



# THE BULLETIN

NEWS AND VIEWS FROM THE RICHMOND HILL NATURALISTS

JANUARY 2011 — No. 494

REMINDER: JANUARY MEETING IS AT THE MCCONAGHY CENTRE

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Storing your Digital Memories ONLINE

Red-Bellied Woodpecker vs Yellow-Bellied Sapsucker

Greenspace to be replaced with Online Park???



## Polar Bears and Butterflies

When can you get Polar Bears and Butterflies in the same place? Only at the Richmond Hill Naturalists Club meeting on January 20th at the McConaghy Centre. Club member Deb Chute will give a short presentation on the beautiful winged insects she has been tracking down in the Dunlap fields and treasurer Gene Denzel will show a few highlights from the past summer's Arctic trip. Come for the butterflies...stay for the good conversation and refreshments.



Left: Owl photo from Leslie Street Spit by Theresa McKenzie; Above: American Lady by Deborah Chute; Below: Polar Bear on an ice floe by Gene Denzel



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NEWS AND VIEWS FROM THE RICHMOND HILL NATURALISTS

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.

Denise Potter, Bulletin Editor:  
editor@rhnaturalists.ca

647-504-4586  
Mailing Address: 128 Pugsley  
Av, Richmond Hill, ON

Mailing Database: Mike Turk

Distribution: Athena Antiochos

Visit our Website at  
www.rhnaturalists.ca

See the Executive List for  
additional contact information.

## 2008 / 2009 RHN Executive

President..... Marianne Yake (president@rhnaturalists.ca  
..... 905-883-3047)  
Past President..... Natalie Helferty  
2nd Vice President..... Position Available  
Secretary..... Position Available  
Treasurer/Secretary..... Gene Denzel (treasurer@rhnaturalists.ca)  
Field Trips..... Joe Agg (trips@rhnaturalists.ca)  
Environment..... Position Available  
Publicity..... Position Available (publicity@rhnaturalists.ca)  
Bulletin Editor..... Denise Potter (editor@rhnaturalists.ca)  
Membership..... Mike Turk (membership@rhnaturalists.ca)  
Events..... Position Available  
Ontario Nature Rep..... Marianne Yake  
Website Admin..... Rod Potter (webmaster@rhnaturalists.ca)  
Chair of AstroNats..... Heidi DeBond (astronomy@rhnaturalists.ca)



Don't forget to Renew your Membership!  
Your membership fee helps pay for our monthly hall rental, website registration, speakers, printing and postage for the Bulletin (all Website and Bulletin contributions and editing are on a strictly volunteer basis), and special events. Please renew by clicking on the "Membership" link on the website at rhnaturalists.ca or at the monthly General Meeting. A single membership is \$30; get a membership for the whole family for only \$35.

## Richmond Hill Council to consider David Dunlap Observatory Lands

At their February 9th meeting Town Council will be considering requests from Corsica Development Inc to amend the Official Plan and Zoning By-law and to approve Corsica's draft Plan of Subdivision for the 177.9 acre site we know as the David Dunlap Observatory and Parklands. The Town officially recognizes the property as "123 Hillsvie Drive".

Corsica has requested rezoning the land from "Major Institutional" to new categories that would permit low and medium density residential uses, institutional uses, and open space. Their draft Plan of Subdivision consists of 833 residential dwelling units, including detached, semi-detached and townhouses, new roads, stormwater management ponds, as well as parkland and lands preserved for cultural and natural heritage preservation. The Town's staff report will be available from the Office of the Clerk on Wednesday, Feb 2 after 3pm.

You may also wish to attend the January 24, 2011, Council Meeting on the Dunlap Conservation Management Plan. Both meetings occur at 7:30pm in the Council Chambers at 225 East Beaver Creek Road.

