

President's Message

Hello fellow naturalists. It has been a busy year. Without the help of many volunteers our club would not be as strong as it is today. I would like to personally thank all those who helped lend their time to help us make this past year a success for all of us. Through participation comes great experiences and of course great memories. I would like to thank the members of the Executive: Secretary Donna Ryckman-Rooney, Treasurer Gail Jones, Membership and Past President Don Hall, Program Dave Euler, Outings Val Walker, Members at Large Carl Linhart, Mark Harvey, Jen Harvey, Robert D. Cohen, Tony Walker for their help to organize and direct the club's activities. Thanks go to Bill Purnis and Flo MacLeod for their work publishing the newsletters.

We have gone on many great outings led by great volunteers. From Pt Pelee, Cedarville, Tahquamenon Falls to Orphan Lake in Lake Superior Park, to mention just a few. We have visited many different parts of Ontario and Michigan looking for birds, flora and other fauna and just enjoying this great geography at our doorstep. We hike, we bicycle, we ski, we snowshoe, we drive, and we paddle. The only thing we haven't done is fly. Above all we are sharing this wonderful time in nature with similarly minded folk.

We have had many interesting presentations and speakers. It is great to hear about their experiences, to feel their passion and to share their knowledge with us.

We have taken a lead role in focusing attention on the plight of the threatened Chimney Swifts that visit Sault Ste. Marie in large numbers spring and fall. We are presently applying for project moneys to support the study of the Swifts and the importance of maintaining their habitat for their survival. In the mean time we will continue to monitor the Swifts as they arrive in the spring and pass through in the fall.

As a result of our role in pursuing funding with our partners Algoma University and others we have begun the process of incorporation as a non profit non charity corporation which facilitates the funding process. Our formal corporation name will be Sault Ste. Marie Field Naturalists. We will still call ourselves the Soo Nats. And we will still be a binational club.

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We have helped various Conservation organizations from Michigan and Ontario with their determination of the nature of the flora and fauna in their areas from Gibboney Lake, Lake Superior Nature Preserve, and the Soo Muskeg inventories. Another one of our big projects was to help the NORDIK Institute with their endeavour to produce a Hub Trail guide and QR (Quick Response) codes on regular posts along the way.

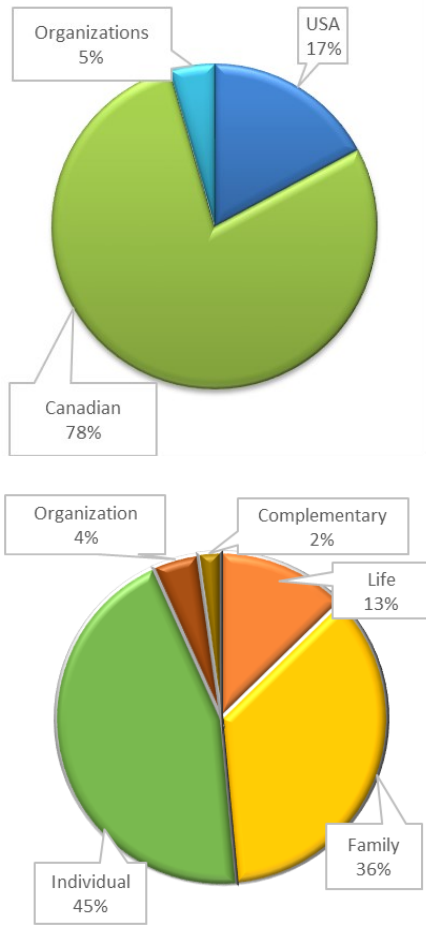
This is to help educate the public using their smart phones in terms of flora and fauna that they can observe by the trail. Sault College students also lent a hand in our project which was a welcomed help indeed.

Next year promises to be an even bigger year with many outings and great programs.

Please lend a hand when you can and also support those volunteers who give up their time for our enjoyment and education. Looking forward to another great year, let me know if you can help the club in any way. Many hands make light work and lots of laughter.



Ron Prickett
President



Membership Report

Submitted by Don and Vivian Hall

The Sault Naturalists are alive and growing. We had 112 members at the end of last year. An additional 22 people have signed up, bringing our total at the end of 2014 up to 134.

Possible reasons for the increase include our move to the Bayliss Library and their promotion of our programs, more retired people looking for an active, nature-oriented group and the excellent work of our outings committee. Our efforts to save valuable Chimney Swift roosting habitat and Hub Trail related work have raised our profile on the Canadian side. Activities aimed at young families and our support of young naturalists is adding to membership right now, and opening up possibilities for the future.

