



# THE BULLETIN

NEWS AND VIEWS FROM THE RICHMOND HILL NATURALISTS

February 2012 — No. 502

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE...

Potato-eating Ducks:  
Northern Pin-tailed  
and Long-Tailed  
Ducks discussed



Botany Group  
Meditations



Great Back Yard Bird  
Count THIS  
WEEKEND Feb 17-20



Hey, the place was full of birds a few minutes ago! A young Cooper's Hawk waits for breakfast on Theo Hofmann's back-yard birdfeeder this week (you can't see the feeder in this photo, but it's on the other end of the stick on which the hawk is perched). The yellow eye indicates an immature Cooper's.

## Send us your Signs of Spring!

It may seem like winter is just getting started this year but signs of spring are already all around. You may have noticed Red-Tailed Hawks pairing up in the last couple of weeks. Usually solitary -- but very commonly seen along Ontario 400-series highways -- these large hawks have been seen in cuddly couples nestled close together on branches and even sitting on nests in trees high above the ground in the past week.

Send us your signs of spring for the March edition of the Bulletin.





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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.

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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.

Change of Address: Any change of email or street address should be sent to Mike Turk who prints the envelopes for the Bulletin mailing.

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**Make OBSERVING the HOLIDAY Season BETTER With a DONATION To YOUR Community**

**Support The Richmond Hill Naturalists Annual Fundraising & Membership Drive**

As the holiday season & year end comes closer, please consider making a charitable donation to support our continued good works in Richmond Hill - including the protection & preservation of the Dunlap Observatory Parklands. Donations of \$50 or more will receive an Official Income Tax Receipt.

To receive your tax receipt, please make your donation payable to our fundraising partner, The Escarpment Biosphere Foundation & mail to: Richmond Hill Naturalists, P. O. Box 32217, Harding Postal Outlet, Richmond Hill, Ontario L4C 9S3.

You can also purchase single (\$30) or a family membership (\$35) in the Naturalists Club for the 2011-12 season, which make great gifts for community friends & family.

**DONORS OF \$100 OR MORE will receive a 2012 heritage calendar of The David Dunlap Observatory Parklands**

**2012 Calendar Heritage Facts & Photos**

## 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, February 16, 7:30pm - General Meeting. Topic: Botswana! with club members Kevin Shackleton and Mike Turk who recently returned from a trip to Africa.



### Bird Group Meetings

March 14, 2012: Host: Muriel Farrant. Birds: Whippoorwill and Common Nighthawk



April 11, 2012: Host: Joandice Marshall. Birds: Connecticut Warbler and Mourning Warbler

For more information about the Bird Group contact Mike Turk at [turkm@accessv.com](mailto:turkm@accessv.com)



### Botany Group Meeting

March 5, 2012: 12:30pm. Host: Charles Bishop



### Astronomy

Friday night observations continue weather permitting. Contact [astronomy@rhnaturalists.ca](mailto:astronomy@rhnaturalists.ca) 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.



### Membership



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.

# Northern Pintail and Long-Tailed Duck

by Gene Denzel

The RH Naturalists Bird Group met on the evening of 8 Feb at the home of Joe and Berte Agg. Present were Joe, Mike Turk, Tony and Joandice Marshall, Muriell Farrant, Barbara Jackson, Theo Hofmann and Gene Denzel. The birds of the evening were Northern Pintail and Long-tailed Duck. After enjoying some delicious tidbits provided by Berte, we settled down to review these two species.

## Potato-eating Duck?

Both of these birds are circumpolar breeders which can be seen at some times of the year in the GTA, but they are quite different in the details of their lives. The Northern Pintail is almost too perfect in its plumage, inviting terms such as 'elegant' for the male's appearance in breeding season. Its long, graceful neck is adorned with a neat white vertical stripe, and its dark bill with a perfect blue-green stripe on the side. (The accompanying photo of a male is from Humber Bay East this past January--- possibly a very early migrant!) Their numbers seem globally to be stable and large, and they are one of the top targets of hunters in the Fall. The pintails breed extensively in the prairie potholes, locally in Ontario and Quebec in small numbers, down through California and parts of Arizona, and in parts of NY. They winter further South, as far as the top of S America, and they have been found in Hawaii, Africa, Southern Europe and Asia.