## Coming Events



Thursday, January 20, 2011 at 7:30pm - General Meeting. Polar Bears and Butterflies - Speakers - Club members Deborah Chute and Gene Denzel will each do a short presentation. Note: the meeting will be held at the McConaghy Seniors Centre at 10100 Yonge St, North of Major Mackenzie Dr, just north of our regular meeting space at the Presbyterian Church. Parking can be reached from Arnold Crescent. For info contact Marianne Yake at 905-883-3047, or visit [www.RHNaturalists.ca](http://www.RHNaturalists.ca).



Wednesday, February 9th, 2011, Richmond Hill Council to consider Dunlap Observatory Lands. See page 2 for details.



Tuesday, February 10, 2011 at 7:30pm - Executive Meeting. McConaghy Centre. All are welcome. Executive positions available include: Secretary, Environment, Publicity, Events. Come out to the Exec meeting and see what you think!



Wednesday, February 11, 2011 at 7:30pm - Bird Group - Whippoorwill and Common Nighthawk - hosted by Muriel Farrant at 123 Woodward Av, Thornhill. All are welcome. Please RSVP to 905-889-7156.



Thursday, February 17, 2011 at 7:30pm - General Meeting - Speaker John Pisapio, Management Biologist, Ministry of Natural Resources will speak on BioDiversity. 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](http://www.RHNaturalists.ca).

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.



Tuesday, Jan 18, 7-8:30PM: Oak Ridges Corridor Park East Open House and Presentation – Tuesday Jan 18, 7:00 -8:30 pm, Connor Room, Parks & Rec Building, 39 King Rd. This is your opportunity to comment on the plans for the new section of the Oak Ridges Corridor Park in Jefferson Forest on the east side of Bayview Ave. Learn more in the new edition of the Corridor Park Rambler newsletter available at: <http://trca.on.ca/dotAsset/92855.pdf> For more information on the Corridor Park and East Lands visit: <http://www.oakridgesfriendsoftheenvironment.ca/NatureReserves.htm>



Sunday, January 23, 2011, 1:15PM-4PM - Lake Wilcox Winter Hike and Homeowners Learning Centre. Do you live near Lake Wilcox? Sustainable Neighbourhoods will be providing free advice on easy things you can do to help keep the neighbourhood a great place to live, like how to manage water on your property, create beautiful and maintenance free landscapes, access government programs to subsidize home & property improvements, and keep energy bills down. Activities for kids of all ages! Lake Wilcox Public School Gym. Meet at 1:15pm for guided family hike from 1:30-2pm. Learning Centre open from 2-4PM. CONTACT: Janet Ivey, TRCA (416-661-6600 ext. 5729 or [jivey@trca.on.ca](mailto:jivey@trca.on.ca)) or see [www.sustainableneighbourhoods.ca](http://www.sustainableneighbourhoods.ca)

Toronto Ornithological Club JIM BAILLIE MEMORIAL BIRD WALKS:



Sunday, January 23, 2011: Sunnyside/ Humber Bay, 1:30pm - sunset. Leader: Bob Cumming. Meet at 1:30pm in the Sunnyside parking lot at the foot of Windermere Avenue off Lakeshore West. Gulls, waterfowl.



Sunday, January 30, 2011: Durham Region, 9:00am- early afternoon. Leader: Rayfield Pye. Meet at 9:00am at the south-west corner of the Pickering GO Station (Bayly/Liverpool) to car pool if necessary. Waterfowl, gulls, possible winter finches, wintering sparrows and feeder birds.

# Get Clicking! Share your Nature Memories on Flickr

Rod Potter

Flickr (flickr.com) is a great way to share photos with family and friends -- especially when some of your friends are members of the RHN. The Naturalists have been maintaining the RHN group for the past 3 years. So far 13 members have contributed nearly 300 photos.

The collection includes photographs from various RHN outings, backyard bird sightings, special events and wonderful images from members who have travelled far and wide across the planet.

## How to join

Getting started with Flickr is easy. Just visit flickr.com and follow the sign-up procedure. Both free and paid memberships are available. Free members are permitted to upload 300MB worth of photos and two 150MB video clips each calendar month. Paid members can upload as many images as they wish.

