



# THE BULLETIN

NEWS AND VIEWS FROM THE RICHMOND HILL NATURALISTS

September 2012 — No. 505

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Welcome back! It's been a busy summer for the Richmond Hill Naturalists. Joe Agg has continued his weekly cleanup days around natural areas in Richmond Hill, helping to make our town more beautiful, our natural areas safer for the creatures, and providing valuable volunteer service hours for our youngsters. Marianne Yake has been doing the even dirtier work of fighting for the natural lands we have left at the OMB. Others have been working for nature or just enjoying it in myriad ways. So welcome back, and please drop us a line to tell us what YOU'VE been doing.

We are very grateful to Bruce Brydon for providing a Bird Sightings Report to the Bulletin, a feature which has been in hiatus for a few years. Thanks Bruce! Be sure to send your bird

sightings from the Peel and York Region areas to Bruce via [rhnatsightings@hotmail.com](mailto:rhnatsightings@hotmail.com). As you'll see inside, an impressive array of birds have been seen in York Region this past season, from Glossy Ibis to Golden-Winged Warbler. Many exciting reports come from Reesor Pond, on Reesor Road and the 407; as well as the Kortright Centre and the Holland Landing Sewage Lagoon (birders and their sewage lagoons!)...but this might just be because birders go to those places to look. We're pretty interested in what you're seeing in the places you're looking, even if it's just your back yard or the grocery store parking lot.

And we'd like to introduce the new fun fundraising event - a Theatre night courtesy of The Curtain Club. See inside for more details.



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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

905-770-4586  
 Mailing Address: 128 Pugsley  
 Av, Richmond Hill, ON

Mailing Database: Mike Turk

Distribution: Athena Antiochos

Visit our Website at  
<http://www.rhnaturalists.ca>

See the Executive List for additional contact information.

## 2011 / 2012 RHN Executive

President.....	Marianne Yake (president@rhnaturalists.ca .....905-883-3047)
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Field Trips.....	Joe Agg (trips@rhnaturalists.ca)
Environment.....	Position Available
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Bulletin Editor.....	Denise Potter (editor@rhnaturalists.ca)
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Events.....	Position Available
Ontario Nature Rep.....	Marianne Yake
Website Admin.....	Rod Potter (webmaster@rhnaturalists.ca)
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### Please support the 2012 Baillie Birdathon

Forgot to pledge over the summer? It's not too late to help fund conservation, migration research and other projects by donating to the Baillie Birdathon. Two Richmond Hill Naturalist club teams were among more than 7,000 North American participants attempting to find as many bird species as possible in a 24-hour period in May. The money raised benefits Bird Studies Canada, the James L. Baillie Memorial Fund, and participating Migration Monitoring Stations and Conservation Organizations. 25% of your tax-deductible pledge to the Hill Hikers (Rod and Denise Potter) or The Sloths (Theo Hofmann) will go to the Richmond Hill Naturalists. See Theo's account of his Birdathon inside!

It's easy to pledge online. Just follow the pledge links here:

<http://www.rhnaturalists.ca/2012/04/baillie-birdathon/>



### 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; 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 [RHNaturalists.ca](http://RHNaturalists.ca).



September 20, 7:30 pm: Welcome Back! Club members discuss their interests: Hiking the Moraine Update from Diane Piche; Lake Wilcox Update from Jim and Sharon Bradley; Birds of Texas with Gene Denzel,



