



# THE BULLETIN

NEWS AND VIEWS FROM THE RICHMOND HILL NATURALISTS

September 2011 — No. 498

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End of Summer - Corn Roast Memories



*Tending the Cauldron at the Corn Roast- Russ Tilt's Richmond Hill backyard September 2011*

## Joe Agg's Project to Clean up German Mills Creek is a Tall Order

It takes a big heart to take on a big project. Over the years, many members of the



Richmond Hill Naturalists have taken on special projects in support of conservation or to raise awareness of nature.

This year, Joe Agg has taken on the ambitious task of cleaning up German Mills creek, a feat that will improve the Don Watershed and improve the habitat for fish and wildlife that rely on the creek. The spruced up waterway will also make adjacent trails that much nicer to walk on -- provided we take care not to mess up the good work that Joe and a team several dozen volunteers have accomplished.

At our September meeting, Joe treated RHN members to a talk about the interesting history that brought him to Richmond Hill, boyhood adventures living across the way from Dunlap Observatory, recent travels to Gananoque and his recent work on the German Mills Creek project.

With so many volunteers on the prowl for litter, Joe expected to find a variety of artifacts -- and the creek did not disappoint. Among the several hundred bags of trash removed so far, they found numerous car batteries, containers of oil and kerosene, a 1970's era TTC fare box (empty), wallets, credit cards, jewelry and plastic bottles -- hundreds and hundreds of plastic bottles.

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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](mailto:editor@rhnaturalists.ca) Deadlines are the 2nd Thursday of each month.

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## German Mills Creek Cleanup

*Continued from Page 1*

Everyone is welcome to volunteer. Thanks to a grant Joe is able to supply gloves and tools to help with the clean-up. Volunteers are asked to wear long pants and bring rubber boots if you have them. Drinking water, a hat, sunscreen, bug repellent and a light snack are also recommended.

It's not just about cleaning up the creek; it's also about raising awareness in the community that "there's a place for garbage -- and it's not in the creek!" as Joe says.

The project is winding down for the colder months but Joe figures there will be plenty more to do in the spring!

View Joe on Global News from the News Hour report on September 26 at: <http://bit.ly/qnRbU9>

## Membership Renewal

Your membership fee helps pay for the club's 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. You can join or renew online by clicking on the "Membership" link on the website at [rhnaturalists.ca](http://rhnaturalists.ca); pick up an application from any member of the executive, or in person at the monthly General Meeting. A single membership is \$30; get a membership for the whole family for only \$35.



## Coming Events



### Richmond Hill Naturalists General Meetings

Unless otherwise noted General Meetings are held at 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).



Thursday, October 20, 7:30 PM - General Meeting: "Why the World \*Won't\* Come To An End In 2012" with Dr. Ian Shelton



Thursday, November 18, 7:30PM - Joint meeting with West Humber Naturalists - Wonders of Machu Pichu with Gene Denzel



Saturday, December 17 - Christmas Bird Count. Contact Gene Denzel for more information at [lezned@yorku.ca](mailto:lezned@yorku.ca)



Bird Group Meetings: please note corrected dates!

October 12 Host: Barbara Jackson Birds: Kingfisher and Bluejay

November 9 Host: Charlene Denzel Birds: Lesser Scaup and Ringbill Duck

December 14 Host: Mike Turk Birds: Dicksissel and Bobolink



### Field Trips

October 21-23 - Long Point/Normandale -- with Joe Agg. Please contact Joe if interested in joining this 2-night expedition.



### Astronomy

Observing every Friday night in Richmond Hill, weather permitting. Contact [sn87a@hotmail.com](mailto:sn87a@hotmail.com) for more information.

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.



## Birdathon in Toronto

Report on Two Birdathons by Theo Hofmann

1. Vaughan, Leslie Street Spit and Toronto Islands.

*Two half days: 22 and 23 May.*

Because I am now limited in my activities I decided I would do a limited birdathon this year, spending just the number of hours that I can manage during a day in the field. Eleanor Dowson and Margaret McKone were keen to join me, but unfortunately they were available only on the weekend of the 14th and 15th May.

As it turned out on both days it rained fairly continuously and we decided not to go. On the following weekend, Victoria Day, I went out on Sunday morning with Roy Smith to check on some of the Northern Mockingbirds which he is studying. It was a fair day, hence I decided on the spot to start a Birdathon on my own, beginning at noon on the 22nd May and continuing on the 23rd until noon. Fortunately we have a very active feeder at home which I watched from 12.00 to about 14.00 and from 19.00 to dusk after I got back home from the Leslie Street Spit. I picked up a surprising 20 species at the feeder and in the back yard. A late White-throated and a late White-crowned Sparrow contributed to this high number. Both had been hanging around the yard for some time. A female Rose-breasted Grosbeak was a great surprise. A pair of Downy Woodpeckers and a pair of Red-breasted Nuthatches have been visiting the feeder daily for many weeks. A Chipping Sparrow and a Red-winged Blackbird added to the count.