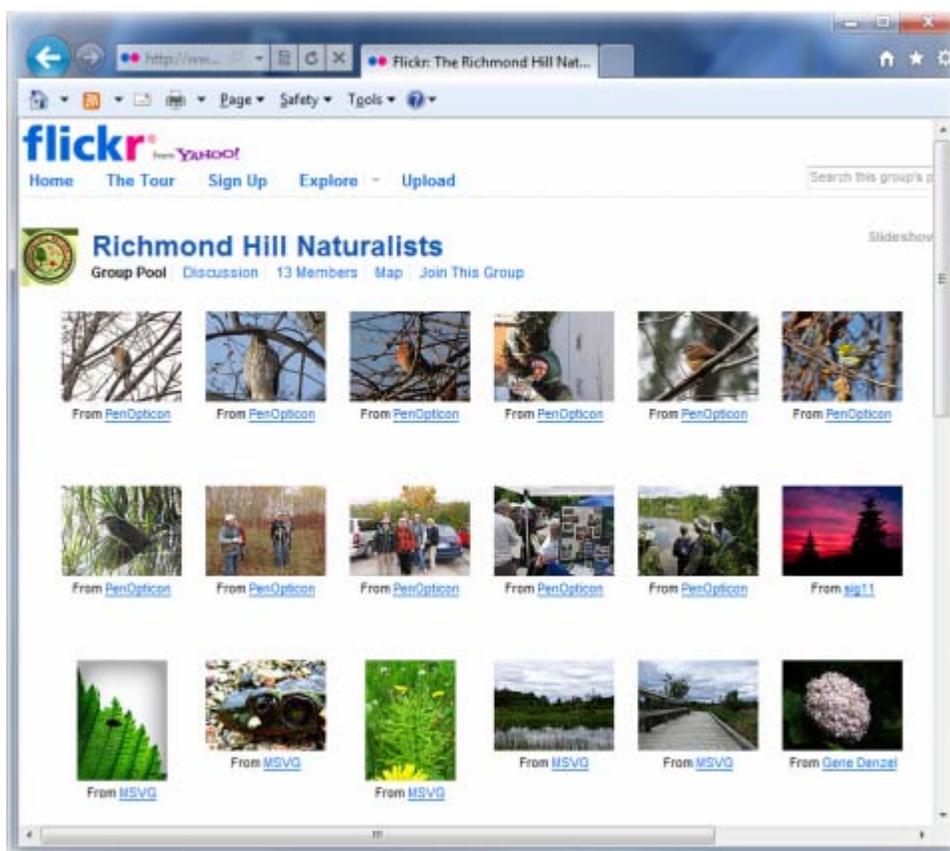
Flickr lets you easily share photos using a web browser or a small Windows or Mac uploading application. You can also upload photos with an iPhone and other mobile devices.

## The RHN Flickr group

Once you have a Flickr account and have uploaded a few pictures, you can join any of thousands of special interest Flickr groups, including the RHN group. Just visit:

<http://flickr.com/groups/rhn/>

and click Join to get started. Any photos you share with the RHN Flickr group will also be instantly shared on the RHN website.



Along with the RHN group, we also maintain a Save the DDO group that features numerous photos of the observatory and grounds. Everyone is welcome to share DDO photos with this group:

<http://bit.ly/ij2iDp>

**Keeping control over your images**

If your digital images are important to you, Flickr provides a convenient and inexpensive way to back up your collection so it won't be lost when your computer hard drive eventually packs it in.

In addition, Flickr provides a set of tools for manipulating photos. You can crop, resize and make

colour-correction adjustments using a simple web-browser interface. The site also provides convenient tools for organizing your pictures. You can create photo sets and collections of sets and provide detailed descriptions, titles and tags that will make your photos easy to find. You can even provide geolocation information so your images can be plotted on a map.

For anyone with the time, Flickr also provides a fun comment and discussion facility. Some groups even arrange meet-ups and photography outings.