### Bird Group Meetings 2012-2013

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

October 10, - Brewer's & Rusty Blackbirds - hosted by Charlene Denzel



November 14, - Canvas Backed and Red-Headed Ducks - hosted by Barbara Jackson

January 9, - Black-Backed and Three-Toed Woodpeckers - hosted by Martin Chen

February 13, - Barn Owl and Burrowing Owl - hosted by Mike Turk

March 13, - LeConte's and Henslow's Sparrows - hosted by Joandice Marshall

April 10 - American Redstart and Eastern Towhee - hosted by Joe Agg

Botany Group Meetings - To Be Determined

### 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.

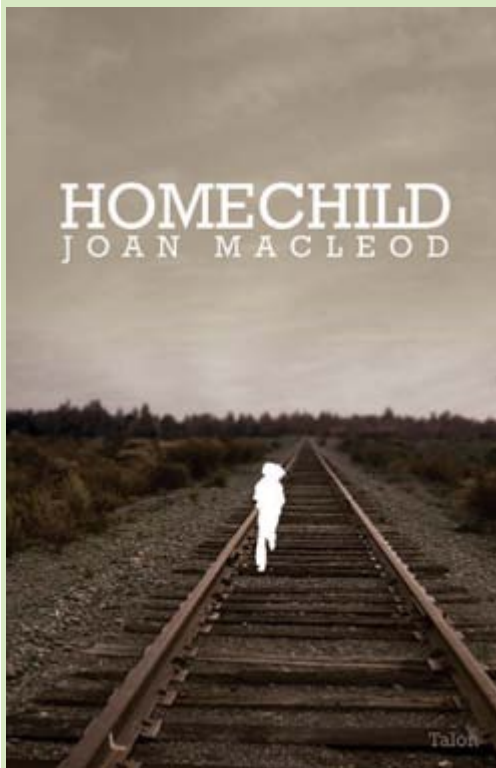


### Remembering Art Briggs-Jude

*from Muriel Farrant*

Many long-time members of the Richmond Hill Naturalists will fondly remember Art and Wendy Briggs-Jude, who many years ago bought a huge old farm near Westport and named it "Bluebird Acres". Sadly Art died on July 13, 2012. For many years Art gave tours of their beautiful property which were particularly interesting due to his remarkable sense of humour and vast knowledge of natural history, which he unreservedly shared with anyone who was interested. Despite being confined to a wheelchair for several years, he continued his tours, was still gardening, writing many newspaper columns, and keeping active in the community. He will be sadly missed by all who knew him. Condolences to Wendy and their families.





## Naturalist Club Night at the Curtain Club

On March 19, 2013, come and participate in the life of Alistair MacEachern, a crotchety, funny and fearless farmer. Award-winning Canadian playwright Joan MacLeod's play Homechild unearths the travesty of the 100,000 Home Children sent to Canada from Britain. This Curtain Club Charity Night play is about family bonds, lineage and the endurance of love. All proceeds from the sale of tickets for this event go to The Richmond Hill Naturalists.

THE PLAY: Homechild by Joan MacLeod

DATE: March 19, 2013

TIME: 8:00 p.m. (Doors open at 7:15 for socializing)

PLACE: The Curtain Club, 400 Newkirk Road, Richmond Hill

TICKET PRICE: \$15.00

For more information and tickets contact:

Athena Antiochos: 905 669-1825 (or) athena07@sympatico.ca

## Botany Group explores "Animal" Kingdom

Reported by Ted Hampton

The Botany Group met on April 16, at the home of Muriel Farrant. Seven members were present and, after delicious treats, we reported on favourite or special plants of our own choice.

The species discussed were Bloodroot, Indian Pipe, Maidenhair Fern (Northern and Southern – quite different), and in a rare venture into the "animal" kingdom, Cattails and Pussy Willows and Trout Lily (often called, incorrectly, Dog Tooth Violet or Adder's Tongue). An additional point of interest – we learned that both Trout Lily and Cattails are edible.

*A change in the weather is sufficient to  
recreate the world and ourselves.*

Marcel Proust

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# Transit of Venus

*Photos by Tuba Koktay*

Like so many days this summer, the June 5th sky was bright and blue -- just perfect for watching Venus pass in front of the sun. The Richmond Hill Naturalists' AstroNats group made sure everyone could safely watch the rare astronomical event and understand what was really happening.

Two telescopes were available, courtesy of Toomas Karmo and Karen Cilevitz. Karen's scope is equipped with a solar filter allowing people to look through the scope to see the orangish sun with Venus appearing as a small black spot. Victoria Shelton provided a binocular projection.

Amateur astronomer Ken Baine brought some diaramas to explain how the Transit of Venus event occurs.



16th Ave Public School students model their stylish Solar Viewing glasses, provided by Ian Shelton and Tuba Koktay. Put those snazzy glasses away carefully for your great-great grandchildren, kids! The next transits of Venus will be December 10–11, 2117, and in December 2125.



Toomas Karmo uses a petri dish to project a nice white sun with Venus appearing as a small black dot.