Preferred breeding sites are shallow wetlands, tundra, and generally unforested areas. In Winter they typically go for wetlands again, but also grain fields and coastal marshes. They are dabblers (usually feeding from the surface rather than



diving), and on land. They eat vegetative parts of water plants, aquatic invertebrates, amphibians and small fish, but also grain seeds and tubers (even potatoes!). In Ontario they are most often seen in migration, although the Atlas shows some breeding sites in the far North and also in small numbers locally in suitable habitat in Southern parts.

The Pintails are very nervous ducks, and tend to flush easily, often the first to rise from mixed flocks when approached. A flight going by is almost unmistakable for the long graceful necks and long tails, stretched out as they fly. They are not very vocal except at breeding time, when the male has a beautiful soft trill, and the female a soft mallard-like quack.

Incessant Comical Chant  
The Long-tailed Duck (often referred to in NA as the 'Oldsquaw' for its calls), is another beautifully plumaged duck, with drastically different plumage in Winter and for breeding (attached photo shows typical male plumage in Winter). The official name derives obviously from the males' long, whip-like tails (actually upper tail coverts), which are often carried

upright. The species is numerous world-wide, and also a frequent target of hunters (although their flesh is described as 'oily and rank'!) They breed across the sub-Arctic, in Ontario only on the shores of Hudson's Bay. In NA they winter down both coasts, and extensively in the Great Lakes, usually in large flocks. In late Winter they are extremely vocal, and a trip to the Lake Ontario shoreline will usually let one hear their incessant somewhat comical chant. They are diving ducks, among the deepest at over 65m, staying down for up to 1.5min. In contrast to some of the ducks wintering on Lake Ontario, they have done so throughout history. They dine here on mostly molluscs, and in general on crustaceans, marine invertebrates, worms, fish, insects, and a little plant material such as tundra plants and their fruit. In flight they are strong, but their landings resemble crashes, even more than most diving ducks.

The evening concluded with some informal quiz questions, and a reminder to suggest pairs of birds for next year's sessions. The next meeting of the group will be at Muriel Farrant's, on 14 March.

# Meditation on Botany Greats

by Ted Hampton

The Botany Group met on February 6 at the home of Siglint Fitting. After delightful refreshments, Siglint shared with us some photographs from her recent travels.

Members once again spoke of their favourite flowers, including Birdfoot Trefoil, One-Flowered Cancer Root, Sheep Laurel, Hawkweed, Marsh Marigold (Cowslip).



*Roger Tory Peterson at work.*

We learned something of the lives of men responsible for the field guides we often use for identifying plants and flowers: Roger Tory Peterson (1908 to 1996) and Lawrence Newcomb, for whom is named a botanical library in Massachusetts. Both authors were influenced by the pioneering work of Asa Gray (1810 to 1888) and his "Flora of North America". Gray created the Botany department at Harvard University and was head of the department for 31 years.

In "A Field Guide to Wildflowers", (the introduction) Peterson says 'we ran into a snag on the illustrations: the artist we had chosen begged off; her publisher would not

release her from another project. So, in an unguarded moment, I said, "Well, then I will do the drawings." Since then I have made well over 1500 drawings of flowers. I covered thousands of miles, trying to catch the brief period of bloom of various species. In the case of rare species, which ought not to be picked, I often drew them lying flat on the ground'. We shall remember the author's efforts the next time we try to identify an orchid or daisy!

The next Botany Meeting is to be on March 5 at 12:30 at the home of Charles Bishop, 117 Citation Drive, Toronto - Telephone 416-222-2916

## Ontario Nature 2011 Conservation Awards

*Submitted by Lauren Wright, Ontario Nature*

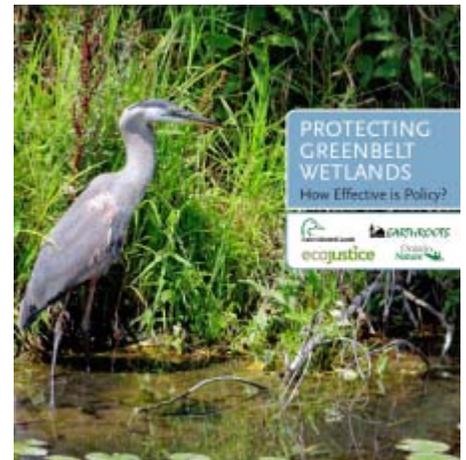


The Ontario Nature Conservation Awards recognize excellence by honouring individuals, groups, government agencies, and corporations who have worked to protect nature in Ontario. If you know of someone you'd like to nominate for their tireless work on behalf of the province's nature, please go to [www.ontarionature.org/awards](http://www.ontarionature.org/awards) to download an official nomination form. The deadline

for nominations for the 2011 round of Conservation Awards is March 30, 2012. All recipients will be honoured at Ontario Nature's Annual General Meeting on June 9, 2012.