At 14.00 I made my way down to the Leslie Street Spit. Unfortunately I had no car available and went by bus and subway. Hence I had not very much time and did not get very

far along the spit. I saw 14 of the usual species. On the way home I was lucky to see the downtown Peregrine Falcon. On Monday, 23rd May, I took the subway down to the Hanlan Ferry where I was surprised to find a group from the TOC, led by Luke Fazio. Among them was Barbara Jackson from the Richmond Hill Naturalists. The presence of the TOC group was a help in my quest for species on the Toronto



Islands. I got a few birds which I probably would not have got by myself, but of course, I only counted those which I saw and identified myself. In addition to the birds seen the day before I recorded another 36 species. I counted until 12.00 to make the 24 hour period required. The total number of species counted on the two half days was 74, the time which I spent birding was 9 hours.

2. Toronto Islands. 29 May:

*with Margaret McKone, Leslie Lewis and Jess MacKenzie.*

As it turned out Margaret found that she had time on the 29th May and was keen to do a birdathon. Furthermore two other friends, Lesley Lewis and Jess MacKenzie were also keen to join. Because some of us required public transport we went to the Toronto Islands Park again, going over with the first Hanlan Ferry and criss-crossed the Islands all the way to Ward's Island which we reached at about 16.30. This

gave us about 8 hours of observing. Among the more interesting species that we recorded were small flocks of both Surf and White-winged Scoters, 2 Whimbrels and a Wild Turkey. Apart from these we observed just the regular species, among them 12 species of warblers. This number was perhaps a bit unexpected considering the late date of the migration season. On the other hand we were disappointed in only finding one flycatcher. Our total count came to 72 species in the 8 hours spent on the Islands.

Surprisingly on both counts the only raptor was the downtown Peregrine on the 22nd May.

The combined total count for the two birdathons was 99.

AND A GOOD TIME WAS HAD BY ALL!

## Mystery Corpse Identified

Those who attended the General Meeting on September 15 will recall the thrush found by Russ Tilt. Some minds were unsure whether it was a Gray-Cheeked Thrush or a Swainson's Thrush. Theo Hofmann brought the frozen body to ROM curator Mark Peck who compared it with several specimens of both species. There was no doubt at all that it was indeed a Gray-Cheeked Thrush. The obvious differences were in the colours of the back and wing feathers and in the absence of any significant buffy wash around the throat and at the back of the bill. The eyeline was, well, not in good enough condition to be used for identification.

# The Joy of the Hunt: Baillie Birdathon at Point Pelee

by Denise and Rod Potter

Rod and I arrived in Wheatley late on Friday afternoon, May 13. Our mission: to find at least 100 species of birds in a 24-hour period. Last year at Long Point we had just barely managed it. But this year we were at Pelee, one of the hottest of the hot birding spots that Ontario springtime provides.

The Baillie Birdathon just demands that you find the most birds that you can in a 24-hour period. Rod and I are far from the elite teams who would be finding 150 or more species in a day, but we wanted to break our previous personal record -- and just enjoy seeing a whole lot of birds we rarely see anywhere else.

We started with a trip to Kopegaron, a wonderful little conservation area just outside Wheatley, where an Olive-Sided Flycatcher singing his "Quick Three Beers!" song gave us a great start. Rod managed to capture it singing on video at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/penopticon/6203944050/in/photostream>

Another birder kindly pointed out an Eastern Screech Owl perched against the trunk of a thin tree about 20 feet

up. We would never have seen this little guy without assistance. He blended right in with the trunk. His eyes were closed and he was almost completely motionless. We were to see that Screech Owl snoozing in exactly the same perch more than a week later. Red-Bellied Woodpecker, Baltimore Oriole, Rose-Breasted Grosbeak, Eastern Phoebe, Eastern Kingbird, Great-Crested Flycatcher and Indigo Bunting livened the



Above: A singing Kentucky Warbler; facing page: Magnolia Warbler at Point Pelee National Park, May 14 2011

Kopegaron Woods together with many warblers including Ovenbird, Magnolia, Bay Breasted, Black-throated Green, Northern Parula, Chestnut sided, American Redstart, Black and White Warbler. A Green Heron flew right by us as we stood in a clearing.