## Bird Sightings - Summer 2012

compiled by Bruce Brydon

The Richmond Hill Naturalists are delighted to introduce this new regular feature to Bulletin readers. Please report bird sightings from York Region and Peel to Bruce Brydon by email to [rhnatsightings@hotmail.com](mailto:rhnatsightings@hotmail.com)

### York Region

Mute Swan – 2 at Richmond Hill Hospital Woods July 1 (RBHS, WP)

American Wigeon – 1 at Holland Landing Sewage Lagoons July 2 (KRS)

Green-winged Teal – 1+ at Holland Landing Sewage Lagoons July 2 (KRS)

Hooded Merganser – 1 at Holland Landing Sewage Lagoons August 12 (RBHS, BB)

Great Egret – 1 at Reesor Pond July 22 (RBHS, WP)

Cattle Egret – 1 at Ravenshoe and Lake Dr. June 5 & 12 (MP, KRS)

Glossy Ibis – 1 at Ravenshoe west of Warden Ave. May 31 (IC)

Cooper's Hawk – 3 (1 adult, 2 juvenile) at Thornhill Ave. late July – early August (GD)

Red-shouldered Hawk – 1 at Happy Valley Forest June 23 (OFO outing)

Broad-winged Hawk – 1 at Bathurst and Green Lane August 15 (BB)

Merlin – 4 (M, F and two young) at Ontario and Main St. (Newmarket) July (anon. fide KRS)

1 at Holland Landing Sewage Lagoons August 11 & 12 (RBHS, RJF, BB)

Sandhill Crane – 2 at Boag west of Leslie St. May 17 & May 19 (BB)

Black-bellied Plover – 2 at Reesor Pond May 23 (SLo)

Semipalmated Plover – 2 at Boag west of Leslie St. August 12 (BB)

Piping Plover – 1 at Reesor Pond May 22 (SLo, C&GD, BB), 1 at Reesor Pond May 23 (WP)

Solitary Sandpiper – 1 at Holland Landing Sewage Lagoons August 10 (KRS)

Greater Yellowlegs – 3 at Holland Landing Sewage Lagoons August 10 (KRS)

Lesser Yellowlegs – 20 at Holland Landing Sewage Lagoons August 10 (KRS)

Marbled Godwit – 1 at Reesor Pond May 15 (SLo, KRS)

Semipalmated Sandpiper – 5 at Holland Landing Sewage Lagoons August 10 (KRS)

Least Sandpiper – 1+ at Holland Landing Sewage Lagoons August 10 (KRS)

White-rumped Sandpiper – 2 at Reesor Pond June 3 (SLo)

Pectoral Sandpiper – 2 at Holland Landing Sewage Lagoons August 10 (KRS)

Stilt Sandpiper – 1 at Reesor Pond July 15 (RBHS)

Short-billed Dowitcher – 4 at Reesor Pond May 13 (SLo)

Wilson's Phalarope – 1 at Reesor Pond May 27 (RBHS), 1 at Holland Landing Sewage Lagoons August 10 (KRS)

Bonaparte's Gull – 200 at Holland Landing Sewage Lagoons August 4 (KRS)

Common Nighthawk - 1+ at Glen Shields and Dufferin August 23 (IC) and 1 at Rumble & Lucas Sep 6 (D&RP)

## Vultures hunt in Richmond Hill back yard

A Richmond Hill resident was surprised this summer when a pair of Turkey Vultures actively hunted for squirrel in his back yard (standard, modern, small yard, backing on to a ravine).

Bob King told us: "I got this picture just before he (the vulture) dove onto the ground, then flew away. I couldn't see the hit but it was a tight squeeze for the bird. There was a lot of the sound of wings hitting tree branches as he got out of there. These guys were not meant for flying in limited airspace." The turkey vulture's wingspan is 160-183 cm (5-6 feet).

Two squirrels had been foraging there moments earlier. The next day the Kings found a "fresh" squirrel skull in the yard.