If you have questions about the RHN Flickr group contact: [webmaster@rhnaturalists.ca](mailto:webmaster@rhnaturalists.ca)

**Amazing Opportunity for Young Ornithologists from Bird Studies Canada**  
 The 2011 Doug Tarry Young Ornithologists' Workshop will be held at Long Point Bird Observatory near Port Rowan, Ontario, from Friday, July 29 to Sunday, August 7. 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. For those traveling long distances, special grants may also be available to help offset air travel costs. Applications are due April 15, 2011. For more information and an application form, contact our Landbird Programs Coordinator at [lpbo@birdscanada.org](mailto:lpbo@birdscanada.org), or paste this link into your browser: <http://www.sco-soc.ca/studentawards.htm>



Lizard - Gene Denzel



Silvery Blue -- Deb Chute

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## Red-Bellied Woodpecker becoming more common

by Gene Denzel

The Bird study group met on 8 December at Mike Turk's home. Participating were Mike, Martin Chen, Muriel Farrant, Theo Hofmann, Barbara Jackson, Gene and Charlene Denzel, and Joandice Tingley (who was leaving the next day for Ecuador and the Galapagos with husband Tony!). The topic birds were Red-Bellied Woodpecker and Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, two birds which can be uncommonly seen in our area (even on the Christmas Bird Count). After some tasty refreshments, we settled down to discussing our birds.

Although the Red-bellied WP used to be very uncommon in our part of Ontario, in recent years it has greatly expanded its territory and numbers, while the Red-headed WP has been in decline. The reasons for this are a puzzle, currently the subject of scientific investigation. As usual, we discussed various aspects of this species' behaviour, habitat, etc. It has been observed that they can live as long as 20 years in the wild. It has also been



Hummingbirds may rely on the Yellow-Bellied Sapsucker's "sap wells" when they return to Canada in early spring. (Photo by Rod Potter, April 2009, Leslie Street Spit)

observed that on some occasions they practice a form of 'reverse mounting' (female on top of male) as a type of foreplay before mating.

The Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, as its name suggests, feeds by drilling a series of small holes (usually in horizontal rows), and

then ingesting both the sap and insects attracted to the sap. There has been some suggestion that their saliva may have an agent which helps keep the sap flowing. Once the sap flows, one can sometimes observe hummingbirds partaking, and frequently wasps will congregate around the holes. Ruby-throated Hummingbirds may even time their spring migration to that of the Sapsucker in order to take advantage of the sap holes! The sapsuckers mostly migrate to warmer climes for our Winters, but still they have been found three times on the Richmond Hill Christmas Bird Count (including this year).

After our discussions of these two birds, the group was subjected to a quiz, prepared by Mike, which caused some furrowed brows over some of the questions. With thanks to Mike for the hospitality, we adjourned until meeting at the Christmas Bird Count on Dec 18.



Red-Bellied Woodpeckers becoming less uncommon in Southern Ontario. This photo is from Presqu'île Provincial Park where they are regularly seen. One was seen in Richmond Hill during the Christmas Bird Count, Dec 2010

# Christmas Bird Count 2010 Highlights

by Gene Denzel

The Christmas Bird Count for Richmond Hill was held on 18 December. The weather was cooperative ---not too cold, not much snow during the day. 32 people went out counting, and 5 people watched their feeders at home. A total of 6129 birds were reported. Although only 52 species were counted, plus unidentified species of hawk, gull, and a sparrow (a little below the long term average over 55 previous counts), there were quite a few highlights.

As predicted by Theo Hofmann in writing about last year's count, this year saw the first Common Ravens ever recorded on the Richmond Hill CBC, 2 in sector seven and 1 in sector one. Another first was a pair of Winter Wrens, seen in sector 7. A Yellow-breasted Sapsucker was seen by a feeder-watcher, for only the third time on the Count. A Red Crossbill was seen in sector 5, for only the 4th time. For the second year in a row there was a Mute Swan reported, this time in sector 3.



