



COMING EVENTS

- Friday, March 30, 2001, 7:30 p.m.** - General Meeting. WBFN member, Elizabeth Kellogg, will give a talk on Bird Banding. Her talk will include information about projects which she and her husband, Roger Frost, have initiated since moving to this area five years ago. Emphasis will be on what can be learned about birds from banding. Kawartha Pine Ridge District Health Unit.
 - Friday, April 27, 2001, 7:30 p.m.** - General Meeting. WBFN member Alison Elliott presents “The Wilds of Namibia”, a photographic journey of the natural history of Namibia (formerly South West Africa) as seen during travels in 1999. Cobourg Public Library.
 - Saturday, May 12 - Murray Marsh / Lone Pine Marsh Spring Birding Trip.** To carpool, meet at 7:30 a.m. at the Arby's commuter parking lot or at 7:45 a.m. at the Hwy. 45 commuter lot. Wear long pants, rubber boots and bug spray. Bring binoculars and a lunch. Call Alison Elliott (905) 797-1123 for information.
- Evening Outings:** Call Alison Elliott (905)797-1123 for information and directions.
- Thursday, May 3, Port Hope High School Trail,** 7-8:30 p.m. Meet at the parking lot behind Port Hope High School (Highland Dr. and Victoria St)
 - Thursday, May 10, Laurie Lawson Outdoor Ed. Centre,** 8000 Telephone Rd., 7-8:30 p.m. Meet at the parking lot on the north side of Telephone Rd..
 - Thursday, May 17, Ganaraska Trail,** 7-8:30 pm. Meet on Barrett St. on the east side Barrett St. Bridge, Port Hope..
 - Thursday, May 24, Northumberland Forest,** 7-8:30 p.m. Meet at 6:45 p.m. at the Hwy 45 commuter parking just north of 401 at Cobourg.
 - Friday, May 25,** 6:30 p.m. - Annual walk at Willow Beach Marsh.
 - Monday, June 11** - Annual Bluebird and Whip-poor-will Walk with Hazel Bird

Peter's Woods

Since 1997, a dedicated team of volunteers from WBFN has assumed maintenance of Peter's Woods. We will continue this project in 2001. Other members of WBFN who would like to have their names added to the volunteer list should call Russell Lake at 372-3636.

Audrey Wilson has retired as co-chair of Peter's Woods and this position should be filled. Thanks to Audrey and all Peter's Woods Volunteers.

Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas Project

This year marks the first year of a five-year project to collect information about the breeding birds of Ontario. To the many WBFN members who have volunteered to assist with this project, many thanks.

Please note that there will be a workshop for atlasers in this area on Sunday, April 29 from 1-4 p.m. probably at Presqu'ile Provincial Park. Unfortunately, at press time, details as to the exact location are not available, but reserve the date. When details are finalized, you will be notified by the coordinators. Car pools can probably be arranged at this time.

*Margaret Bain
Clive Goodwin
Roger Frost*

MEMBERSHIP NEWS

•Best wishes from the Club to **Bryan Baxter** who is retiring from his position as Chief Administrative Officer of the Town of Cobourg at the end of May 2001. We note that Bryan has volunteered to cover a square for the Breeding Bird Atlas and anticipate that his square will receive excellent coverage.

•**Sharon Keogh and David Acomba's** Zephyr Films has produced a second series of shows in their "Down To Earth" series, which begin broadcasting on Vision TV starting April 18, 2001 at 7:30 p.m. In this series, artist Robert Bateman, geologist and guide Ben Gadd, author Sharon Butala, multi-disciplinary artist Peter von Tiesenhausen, Chief Emeritus Ruby Dunstan of Lytton First Nation and writer and fly-fisherman David Carpenter take us to some of their special

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

Michelle Bowen and Richard Peacock and family, Oshawa
Anne J. Rickard-Mabey, Cobourg
Terry Sprague, Demorestville
Ed Heuvel, Stirling

THE WILLOW BEACH FIELD NATURALISTS

Past Pres.	Terry Stopps.....	372-1028	stopps@eagle.ca
President	Bob Short.....	885-1420	mb.short@sympatico.ca
1st Vice-pres.
2nd Vice-pres.	Carole Payne.....	885-6135
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Curlw Ed.	Norma Wallace.....	885-5552
	Elizabeth Kellogg.....	885-9615	ekrf@eagle.ca

The editor is most grateful to those who have contributed to this issue of the Curlew. Copy for the April 2001 issue should be received by March 31, 2001. Rare or interesting sightings should be reported to Ted McDonald (885-4764) or Norma Wallace (885-5552) for the April Curlew. Correspondence for WBFN should be addressed to: "The Willow Beach Field Naturalists, P.O. Box 421, Port Hope, ON L1A 3W4."

