



The Woodland Observer

Enjoy Nature!

Nipissing Naturalists Club

June 2009

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Mashkinonje Spring Hike May 3rd, 2009

By Angela Martin

In a spring with rain and winds, our hike was filled with sunshine and a breeze to keep us comfortable. Twenty four people (8 Nipissing Naturalists) hiked to the new lookout tower over the Loudon Peatland in the Mashkinonje Provincial Park. Our groups ended up splitting in two: one group went directly to the tower and the other group stopped along the way. Peter Beckett and Fred Pinto, in the latter group, shared their knowledge and we learn about all sorts of things from lichens to the Five Lives of Trees.



Peatland Outlook Tower
Photo by Gary Martin



Annual Picnic and Hike- Sturgeon River House Museum

Sunday, August 23rd at 1:00 pm

Come and enjoy a wonderful afternoon for our annual summer picnic. We can have our potluck dinner in the fort beside the Sturgeon River and hike their trail. Bring a dish to share with other members, your own refreshments, plate and utensils.

Meet at the North Bay Information Center at 12:30 pm for carpooling.

For more information, please call Angela at 594-2745.

Along the hike, we heard or saw Yellow-rumped , Nashville and Black-throated Green Warblers, Gray Catbird, Black-capped Chickadees, Song and White-throated Sparrows, Northern Flicker, Mallard, American Kestrel, Common Raven, Broad-winged Hawk, Great Blue Heron, Sandhill Crane and Painted Turtles.

The highlight of the trip was the new tower. The tower was architecturally designed by Ontario Parks and engineer approved. The raw materials were provided by a grant from the Shell Environmental Fund, Ontario Parks and the Friends of Mashkinonje. The tower is sturdy and well built, thanks to Harley Lang's skills. The platform is 20 feet above the rock and the view is phenomenal. One can see the lag, marsh, fen, bog and all the way to the Great Blue Heron rookery at the Loudon Peatland outlet. This area is classified as a provincially significant wetland.

The tower will be present for people to enjoy for many years to come. When you feel like visiting a beautiful wetland and not get your feet wet, come to Mashkinonje. Although Mashkinonje is a provincial park, it is not operational and has no fees. By the way, Bonnie Brownstein and Fred Pinto can be seen on the tower. Enjoy!

Wildflower Walk, May 24, 2009

By Karen Major

Bonnie Brownstein joined Karen and Chris Major for Karen's annual wildflower walk at her home in Bonfield. The day was absolutely gorgeous with a slight wind that kept most of the bugs away, although bug jackets were needed.

We saw a wide variety of plants in various stages of growth. The Fly Honeysuckle and Gooseberry had finished blooming and the Trailing Arbutus was almost done. Blooming were the Dwarf Raspberry, Kidney-Leaf Buttercup, Carolina Spring Beauty, Red Trillium, Painted Trillium, White Grained Mountain Rice Grass, Star Flower, Hairy Wood Rush, Goldthread & Skunk Currant. Budding were the Mayflowers, Hawthorn, Bush Honeysuckle, Bunchberry, Indian Cucumber Root, Sarsaparilla, False Solomon's Seal, Rose Twisted Stalk, White Water Lily, Long-Stalked Sedge and Bur-Reed. Tall Meadow Rue and Clintonia could be seen growing.

Down at the beaver pond the Painted Turtles were sunning themselves on rocks and logs while large tadpoles and minnows were swimming around. What could possibly have been a Spotted



*Dragonfly drying wings on blade of grass
Photo by Karen Major*

Sandpiper was seen fishing while dragonflies were just emerging from the nymph stage to dry their wings on blades of grass near the shore of the pond. At the far end of the pond, as we rounded the corner, we walked up on Mr. and Mrs. Canada Goose with the fluffy yellow goslings out for a walk and a little green coloured frog peeked out of the water at us.

From the beaver pond we walked up to the Vernal Pool where we were serenaded by the wood frogs while their tadpoles swam around and the empty egg sacks floated near the pool's edge. A Hairy Woodpecker was pecking out a beat while another one was answering. An Oven Bird made an appearance and then flew off to sing from another tree.