A turkey vulture photographed just before attacking a squirrel in a Richmond Hill back yard this summer. Photo by Bob King, July 19 2012

- Olive-sided Flycatcher – 1 at Bathurst north of Morning Sdrd. August 23 (BB)
- Yellow-bellied Flycatcher – 1 at Bathurst north of Morning Sdrd. August 23 (BB)
- Acadian Flycatcher – 2 at Happy Valley Forest May 25 (BB) and June 10 (D&RP)
- Common Raven – 1 at Richmond Hill May 14 (FP)
- Cliff Swallow – 2 at Reesor Pond July 22 (RBHS, WP)
- Carolina Wren – 1 at Lake Dr. west of Sibbald Point August 22 (RJF)
- Winter Wren – 1 at Happy Valley Forest June 23 (OFO outing) and June 10 (D&RP)
- Marsh Wren – 1 at Tom Taylor Trail at Mulock Dr. (Newmarket) May 21 (KRS)
- Northern Mockingbird – 2 (nest & young) at Trisan Centre (Schomberg) May 26 (RBHS, WP), 1 at Major Mackenzie and Hwy. 27 May 2 (JLo)
- Snow Bunting – 3 at Ravenshoe east of Leslie St. April 21 (JW)
- Golden-winged Warbler – 1 at Bathurst north of Morning Sdrd. August 1 (BB)
- Blue-winged Warbler – 1 at Bathurst north of Morning Sdrd. May 20 (BB)
- Hooded Warbler – 2 at Happy Valley Forest May 31 (DW), 1 at Happy Valley Forest June 23 (OFO outing)
- Cape May Warbler – 1 at Cawthra Mulock May 7 (BB)
- Northern Parula – 2 at Bathurst north of Morning Sdrd. May 5 (JW), 1 at the Fleming residence May 9 (RJF)
- Blackburnian Warbler – 1 at Bathurst north of Morning Sdrd. August 23 (BB)
- Black-throated Green Warbler – 1 at Bathurst north of Morning Sdrd. August 23 (BB)
- Wilson's Warbler – 1 at Bathurst north of Morning Sdrd. August 23 (BB)
- Spotted Towhee – 1 at Kortright CA May 20 (LF)
- Eastern Towhee – 2 at Cawthra Mulock May 1 (KRS)
- Clay-colored Sparrow – 2 at Cawthra Mulock May 7 (BB)
- Field Sparrow – 1 singing in Hydro corridor on Longbridge Ave spring and summer (GD)
- Grasshopper Sparrow – 12 at Bendor & Graves (YRF) July 16 (BB)
- Dark-eyed Junco – 1 at the Shackleton residence April 24 (KRS)
- Scarlet Tanager – 1 at Happy Valley Forest June 23 (OFO outing); and June 10 (D&RP)
- Rose-breasted Grosbeak – 1 at the Hofmann residence June 20 (TH), 2 broods at the Denzel residence July (GD)
- Orchard Oriole – 1 at Milne Dam Conservation Park May 22 (BKM)
- Peel Region
- Pied-billed Grebe – 1 family at Palgrave CA area June 23 (OFO outing)
- Green Heron – 1 at Palgrave CA area June 23 (OFO outing)
- Black-crowned Night Heron – 1 at Gore Rd. rail trail July 22 (anon. fide PG)
- Yellow-billed Cuckoo – 1 at the Graydon residence July 27 (PG)
- Black-billed Cuckoo – 1 at the Graydon residence July 26 (PG)
- Belted Kingfisher – 2 at Castlederg and Humber River all July (PG)
- Pileated Woodpecker – 3 (M, F, and fledgling) at the Graydon residence all July (PG)
- Red-breasted Nuthatch – 1 at Palgrave CA June 23 (OFO outing)
- Winter Wren – 1 at the Graydon residence July 26 & 27 (PG)
- Golden-crowned Kinglet – 1 at Palgrave CA June 23 (OFO outing)
- Northern Waterthrush – 1 at Palgrave CA area June 23 (OFO outing)
- Blackburnian Warbler – 1 at Palgrave CA June 23 (OFO outing)
- Pine Warbler – 1 at Palgrave CA June 23 (OFO outing)
- Yellow-rumped Warbler – 1 at Palgrave CA June 23 (OFO outing)
- Grasshopper Sparrow – 1 at Palgrave CA area June 23 (OFO outing)
- Bobolink – 1+ at Palgrave CA area June 23 (OFO outing)
- Purple Finch – 1 at the Milsom residence June 6 (DM)
- Observers
- BB Bruce Brydon, BKM Barry Kent MacKay, C&GD Charlene and Gene Denzel, D&RP Denise and Rod Potter, DM Dave Milsom, DW Dave Worthington, FP Frank Pinilla, GD Gene Denzel, IC Ian Cannell, JLo Joan Love, JW John Watson, KRS Kevin Shackleton, LF Lev Frid, MP Michele Potter, OFO Ontario Field Ornithologists, PG Phyllis Graydon, RBHS Roy B. H. Smith, RJF Ron Fleming, SLo Stan Long, TH Theo Hofmann, WP Winnie Poon.
- Notes: 1+ is used where the quantity was not specified but more than one of the species were seen. Your York and northern Peel Region sightings are welcome. Send them to [rhnatsightings@hotmail.com](mailto:rhnatsightings@hotmail.com)*

