of the Baillie Birdathon!

Each morning we'd arrive at the Bird Observatory on Old Cut Road to see what was being seen. We met other Richmond Hill Naturalist Club members Jim and Sharon Bradley, and Glenn Reed was working in the banding observatory. In the evening of May 12th and 13th it would clear up for a little while and by the vast marsh we heard (and eventually glimpsed) American Bitterns and Virginia Rail. May 13th in the early evening we decided to take some sandwiches and hang out at the Charles Sauriol Forest to

wait for owls to come out. Unfortunately what came out was a violent storm, but as we stood safe and dry under a picnic shelter we heard an American Woodcock peeping and doodling in between the crashing of the thunder. A little lightning and thunder is nothing to the lovelorn Woodcock.

The next day – our last chance – dawned cold and foggy. Environment Canada promised sunshine but the Long Point area had its own ideas. Early in the morning we climbed up onto the viewing platform looking out over the Long Point Marsh. Drizzle and wisps of fog hemmed us in. We'd just set down the scope when a Least Bittern flew feet first almost directly towards us, landing in a clump of reeds only a few meters from the platform. For nearly a minute he perched near the top of the clump, (and of course with the fog and damp we had left the camera in the car), then he dropped deeper into the reeds and utterly vanished. As we watched the Least Bittern a trio of black terns wheeled by. And at that moment we knew that, even if we weren't going to reach our 100-species target, Long Point is still a wonderful place.

But somehow, as we revisited each of our favourite sites on that last day, we kept on finding more and more birds. Back in Backus Woods we spent an hour tracking down a calling Prothonotary Warbler. As we turned the car away from Long Point and back towards Richmond Hill, the elusive Yellow-Bellied Sapsucker called from a tree, and male Eastern Bluebird preened his heartbreakingly blue feathers in the sunshine that finally returned. We stopped in at the Townsend Sewage Lagoons and found Short-Billed Dowitchers, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs,



Ruddy Duck and Common Moorhen among many other species... and we still had a couple of hours to go! An Eastern Meadowlark on the telephone line by the road outside Hagersville was gleefully added to the list, and then as we drove along Highway 6 towards Hamilton we spotted a large raptor flying in the distance. We didn't have a red-tailed hawk yet for the day so we pulled over to check it out. It wheeled closer

and closer and then we could see clearly that it was no hawk but a mature bald eagle, heading towards Long Point. It was 6:45pm and with the bald eagle we had soared past our target, ending the consecutive 24-hour period with 105 species...and a total of 124 species over the four days.

Our total species lists are posted on the Naturalist Club website.

Please support Bird Studies Canada and the RHN by Donating Online

Canada's Baillie Birdathon was established in 1976 as a national fundraiser to support the research and conservation of wild birds. Funds raised by participants benefit not only the work of Bird Studies Canada, but also designated bird observatories in the Canadian Migration Monitoring Network, the James L. Baillie Memorial Fund, which provides research grants to amateurs across Canada, and participating conservation and naturalist clubs. All contributions to Birdathon are tax-creditable.

During a 24-hour period in May, participants attempt to find as many bird species as they can, sponsored at a flat rate, or on a per-species basis. Birders can designate a favourite conservation organization to receive a portion of the funds they raise.

Denise and Rod Potter have designated the Richmond Hill Naturalists to receive a portion of the funds donated on their behalf. Please donate online at

<http://www.bsc-eoc.org/support/birdathon/index.jsp?targetpg=donate&lang=EN&number=59091>



*Oven bird in Backus Woods, May 2010*



## Heron Rookery

The herons are still perched on their nests at the Heron Rookery. To see them, bring binoculars, go to the school parking lot on the east side of Leslie, just south of 19th avenue, and look at the trees beyond the field. Watch for large -- really large -- hungry beaks sticking up out of each nest!

Photo by Tony Marshall

## Doors Open at Lake St. George

Immediately north of Oak Ridges Corridor Park East (Jefferson's Forest) is Lake St. George Field Centre, an outdoor environmental education centre owned and operated by Toronto and Region Conservation. It is used primarily by school classes on weekdays, by adult or youth groups on weekends, and by youth camps during the summer.

For the security of all children living and learning on the 340-acre site, the property is normally not open to the public. Lake St. George will be open on Saturday, June 12, as part of

the "Doors Open Richmond Hill" event, when select heritage properties in the Town welcome visitors for one day. You'll enjoy a variety of interesting experiences at picturesque Lake St. George. Explore Davies Hall, the 1908 estate house of the Davies and Snively families. Climb servants' stairs to the second storey, then descend into a basement that was part of the foundation of an 1856 log chateau of Henri Quetton St. George. Henri was son of Laurent, one of the original French royalist colonists of north Richmond Hill in 1800. Step deeper back into history and view artifacts uncovered by archaeologists, who will be on hand to describe a 600-year old longhouse village and 9000-year old caribou hunting camp found

here. Perhaps you'll even hear a ghost story or two! Walk the property to discover historic buildings, remnants of orchards and gardens, and forests and wetlands. Boat tours of the lake's beauty and wildlife will be a special highlight. Board a solar-powered, 23-passenger pontoon boat to cruise the natural shoreline of one of the Oak Ridges Moraine's deep kettle lakes.

Admission and tours are free of charge. Drop in between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m., at 950 Bethesda Side Road, 400 metres east of Bayview Avenue. Bethesda Side Road is two kilometres north of Stouffville Road, or two kilometres south of Bloomington Road.

## A Birding Guide to the Long Point Area

While not as well-known as Point Pelee, the Long Point area is a treasure trove of diverse habitat that includes extensive tracts of Carolinian forest, sprawling wetlands, miles of Lake Erie shoreline, as well as grasslands and riverside trails. But with more than 700 square kilometres to explore, Long Point can't be birded in a single day or with out a little expert help. Fortunately, Ron Rideout's *A Birding Guide to the Long Point Area* provides just the kind of help needed. It's a well-written and well-organized guide that will prove essential to anyone visiting Long Point for the first time. In fact, with detailed descriptions of 45 area destinations, the Guide will probably be needed for at least 3 or 4 trips to fully explore Long Point.

The book offers many suggestions for outings via foot, bicycle, canoe and car. The text is also peppered with satellite views of trails and colour photographs of many destinations. A target species section provides a long list of local specialties along with very specific directions on when and where to find them. Just as the author tells us, for example: Blue-Winged Warblers can be seen and heard on the north side of the 4th Concession by the bridge at Dedrick Creek.

The last section features a standard seasonal checklist for all 388 species currently recorded in the Long Point area will be useful for anyone considering a visit outside of migration season. This complements an early chapter, "The Birding Year", where the author provides a month by month description of the area's bird activity.

As the author notes, much has changed at Long Point over the

past few decades. Red-headed woodpeckers, Whip-poor-wills, Prairie Warblers and other species have declined, while a few others have increased in step with habitat and climate changes.

Ron Rideout's updated Guide will help inspire a new generation of birders to both appreciate and preserve the diversity of avian life at Long Point.