Several Chimney Swifts chattered overhead as we stoked up on lightly-battered perch at the Car Barn restaurant in Wheatley. It was a beautiful evening and with a couple of hours of daylight left we drove down to Wheatley Harbour. We were delighted to find a lone Ruddy Duck right in the harbour. Belted Kingfisher, Wood Ducks -- and a Northern Cardinal -- joined the list. Continuing on the harbour road, we stopped at each little cove and got another great bird in each: a Horned Grebe in one, a brightly-plumaged male Common Merganser in the next, a line of Double-Crested Cormorants...

We zoomed to Hillman Marsh, where we found Dunlin, Lesser Yellowlegs, American Wigeon and Mute Swans. As dusk fell American Woodcocks began

peinting and displaying all around. We had already tallied 65 species in just a few hours.

Saturday morning dawned with threatening clouds. Our B&B hostess provided an early breakfast then we headed for Point Pelee, taking the tram out to the tip where we found, along with crowds of other people, a Black-Crowned Night Heron huddled in a cedar bush; Red-Breasted Mergansers riding the surf off the tip, Philadelphia Vireos, Yellow-Bellied Flycatchers, Blackpoll Warblers, and the special highlight: a singing Kentucky Warbler, along with many other species. The trees fairly dripped with Orchard Orioles, Baltimore Orioles and yellow warblers, along with a few Eastern Towhees. Hummingbirds, Field Sparrows and Black-Throated Blue Warblers decorated the walk back to the Visitor's Centre. Several groups of birders hurried by looking for a Painted Bunting -- we didn't find it.

Swamp Sparrow and Common Yellowthroated Warbler numbered in the dozens at the Marsh Walk. Marsh Wren was not detected that day. Just as we were leaving three Black Terns wheeled and chirped playfully overhead.

A persistent drizzle didn't stop us. We continued to search other parts of the park, rewarded with a Tennessee Warbler and Cape May Warbler, both singing and foraging at eye level!

As our 24 hours ended at 5:45pm we had found 114 different species.

Besides raising money for bird conservation and migration monitoring, and for the Richmond Hill Naturalists, why do we do it? For me it's partly the awe I feel every year as I realize anew the heroic journey each of these tiny migrants has made to reach our shores; partly the wonder at the diversity and beauty of these little heroes, and partly the joy of the hunt. Can't wait til next spring!

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## Ontario Votes October 6: Questions For Provincial Candidates



As an MPP will you support the plan for naturalizing and flood-proofing the mouth of the Don River proposed by Waterfront Toronto?

As an MPP will you actively support policies that increase the percentage of renewable energy flowing to Ontario's energy grid?

As an MPP will you support the renewed funding of the Oak Ridges Moraine Foundation allowing it to continue to support efforts to protect the headwaters of the Don and Humber rivers?

Municipalities such as Toronto are the level of government that most directly affect the way citizens live. As an MPP will you support and expand efforts to upload costs such as welfare and court security from the municipalities back to the province?

As an MPP will you support efforts to reform the Ontario Municipal Board so that it works to support Ontario communities rather than the development industry?

For more information on When and Where to vote, please visit Elections Canada website:  
<http://wemakevotingeasy.ca/>



### Ontario Election 2011

### Where do the parties stand?

clean air clean water climate change energy transit and traffic great lakes healthy food endangered species far north nuclear greenbelt

While considering these questions, you can also check out Green Prosperity, a joint effort by 21 of Ontario's leading environmental organizations that includes Ontario Nature. These groups closely examined the

platforms of the four major provincial parties to see where they stand on the most important environmental issues facing this province. They also interviewed key players from each of the parties (the Provincial Conservatives chose not to respond) to look more closely at their answers to Green Prosperity election survey. For anyone who cares about clean air, clean water, a safe climate, healthy wild places and species, check out the video interviews and survey responses at [www.GreenProsperity.ca](http://www.GreenProsperity.ca) before you head to the ballot box on Oct. 6th.

## September Corn Roast:



The weather cooperated beautifully once again at the annual September RHN Corn Roast. Thanks once again to Russ Tilt for hosting the RHN in his beautiful backyard "park" (Not to be confused with the other Russell Tilt Park named in his honour).

*Photos by Mike Turk*



# Faces of Nature



Can you spot the Mossy Green Rock Man? Bruce Trail near Owen Sound. Photos by Rod Potter



Turtle sunning on driftwood. Algonquin Park, Ontario.



Driftwood Turtle in the sun. Cranberry Marsh, Lake Ontario



Black-Crowned Night Heron -- not happy to have been spotted, Don River, Toronto



Curious squirrel is looking at chew. Richmond Hill.

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