Membership as of January 2015

Life	17	Canadian Membership	105
Family	48	American Membership	23
Individual	60	Canadian Organizations	3
Students	0	American Organizations	3
Organizations	6	Total Memberships	134
Complementary	3		
Total Memberships	134		

Ontario Nature Report

Submitted by Val Walker

Sault Naturalists of Ontario and Michigan hosted the 2014 Ontario Nature Northern Regional Fall Meeting on St. Joseph's Island this past September. Thirty-one delegates representing 13 conservation organizations from Thunder Bay to Sudbury attended. The theme of the meeting was "Working Together for Wildlife Habitat".

Thanks to Dave Euler for his planning and organizing for this meeting and his assistance and guidance throughout the three day event. Thank you also to Don and Vivian Hall for their help in the kitchen preparing meals for the group.

Meeting Highlights: Tanya Pulfer, Citizen Science Coordinator from Ontario Nature gave an update on the Ontario Reptile and Amphibian Atlas Program.

Don Hall, Past President Sault Naturalists of Ontario and Michigan. Don briefed the group on the Save Our Swifts initiative created after the Courthouse chimney was capped in November 2012.

Eric Thompson, Executive Director, Ontario Woodlot Association addressed 'Ecological Values of Private Woodlots' including a woodlot tour.

Jennifer Cross, Executive Director gave a review of Wood Turtles and the Algoma Highlands Conservancy.

ON Update: Endangered Species Act Lawsuit - In September 2013, Ontario Nature and Wildlands League sued the Ontario government over its decision to exempt major threats to SAR from the ESA. January hearing results pending.



Dennis Township Blog Slog & Fen Foray with Rob Routledge - July 2014



Gray Treefrog (*Hyla versicolor*)

Financial Report

Submitted by Gail Jones

Canadian Account

Balance Jan 1 2014: \$5128.90
Balance Dec 31 2014: \$2385.42
Receipts: \$3261.47

- Memberships: \$2665.00
- Donations: \$10.00
- US Exchange: \$1.47
- Silent Auction: \$585.00

Disbursements: \$6004.95

- Newsletter: \$118.69
- Postage: \$68.34
- Insurance: \$753.84
- Bank Charges: \$57.90
- Capital Projects: \$31.07
- POBox Rental: \$169.50
- Ontario Nature Membership: \$165.00
- Misc: \$4640.61

Receipts over (under) Disbursements: (\$2,743.48) *

US Account

Balance Jan 1 2014: \$156.71
Balance Dec 31 2014: \$599.71
Receipts: \$493.00

- Memberships: \$340.00
- Insurance Refund: \$103.00
- Misc: \$50.00

Disbursements: \$50.00

- Donations: \$50.00

Receipts over (under) Disbursements: \$443.00

*Please note re the Canadian Account: The January 1 2014 balance forward includes the proceeds of GIC #1 (\$4279.31) that matured Nov.22 2013 and credited to the general account. Misc. Disbursements of \$4640.61 includes \$3611.83 which was invested in a GIC on Jan 13 2014..

GIC #1 \$3611.83 Can.Maturing Jan 13 2015

GIC #2 \$3750.82 Can.Maturing June 17 2015

Program Committee Report

Submitted by Dave Euler

Program Committee Members: Dave Euler, Chair, David Trowbridge, Nancy Logan, Robert Currell, Rob Routledge

With help from Carl Linhart, the Club moved the location of its Monthly Meetings to the Bayless Public Library, in Sault Ste Marie, Michigan, starting January 2014. This has been an excellent location, and the warm reception from the Librarian, Susan James and her staff has been outstanding. For our future meetings in December, January, March and April, we expect to enjoy the library again in 2015.

For our January meeting Dieter and Erica Ropke presented pictures from the Island of Crete a place where they have spent many happy hours hiking, kayaking and enjoying the Mediterranean Culture.

In February, Vivian Hall and Gail Jones organized the 60th Birthday celebration of the Club. Warm memories, pictures of club members over the past 60 years were all featured, as well as skits that relived some memorable outings of the Club.

Steve Sjogren, Wildlife Biologist for the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, used the Raco Plains example in March, to illustrate an ecosystem management strategy that benefits not only Kirkland Warblers but also sharp-tailed grouse and other species that are adapted to fire. Since effective fire suppression has eliminated important ecological features at Raco, current management is focused on restoration of habitat that mimics wild-fire.