*Sectors of the Richmond Hill Christmas Bird Count. 32 counters and 5 feeder watchers counted a total of 52 species and 6,129 individual birds on Dec 18 2010. In case you're wondering, Sector 4 was absorbed into other sectors many years ago. If anyone remembers why please email [editor@rhnaturalists.ca](mailto:editor@rhnaturalists.ca)*

Birds such as Horned Larks and Bohemian Waxwings, which move around in flocks, were reported this year, as were some Northern Flickers. A Great Blue Heron was found at Walmart Pond, just as we were quitting for the day in sector 2, and a Belted Kingfisher was seen in sector 5, in spite of the paucity of open water. Continuing the trends of recent years, there were no Ring-Necked Pheasants nor unusual gulls. An oddity in sector 2 was the lack of Rock Pigeons throughout the day, although traditionally they have been plentiful. A cruise up Yonge St from Major MacKenzie to Elgin Mills at 5 pm finally produced 2 on the E side of the street, so we could avoid being skunked.

Sector 5 delivered the most species (33) and the most birds

counted of any sector (1471) - with headline grabbers such as Sharp-shinned Hawk, Kestrel, TWELVE red-tailed hawks, Belted Kingfisher, Snow Buntings and one Red Crossbill. Sector 7 was next with 29 species including Bohemian Waxwings and Winter Wrens, but only 590 individual birds. Sector 6 had the fewest (20 species) - but included a Northern Harrier in their tally. Sector 9 had the fewest individuals (325) with 23 species.

A good crowd of participants convened at Athena Antiochos' home for the traditional Chilli Supper and wrap up. The food was good, the desserts plentiful, and 3 people were lucky recipients of the gift cards donated by Wild Birds Unlimited (Andy and Debbie Neal).

## Owl study ushers in new year

by Joandice and Anthony Marshall

Richmond Hill Naturalist's first Bird Study group meeting in 2011 took place on January 12 at Athena Antiochos' residence. Attendees included: Athena Antiochos, Barbara Jackson, Muriel Farrant, Gene & Charlene Denzel, Martin Chen, Tony & Joandice Marshall. The group compared the Northern Saw-whet Owl and the the Eastern Screech Owl.

Northern Saw-whet Owls are only about 20 cm high -- smaller than a starling-- and live in dense coniferous or mixed forests, wooded swamps and tamarack bogs. We learnt from Charlene that the Saw-whets are solitary, hunting primarily at dusk and dawn. Muriel reported that their call is a single whistled note repeated over and over.

The bird is named for the scraping screech call it makes frequently during the breeding season, reminiscent of a traditional saw being manually sharpened. From early summer until the end of February, Saw-whets rarely make any sound at all.

Perched often at eye-level, with their backs against the tree trunk they are practically invisible. Their favourite haunts can be discovered by noting pellets at the base of coniferous trees in winter and the tell-tale white streaks of droppings on bark higher in the trees. Gene Denzel mentioned that for nesting, Northern Saw-whet Owls often lay 5-7 white eggs in the holes made by Northern Flickers, or Pileated Woodpeckers. The male does all the hunting while the female incubates the eggs and young.

Eastern Screech Owls stand about 22cm high, with yellow eyes and ear tufts that can be prominent when raised; when



*Bird Study Group Attendees (Left to Right): Charlene Denzel, Martin Chen, Muriel Farrant, Athena Antiochos, Barbara Jackson, Joandice & Tony Marshall and Gene Denzel. Photo by Anthony Marshall*

lowered the head appears round.

Martin reported that Eastern Screech Owls are widely distributed, from the Rockies to the Atlantic provinces and right down to Florida. These owls tend not to migrate and have adapted extremely well to the urban setting. The proliferation of bird feeders in modern subdivisions also feeds the Eastern Screech Owl's favourite food - mice and other small rodents. This owl's presence is usually first detected through its nocturnal hooting, or the eerie song of the adults as they establish and defend a territory.