Walking back we had a Woodcock run from us but not before we got a good look at it. We also saw an American Toad, Canadian Tiger Swallowtail Butterfly and a Mourning Cloak Butterfly.

All-in-all it was a great walk with lots seen and heard (and no bug bites!!!)

General Meeting Notes - Tuesday, May 12 2009

By Jeremy St. Onge

Unfortunately our scheduled speaker, Colin Jones, was unable to speak to us about dragonflies and damselflies. We hope to have him reschedule for a fall presentation. Stay tuned!

Luckily, the Nipissing Naturalists have no shortage of talent and experience to draw on in times of need! Angela Martin introduced the group to the Sharp-Tailed Grouse (*Tympanuchus phasianellus phasianellus*) and Fred Pinto guided us through a wonderful slideshow about this interesting species.

The presentation was based on a trip to Manitoulin Island on April 27th of 2008 which the Pinto's and the Martin's had undertaken. There is a piece of private property where one may view these grouse performing their mating rituals at a lek. A lek is a gathering place of males for the purpose of competitive mating rituals. In this particular circumstance, human observers in willow and burlap blinds are able to

view groups of between 20 and 40 male sharp-tailed grouse competing for centre stage by engaging in courtship ritual. The male sharp-tailed grouse is able to inflate purple throat patches which add vibrant colour to his strutting and stomping.

Fred presented various theories about why males of some species use leks, and focussed on the Hot Shot vs Hot Spot theories: do leks offer females the advantage of comparing possible mates side-by-side, or are they chosen as convenient mating grounds in areas with high densities of grouse?

Afterwards, Fred led a group discussion about possible courses of action to deal with Climate Change. We looked into three scenarios: limiting pollution, initiating a carbon tax, or capping emissions and trading carbon credits.

Near the conclusion of the meeting, members reported many great observations from nature. Spring is upon us!

Calendar of Events

Next General Meeting

Tuesday, June 9th, 7:00 p.m.

Spotted Turtles, with Dan Reeves

Dan Reeves will give an overview of spotted turtles, focusing on the habitat use, as would likely be applicable in the North Bay area. Dan did his undergraduate work in North Bay, and his graduate work at Laurentian in Sudbury. The main purpose of the graduate work was to create a predictive habitat model for future use in conservation. Although that aspect of the project was not very successful, along the way Dan found some interesting information with regards to population demographics as well as sexual size dimorphism in the species.

Dan is currently working as a biologist for Jagger Hims Limited, a environmental consulting company based in Newmarket.

Tuesday, September 8, 2009

James Abbott, PhD., Assistant Professor
Department of Geography, Nipissing University

James grew up in Ottawa, and joined the Department of Geography at Nipissing in August 2008. His research interests are centred around highly variable environments and how people adapt to them. His doctoral research was done in a floodplain fishery in the Upper Zambezi River between Namibia and Zambia, but now he is applying the same interests closer to home.

James' talk will touch on the concept of Local Ecological Knowledge (LEK), or the information that people living closest to a resource in question build up over time, and how it can be used in research and management. He will also talk about some of the preliminary results from his current research on LEK and shadflies.

FRED'S BIG YEAR!

Avid birders at some point in their life plan a "Big Event". It can be a big day, month or year and has a boundary within a certain area, province, country or continent.

Fred Pinto has decided that 2009 is going to be his "Big Year" to locate as many species of birds as he can within the clubs region, a 50 mile radius of North Bay. As of May 24th, Fred was up to 175 bird species.

Congratulations Fred, keep up the good work.

You can help Fred in his quest to find new species of birds, by contacting Fred at 476-9006 if you find an unusual species of bird.

Blanding's Turtles Tracking Project

By Bonnie Brownstein



Bonnie Brownstein holds up one of her house guests and says, "Smile!"