Peter Uhlig loves orchids and has studied the ecology of orchids in northern forests for many years. Peter fell in love with orchids when he was young man, and has spent many hours growing orchids in a greenhouse and learning about their ecological requirements. After his talk in April, everyone who attended also loves orchids.

In her May presentation Val Walker talked about her recent travels in Southeast Asia. From Lake Toba, the largest volcanic lake in the world, to Gunung Leuser National Park, part of a UNESCO World Heritage site, Val Walker recounted her recent travels to Southeast Asia with a focus on Northern Sumatra. That was fun, for both Val and us.

Raptor Custodianship with Dr. Scott Craig was the topic on Tues. June 10. Dr. Craig helps injured birds of prey and owls towards their recovery and possible release back into their natural habitat. His presentation explained the circumstances under which birds come to his attention and the procedures needed to treat and hopefully rehabilitate them.

On September 9 the Ministry of Natural Resources Biologist, Jim Trottier, discussed how Elk were brought to Ontario by the Ministry of Natural Resources. Jim reviewed some of the issues that were dealt with, how the elk were transferred and some of the problems that the elk have encountered here in Algoma.

Electricity from the Forest??? In October Lisa Venier, a Research Scientist working for the Canadian Forest Service, talked about the idea of "biomass harvesting" to help supply the energy needs of Canadian. This is a complex problem and Lisa's shared her mandate to review all aspects of biomass harvesting.

November 11, Michael Burch, former Director of the Art Gallery of Algoma, and several other artists, are working on a book that involves taking pictures of all the sites in Algoma where the artists known as the "Group of Seven" did their famous paintings. Michael shared stories of the artists and the sites in Algoma they made famous.

December 9. The Birds of Paradise video recounted efforts of scientist from the National Geographic Society to photograph all the Birds of Paradise, a group of highly specialized birds that inhabit the still wild tropical forests in the remote parts of Borneo. It was cold and winter outside that night but we found a tropical paradise in the Michigan Sault St. Marie Public library.



Showy Orchids (*Cypripedium reginae*)



Outings Report

Submitted by Val Walker

Research has concluded what we as naturalists have known for decades....nature and all it has to offer, is soothing to the soul. It could be your garden, a city green space or the immense forests, wetlands and waterways of Algoma and the Upper Peninsula. Just get out and you will feel a calm and clarity that will help you recharge and refocus your life.

The seventy-one field trips of 2014 offered a wide range of opportunities to get out in every season not only to contemplate life but to learn, to appreciate, to contribute and to have some fun.

You could get out and hike, snowshoe, ski, slog, bike or paddle in parks, conservancies, sanctuaries, reserves and preserves.

You could get out and head for backcountry destinations to lakes, rivers, sloughs, fens, bogs, marshes, swamps, cliffs and mountains.

You could get out to bird watch for owls in January, swans and waterfowl in March, loons in May, Kirkland's Warblers in June and a plethora of bird species during the spring and fall migrations.

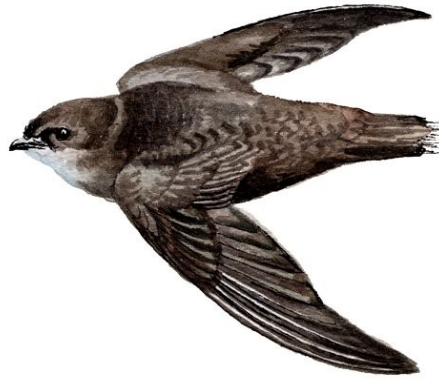
You could get out to find and learn to identify spring wildflowers, mushrooms, ferns, shrubs, trees and wetland plants in the area. Don't feel you have to have a background in botany. We have many skilled members that are very happy to share their knowledge.

You could get out and participate in a biological inventory where a list of plants and animals found in an area is provided to other like-minded organizations like the Central Algoma Freshwater Conservancy, the Michigan Nature Association and the NORDIK Institute (The Hub Trail Guide).

You could get out and bring your kids or grandkids to some nature related activities with the younger generation in mind ...or you could get out to collect sap for making maple syrup.... or you could get out for one of Vivian's famous pot-lucks. The pointjust get out.

A sincere thank you to all those volunteers that lead outings and share not just their time but their expertise to provide the wide diversity of field trip options that we have every year.

Happy trails!



Save Our Swifts Report

Submitted by Ron Prickett

SOS Sub-committee Members: Ron Prickett, Val Walker, Dave Euler

From Save our Swifts to Support our Swifts

Well, it has been an eventful year. We are learning more and more about the workings of the Ministry of Natural Resources, Federal Wildlife Service and the Government.