2000 BLUEBIRD REPORT – UPDATE #25

by Hazel Bird

Without a doubt, weather plays a vital part in shaping the fortunes of our Eastern Bluebirds, both in their wintering grounds and as they travel northward on migration routes that lead to their nesting territory near Harwood, home of the Willow Beach Field Naturalists' Bluebird Project.

Following a relatively mild and snow-free winter, spring and summer were cool and wet, especially in May and June. January 2000 came in with unseasonably warm spells until, in mid-month, winter took command with a vengeance – bringing a mix of wind, rain, sun and snow with temperatures as low as -23°C . This roller-coaster weather continued, for the most part, to set the pattern for the months ahead – a strange and unpredictable season! Toward the end of February, reports of bluebird sightings had begun to come from the nestbox and outlying areas: obviously over-wintering birds.

Late April's persistent, chilling winds brought all bluebird activity to a halt and nesting remained at a standstill for some time. Thus, in many instances, the first broods were finally in progress when normally second nestings should have been expected. However, from that time on, late nests were mainly undisturbed and successful, though not in large numbers. From the beginning surprisingly few bluebirds had been seen throughout the farms and, on some, there were none – indicating probably migration mortality. This might also help to explain the successful season enjoyed by the Tree Swallows that, as a rule, migrate and nest at later dates than do the bluebirds.

Unfavourable weather is, of course, a natural factor and beyond our control. Now, our major concern – a very real one – is the rapid diminishing of habitat taking place in this area. Each year more acres are lost and, of the remaining land, only a small

percentage is ideal for bluebirds – such as open, grazed pastures and some suitable, large lawns. These less desirable sites, though accepted by bluebirds, are readily taken over by competitors – House Wrens and Tree Swallows. One interesting solution to this problem might be to look into the possibility of creating a new box area in farmlands to the south and west between our present project and Baltimore, where cattle are still pastured and bluebirds being seen and reported regularly.

We bluebirders faced our own challenges this year since the extreme weather conditions made it necessary to continue the regular rounds in order to assess the situation in each box – and every day the choice was ours: plod along the overgrown trails in rubber boots and raingear or slosh along in soggy running shoes and jeans soaked to the waist (on short people). Where there is no visible sign of activity around the site a “touch” check is quickly made and, since the door swings upward on the nail hinges, it need be opened just far enough to permit a hand to slide up the side of the nest and with finger tips feel the contents: if warm and soft we assume that all is well (as we breathe a sigh of relief): if cold and clammy (and how aptly those terms describe lifeless young birds!) they must be dealt with at once – removing the nest recording our findings and recycling the contents, nest and all, away from the box and out of sight. The unit is then made ready for another occupant – and not only birds make use of the boxes. In this wet season there were record numbers of ants in a variety of sizes, colours and biting ability. We also had our quota – 3 – of Little Brown Bats – one hanging upside-down below the entrance hole in a box, another inside a guard can and the third – a very small one – curled up on the floor (each on a different farm).

The first round of monitoring began on March 25 with volunteer assistance on every trip (including Spark, my dog, who volunteered for the entire season). This is a pre-nesting visual check to determine the post-winter condition of all box units and posts in time to make any necessary repairs before the spring arrivals move into the territory – and from that time until late summer, the regular checks were carried out (this year until much later than usual).

As in 1999, WBFN members and others (even one from Peterborough) took part – providing transportation and walking the box circuits. Their importance to the project cannot be overestimated and we thank them all: Marilyn Taylor made 20 trips, Louise Baxter – 17, Andrew Taylor – 11, Audrey Wilson – 9, Lori Wensley – 8, Bill Wensley – 8, Bill Henricks – 7, Colin Jones – 6, Barbara Brown, John Lyons – 3, Daphne Svenningson, Lynda Lapeer, Bill Crowley, Laura Manley, Alan Croxall, Janice Street – 2, Sara Taylor, Robert Tapp, Steve Street, (also Andre and Ilona Crutzen from Holland) – 1. Twenty participants made 115 separate trips. Every year we acknowledge with thanks the interest shown by landowners who permit us to use their property for our boxes.