Stephen Belfry and Rebecca Geauvreau, a SAR biologist at the North Bay MNR, have a project in the Nipissing area that involves radio tracking Blanding's Turtles. The batteries in the radio tags run out after a year, so the turtles need to be re-captured and fitted with new tags. It takes overnight for the epoxy on the radio tags to dry - hence Blandings are overnight guests in the Belfry / Brownstein household.

Not to worry - the tags don't bother them and don't contribute to higher mortality rates. If you see a Blanding's turtle **PLEASE** get a GPS reading on its location and take photos of it from the top and from the plastron. Email Stephen at stephen.belfry@ontario.ca or call him at work at 475-5512.

Monthly Bird-Bash

Saturday & Sunday: June 6 - 7
July 18 - 19 Aug 29 - 30

Spend some time observing our local birds and report on how many species of birds you saw. Submit reports to Dick Tafel, rtafel@sympatico.ca or 472-7907.

Birdwing Meeting

Fourth Tuesday of each month at 6:30 p.m. The summer meetings are held outside! Meet at the Information Centre next to the Dionne Quints home, and we'll go to wherever the birds are!

Loudon Peatlands Outing

By Debra Johnson

Dr. Peter Beckett from the Biology Dept. of Laurentian University and Chuck Miller Superintendent of Mashkinonje and Killarney Parks joined an enthusiastic group of 8 Nipissing Naturalists and eight people from the Monetteville/Alban area. Bonnie, Debra, Fred, Claire, Sandra, Cal, and of course Angela and Gary, reveled in the spring sun under cloudless blue skies.

The group included Joe Hamer, from Cambria College, who has previously led our club members on an outing to the Port Loring Deer yards and Harley, a Friend of Mashkinonje member from the shore of the West Arm of Lake Nipissing who has worked long industrious hours assisting the volunteers in building the bridges and board walks in this park.

Peter is always an enthusiastic facilitator, reviewing the characteristics that differentiate bogs, fens, marshes and swamps while we viewed examples of each; in particular, the 6,000 year old bog of the Loudon Peatland. Along the 2.9 km. trail we stopped to examine numerous examples of each, and a shy Sandhill Crane camouflaged in the grasses and sedges at a pond edge.

Members marveled at the new **10 metre** viewing stand overlooking the Loudon Peatland. Many comments were overheard, on the prevalence of 5/8ths diameter lag bolts securing it and the sturdy well constructed platform, quelling any anxiety that we may have had as we climbed the 31 steps to the viewing platform.

From the platform we could see that the Great Blue Herons had returned and were on their nests in their rookery. Kestrels and hawks hunted the Peatland. Peter commented that Southern Bog Lemmings have been documented in one area of this extensive peat land. Fred Pinto discussed the forest biodiversity and sustainability, as well as the survival of the large pines through fires which likely have swept through the area in the 19th century.

The first Mourning Cloaks and Spring Azures were plentiful along the trail, as well as fresh moose scat. Peter pointed out examples of symbiotic lichens, fungi and algae. False Morels were in evidence. At the edge of the marsh, salamander eggs were found and Painted Turtles sunned themselves.

I, for one, never tire of the beauty and biodiversity of Mashkinonje Park. Professional quality trail maps are now available for only \$5.00. Thanks to Peter, Fred, Angela and Chuck for making our outing as fascinating as ever!

Cobalt Silver Camp

By Christine Page

On Saturday, May 23, about 25 people participated in the joint field trip that was organized by the Nipissing Lapidary and Mineral Club. Several Nip Nats attended, and had a marvelous time prospecting for silver, cobalt, nickel, galena and calcite. Guides were provided by the Cobalt Museum for the two tours offered - one was an historical in-town tour of the famous mine camp; the second was a visit to three sites, where everyone found treasures to bring home - once we knew what we were looking for!

When Cobalt was in its prime, more than 150 mines were in operation, and it was considered the silver capital of the world. Now, universities and professional groups tour the area to study the geology, learn about the history, and to bring home a prized specimen.



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Top: Jim Cripps and daughter Relessey (members of both clubs) inspect samples that they have just collected. Left: Combing a mine dump for treasures. Photos by Christine Page