Here is what we know. Every spring and fall thousands of Chimney Swifts, which are a threatened species, make their way to the giant chimneys of Sault Ste. Marie to roost until favourable conditions prevail for them to disperse throughout the landscape. More Chimney Swifts move through Sault Ste. Marie then all of Quebec.

They have for many years roosted in the chimney at the Courthouse. The drama started when the courthouse chimney was capped unbeknownst to all. Fortunately for the Swifts, the chimney at the Post Office was available for them or there would have been a disaster in the Swift population.

After our formation of the SOS committee and contact with the Ministry, Mr. Oraziotti's office and the Government officials responsible for the Courthouse Chimney the cap was removed from the Chimney. However the Swifts continue to use the Post Office chimney and not the Courthouse.

The Superintendent of the Post Office has been contacted and a meeting held to ensure that there are no plans to do any maintenance or construction associated with the chimney. They have been very receptive of their responsibilities towards a threatened species.

The MNR has no moneys to investigate the chimneys and the Swift population needs. We have been invited to submit a project proposal with other interested partners to get the data and the visible record of the Swift population in the Sault. Dr. Jennifer Pierce has volunteered to organize and submit our project proposal. She will be taking the lead role in bringing in other partners to assist us in this project and overseeing the project.

The Sault Naturalists' part of this project to popularize the unique situation we have in Sault Ste. Marie with respect to the survival of the threatened Chimney Swift population. We encourage our members to help in this project when/if it comes to fruition and publicize the situation as wide as we can. We will keep you posted as to the success of our project proposal.

Chimney Swift Facts

- 30% decline in population in last three generations
- Decline due to loss of roosting sites & food sources, weather
- can only roost on rough vertical surfaces, feet too small and too far back
- spend entire day in flight
- can eat 1000 insects per day-aerial foragers
- roost in large chimneys for warmth
- roosting sites need to be within 1 km or so from water body (feeding area)
- SSMarie Post Office and Courthouse ideal roosting sites for Swifts
- mate for life, lay 2 to 4 eggs per year



Chimney Swifts entering roosting chimney



Gibboney Lake Inventory Report

Submitted by Don Hall

Our club works to support other organizations with similar objectives. Among other projects, in 2014 we hosted the northern regional meeting of Ontario Nature, contributed to inventory, promotion and interpretation of the Hub Trail, contributed to the work of the Lake Superior Watershed Conservancy and worked on a biological inventory for the Gibboney Lake wetland near Desbarats, Ontario.

In the case of Gibboney Lake, we were asked by our friends at the Central Algoma Freshwater Coalition (CAFC) to inventory the flora and fauna of the wetland, paying particular attention to species at risk. We had several outings to the area beginning with a very enjoyable ski/snowshoe trek in March, 2014. The winter visit was invaluable because it allowed easy access to all parts of the wetland. We were able to dig through the snow to get an idea of the low growing shrubs and other vegetation.

Spring and summer visits were much more difficult. What appeared to be a good access point in winter was in fact quite treacherous with very tall grass, sharp stones, uncertain footing and abundant Poison Ivy. A Leatherleaf/Sphagnum bog proved impossible to access, which is unfortunate because it may have featured some interesting bog orchids.

Though access on foot was not always possible, unusually high water levels did allow us to visit by canoe. We paddled the open water areas on three occasions and found many interesting, but no rare species. The wetland is interesting, diverse and beautiful when viewed from the water.

We are currently working on a report to be submitted to the CAFC. The species list and many photographs should be very useful in their watershed management planning.



Birding at Whitefish Island - May 2014

Sault Naturalists Club Seeks Non Profit, Non Charity Incorporation

Submitted by Ron Prickett

To help assure selection of our Chimney Swift project proposal by the MNR project selection committee, we have been requested to incorporate by Ministry officials. To that end we have submitted the required paper work for our request to the government to be formally recognized as a corporation.

The designation for our club would be a Non Profit, Non Charity Corporation know as the Sault Ste. Marie Field Naturalists. This formal designation would indicate to the government that we are what we say we are and we do what we say we do.

Any moneys received from the government would go to meet the ends of our project proposals and not into the coffers of the club for any profitable gain.

We will still be the same bi-national club and call ourselves the Soo Nats for short. This formal designation is but a formality to us since we have always operated on the premise of a non profit organization.

Any moneys we receive from members dues are for the purpose of the objectives of the club and that is to serve our members, to help them enjoy the environment and to provide opportunities for us to learn more about our environment.



Fern Foray with Steve Dick - August 2014