# Few Shorebirds but some nice surprises on Theo's Birdathon

by Theo Hofmann

I did an 'old man's birdathon' this year with my daughter-in-law, Alcina de Oliveira. Though not a birder, Alcina was not only very helpful in driving me around, but more importantly she was excellent at spotting birds.

Unfortunately we were late to catch the significant number of migrant ducks and especially the migrant shorebirds and we were not fully aware of this, so we spent a lot of time in their habitats. I had birded Vancouver Island several times, but always in Fall, Winter or early Spring. I recalled rich birding on the numerous lagoons and on the rocky points and in the bays along the south-eastern coast off Victoria, so we decided to begin with Esquimault, one of the major lagoons. It was very active with dozens of \*Great Blue Herons\* and hundreds of \*Glaucous-winged Gulls\*. Luckily there was one \*Herring Gull\* among them, the only one we observed during the whole eleven hours. Several \*Caspian Terns\* gave me a new species for British Columbia. A group of the resident \*Black Oystercatchers\* was a nice sight and a single \*Trumpeter Swan\* was a surprise. \*Mute Swans, Mallards, Canada Geese and several common passerines, incl. four species of sparrows, made up our count at this lagoon.

At Witty's Lagoon \*Homo sapiens\* dominated. All the same we had four \*Common Mergansers\*, and a few \*White-winged Scoters\* and \*Western Grebes\* out in the ocean. A \*Bald Eagle\* flew over. At nearby Witty's Beach, we observed a very active \*Belted Kingfisher\* and a pair of \*Gadwall\*, and the ubiquitous \*North-western Crow\*. Next at



River Otter seen at Cattle Point, Vancouver Island, above and Allan's Hummingbird, below. Photos by Theo Hofmann, May 2012

Victoria's Swan Lake Sanctuary we were greeted with a \*Black-headed Grosbeak\*, a \*Pacific-slope Flycatcher\* and \*Chestnut-backed Chickadee\*. Various species of swallows were active over the lake. The feeders were visited by numerous Oriole and many hummingbirds, predominantly \*Rufous Hummingbirds\*. The best surprise was a \*Costa's Hummingbird\*.

The next morning we started on Mount Tolmie where we picked up a flock of \*Pine Siskin\*, \*Bullock's Oriole\*, \*Pacific and Bewick's Wrens\* and finches. A \*Turkey Vulture\*, a \*Red-tailed Hawk\* and a \*Cooper's Hawk\* flew over. We then drove to Victoria University (UVic) where we saw two \*Ospreys\* on their nest on top of one of the illumination towers on the sports fields.

Then it was time to look for some late migrating shorebirds in the bays and on the points of the south-eastern shore of Victoria. We drove along the Shore Road, stopped at Margaret Bay, where we saw a pair of resident \*Harlequin Ducks\* and got a glimpse of a pair of \*Common Goldeneye\*. Alcina picked up two decorative pieces of driftwood for

her garden.

On Cattle Point, however a \*River Otter\* surprised us and gave a spectacular display in and out of the water. Out in the ocean we picked up four resident \*Surf Scoters\* and had a \*Pelagic Cormorant\* fly by.

The big surprise came at Clover Point: a \*WHIMBREL\*, a nonresident and for Victoria unusual shorebird. This put the cherry on the cake and gave us our 66th and last species. The two glorious clear half-days had given us great pleasure. The two species which were firsts for me for British Columbia, the Caspian Tern and the Costa's Hummingbird brought my total BC list to 289.