On May 29 a committee from WBFN – Bob and Marg Short, Bill Crowley and Russ Lake – came to tour “Second Chance”, a bluebird farm with great potential for prairie plant restoration. Through the nesting season a number of new visitors accompanied volunteers on monitoring rounds: Barbara Pellow, Joyce Sinclair (Winnipeg), Don and Fran Morrison, Malcolm and Pat Pratt, Ken Ramsden and, from England, Geoffrey and Miriam Chapman and Bob and Catherine Hardman.

Annual WBFN Bluebird and Whip-poor-will Walk – June 12, the day of the outing, was pleasant and warm, sandwiched between two days of cold, heavy rains. Twenty-two participants walked the familiar

Bluebird Farm trails and there was no shortage of bluebirds to be seen from the parking spot and throughout the fields. It was noted, however, that few females were among them. We had hoped to see Upland Sandpipers but, from previous box-checking rounds, were aware that the small group seen the previous year had moved farther to the north and east into an adjacent farm. Ten members drove on to the Whip-poor-will stop to add new sightings to the list. On the whole, the group participated well, making this outing a very enjoyable one from beginning to end. Total checklist: Eastern Bluebird, Tree Swallow, Blue Jay, Grasshopper, Savannah, Field Sparrows, Great Blue Heron, Ring-billed Gull, Black-capped Chickadee, Eastern Towhee, American Goldfinch, American Crow, American Robin, Eastern Kingbird, Mourning Dove, Veery, Common Nighthawk, Wood Thrush, Ovenbird, Whip-poor-will (1st heard 9:10 p.m.), Great Horned Owl, Red Squirrel, Little Brown Bat, Wolf Spider and burrow. Total bird species: 21.

Side Interests: This year, to begin our new century Hog-nosed Snake Reports, one was seen (though not by me) and is well documented by Colin Jones – so, for the record, I have borrowed his up-close-and-personal account:

On Saturday, May 27, 2000, returning from Cobourg we noticed a pickup truck stopped on the Harwood Road, just south of County Road 9, with three people standing around it. Driving past, we saw that there was a large snake on the road with its head raised up and the sides of its neck puffed out, like a cobra. We stopped and a knowledgeable woman said it was an Eastern Hog-nosed Snake. The others carried it to the shoulder of the road where it continued to behave like a cobra in its defensive posture. The snake was a uniform steel gray on its back, darker at the head and tail, with a lighter ventral side. We guessed it was about 18 inches long. The coiled body was so stout that I thought all of

it was inflated with air, except the tiny pointed tail. The face bore the unmistakable pig-like upturned snout. It retreated into the grass as soon as we looked away, probably headed for the sand dunes at the top of Robson Road, which Hazel tells me the snakes favour. Let's hope it stays there and not on the road! – Colin D. Jones

Dancing Woodcock: In the middle of a seldom-used tree-lined road, Bill Henricks had to brake suddenly to avoid contact with an American Woodcock – a male, no doubt – busily engaged in what we supposed was a “courtship dance” just a few feet in front of the car. Totally indifferent to our presence,

the bird continued his robot motions: teetering on short legs the stout body would rise and fall, as though on springs, in a rhythmic up-and-down movement and on the “down” stroke the stubby tail would tip upward as the long bill tapped the ground. Finally, after four or five minutes more of this solemn, silent ritual, he hurried across the shoulder and was quickly lost in the grass and leaves.

Financial Statement for 2000

Balance on hand Dec. 31, 1999\$1,218.86

Receipts:

Donations: A. Johnston.....\$25.00

L. Reidt\$20.00

N. Wallace\$30.00

C. Jones.....\$22.00

A. & I. Crutzen (Holland).....\$20.00

Viking Nursery\$60.00

Life Membership – H.B.....\$18.00

.....\$195.00

Box Sales – 6 @ \$10, 1 @ \$12*\$ 72.00

Total Receipts\$267.00

Expenses:

Labour – special checks, gas.....\$85.00

Box repairs.....\$15.00

Total Expenses.....\$100.00

Excess receipts over expenses\$ 167.00

Balance on hand, Dec. 31, 2000.....\$1,385.86

*Boxes purchased by D. Acoma, S. Keogh - 4; B. Evans – 2; S. Crosby – 1.