### Opportunistic Hunters

The main food source of Eastern Screech Owls is small rodents and songbirds, but they are versatile hunters and can pick off prey by swooping to strike small mammals and roosting birds or hawking flying insects, bats & birds; they also forage on the ground for prey and even take small prey from shallow

water. They will take larger animals such as rabbits and snipe; they may even resort to preying on other raptors such as Kestrels and Northern Saw-whet owls.

## Owl Quiz

To finish the meeting off, Barbara Jackson provided a quiz that challenged everyone.

See how well you do with three of Barbara's questions:

1. How many toes do owls have, and what special feature do these toes exhibit?
2. A group of owls is called a \_\_\_\_\_?
3. What special physiological feature enables a tiny Saw-Whet to swallow a whole deer mouse?

>> Answers on Page 10<<



## Do you know this owl?

Hint 1: this sleepy-looking fellow is featured in the Bird Study Club's January study (see page 8)

Hint 2: his song is a single, whistled tone repeated over and over.

Hint 3: he's also the same species of owl as the little guy on the front cover.

Answer on page 10...

Thanks to York Region naturalist and birder Lev Frid for this beautiful photograph. You can see more of Lev's photography at:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/levfrid/>

## Virtual Parks will provide Infinite Green Space

*The writers at the new satirical website [yolkregion.ca](http://yolkregion.ca) looked into their crystal ball and brought us this possible news story from the near future...*

Hill residents will soon be able to relax and recreate in a new virtual town park, the first municipal park of its kind in the world. Conveniently accessible via the popular Facebook social networking site, the 76-hectare park will feature heritage woodlots, open grasslands and a state-of-the-art conference centre. In addition, the park centrepiece will be a stunningly well-preserved 20th century observatory, replete with a gorgeous stone and marble building that will be used for online lectures, receptions and other public functions.

"We know our town is rapidly running out of room", said Melissa Steen, a grade 12 student from Langstaff S.S. "We all have to do what we can to help, so my friends and I built this park".

"It's just a simple Facebook, Twitter, Google Maps mash-up", said fellow classmate, Arnold White as he showed off the park on his iPhone.

The students demoed the park during a visit to Town Council. Visitors are greeted with links to YouTube videos and slowly moving avatars of other visitors. The Mayor beamed with pride as he clicked his way down the walking paths and was impressed to discover one could meander for hours without seeing a single car or even a drugstore. Councillors and audience members gasped with delight whenever virtual deer scampered across the screen.

The Mayor noted that while real-world spaces like Mill Pond only had parking for 25 or 30 cars,

virtual parks can accommodate thousands of visitors with ease. A few councillors expressed hope that the Town might be able to fund future growth by selling off actual parks and replacing them with web sites. "The money we save on grounds keeping and insurance can be used to widen roads and build storm-water retention ponds for new subdivisions."

Before the meeting adjourned, Staff were directed to see if the Town's Paypal account had been activated "in case" they decided to charge user fees to access the new virtual park system.

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## They said there were birds here, but I can't find any...



Birdwatcher

-----

Birdwatchers top my honours list.  
I aimed to be one, but I missed.  
Since I am both myopic and astigmatic  
My aim turned out to be erratic.  
And I, bespectacled and binocular,  
Exposed myself to comments jocular.  
That's why I sit here, growing old by inches,  
Watching the clock instead of Finches.  
But I sometimes visualize in my gin  
The Audubon that I audubin.

- - Ogden Nash

Club Member Theo Hofmann -- who really IS a birdwatcher -- ran this Ogden Nash poem in the Richmond Hill Naturalist Club Bulletin in January, 1985. We like it too and we're running it again. Thanks for the reminder, Theo!

---

### Answers to Owl Quiz

1.Owls have 4 toes attached to each leg. One of the toes on each leg adjusts to provide an opposing grip, useful in catching its prey. 2.A Parliament. (not a "flock", but rather a "parliament") 3.Detachable jaw. Photo: Northern Saw-whet Owl, by Lev Frid