## Greenbelt Wetlands Report Now Available

*Submitted by Lisa Richardson, Ontario Nature*



The collaborative report, "Protecting Greenbelt Wetlands: How Effective is Policy?" is now available on the Ontario Nature website. Written in partnership with Ecojustice, Ducks Unlimited Canada and Earthroots, it examines the strengths and weaknesses of the 3 provincial land-use plans in effect across the Greenbelt - the Niagara Escarpment Plan, the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan and the Greenbelt Plan - and their intersection with other laws and policies that affect wetland protection. To download a copy of the report, visit [www.ontarionature.org/discover/resources/publications.php](http://www.ontarionature.org/discover/resources/publications.php).

# Great BackYard Bird Count - February 17-20

from Bird Studies Canada

Warmer temperatures and lack of snow in parts of North America are setting the stage for what could be a most intriguing 15th annual Great Backyard Bird Count, coming up February 17-20.

Bird watchers across the U.S. and Canada are getting ready to tally millions of birds in the annual count coordinated by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Audubon, and Canadian partner Bird Studies Canada.

Will more robins be seen farther north this year? Will some birds, such as Eastern Phoebes, begin their migrations earlier?

"This count is so much fun because anyone can take part--we all learn and watch birds together--whether you are an expert, novice, or feeder watcher," said Gary Langham, Audubon's Chief Scientist. "I like to invite new birders to join me and share the experience. Get involved, invite your friends, and see how your favorite spot stacks up."

Commit 15 minutes of your time

Participants count birds at any location they wish for at least 15 minutes on one or more days of the count, then enter their tallies at [www.birdcount.org](http://www.birdcount.org). Anyone can participate in the free event, and no registration is required.

Last year, participants submitted more than 92,000 checklists with more than 11 million bird observations. These data capture a picture of how bird populations are changing across the continent year after year--a feat that would be impossible without the help of tens of thousands of participants.

"This is a very detailed snapshot of continental bird distribution,"

said John Fitzpatrick, director of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. "Imagine scientists 250 years from now being able to compare these data with their own. Already, with more than a decade of data in hand, the GBBC has documented changes in late-winter bird distributions."



To learn more about how to join the count, get bird ID tips, downloadable instructions, a how-to video, past results, and more visit [www.birdcount.org](http://www.birdcount.org). The count also includes a photo contest and a prize drawing for participants who enter at least one bird checklist online.

The Great Backyard Bird Count is made possible in part by sponsor Wild Birds Unlimited.

## Ontario Nature News

Birds and Buildings Campaign: Decision on Lawsuit Expected in November

Submitted by Lisa Richardson, Ontario Nature Lawyers for Ontario Nature and Ecojustice have wrapped up their arguments in the landmark lawsuit against Menkes Developments. The lawsuit, the first of its kind in North America, contends that mirrored windows on buildings such as the Menkes-

managed Consillium Place in Toronto have turned them into deadly obstacles for migratory birds. The birds get confused, and fly toward the reflections of blue skies and trees in the windows. A decision on the lawsuit is expected in November.

## Rouge Park Bioblitz Date Changed

Submitted by Sarah Hedges & Lisa Richardson, Ontario Nature

The Rouge Park Bioblitz has been rescheduled for June 15 & 16. In celebration of International Biodiversity Day, the event will feature a traditional 24-hour bioblitz in Rouge Park beginning on Friday June 15, as well as a child and family-focused bioblitz at the Toronto Zoo on Saturday June 16. We are still seeking species experts for this fun and informative event, so if you have a sound knowledge of local wildlife or flora, please contact Lisa Richardson at [lisar@ontarionature.org](mailto:lisar@ontarionature.org) or 416-444-8419 ext. 222.

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