Special thanks to the Gordon Reed family for photocopying 60 copies of the #24 Bluebird Report, free of charge. These are made available to all non-members who support the bluebird operation.

Blue Observations: WBFN territory – Harwood area.

Pre-season: Feb. 19 – G. May – 5 including 4 males – on eaves, catching flies at windows; Feb. 23 – R. Bird – 4 – on overhead wires, frequently flying to ground and back: **Late summer and fall:** (several observers). Sept. 2 – small flocks frequently; 10th – 1 male; 18th to 27th – at least 6 on farm lane, daily for a week; 29th – 2; Oct 10 – 1 male; 16th – 4; Post-season – Nov. 3rd – 9 – at Viking Nursery – feeding on small fruit trees in yard – one pair stayed and were seen frequently later on. Dec. 14 at Harwood Fish Culture Station – mixed flock of bluebirds and goldfinches – 20 – on lunchroom windowsill above a number of well-fruited flowering crabapple trees – observed by Jamie Houston and Mike Ferguson (most were bluebirds). Unfortunately, with this year’s complete failure of the wild grape crop, combined with past destruction of many acres of sumac groves, the chances of survival for bluebirds have been drastically reduced in a winter such as this.

Bluebird sightings reported from outlying areas: (numerous sources) – Castleton, Baltimore, Roseneath, Roseneath Landing (R. and M. Adams and several observers at Roseneath Landing reported seeing a small group of bluebirds off and on until the end of December.), Bewdley, R.R. #2, Orono, Camborne. Nests fledged: John Lyons, Baltimore area – 3 from nests between July 7 and Sept. 24; July 30 – Doug Watkins, Garden Hill area – 1 fledged; Aug. 1 – Barbara Evans, Camborne – 2 broods.

Tree Swallow Notes: First seen: Apr. 13. First egg – May 9; first nest fledged – June 30; No. of nests fledged – 56.

Statistics:	2000	1999
My first bluebird sighting	March 25	Apr. 5
First egg found	April 28	Apr. 21
First young found	May 17	May 14
First nest fledged	May 30	May 27
No. of nesting starts	37	44
Non-successes	7	11
No. of nests fledged	30	33
No. of boxes in use	125	119
No. of checking rounds	8+	9
Nests with 6 eggs	1	0
Nests with white eggs	1	0

Presumed egg or young losses: 7. House Wren – 3; Tree Swallow – 2; Eggs malformed – 2; (in one nest – 4 – very small, in another – 2 – small and flattened noticeably on one side – none of these hatched.)

OH STARRY NIGHT!

by Alison Elliott

Sparkling stars, brilliant planets and two satellites greeted the fourteen people who gathered at Richardson’s Lookout on Saturday, March 3, 2001 for an astronomy evening. About -10°C, the skies were absolutely clear and quiet on the hill overlooking the Ganaraska Forest. Many constellations were visible including the familiar Big Dipper, Little Dipper, Orion, Cassiopeia, and the Pleiades.

Most interesting though were the images of several of the planets as seen through the telescope of Trevor Jones. Venus, low over the western horizon, appeared as though it was a crescent moon with the light of the sun reflecting off only part of the planet. Saturn’s rings were vividly visible, as were the gas clouds of Jupiter and four of its moons.

Many thanks to Trevor Jones for sharing his telescope, his time, and his knowledge.

MID-WINTER WATERFOWL INVENTORY 2001

by Roger Frost

The annual Lake Ontario Mid-Winter Waterfowl Inventory was held on January 7, 2001. As in previous years, the members of the WBFN covered the lakefront from Wicklow Beach to Wesleyville. This year, the coverage was split into 2 teams, with Rod Lee, Maureen Campeau and Alison Elliott covering the section west of Cobourg, and Elizabeth Kellogg, Bob Short and Roger Frost covering the area east of Cobourg. At mid-day, the teams met for lunch and then covered the Cobourg waterfront in the afternoon. In addition, Clive Goodwin and Lori Wensley contributed their sightings from Cobourg.

In total, 3,677 birds of 15 species were counted. Because of the deep snow and frigid temperatures, numbers of Canada Geese were only about a 10th of what they were last year. Mallards and Black Ducks were also present in much lower numbers. However, Common Goldeneyes, Long-tailed Ducks (formerly Oldsquaw), and Red-breasted Mergansers were all recorded in higher numbers than in the past few years.

The highlights included 4 Horned Grebes just east of D'Arcy St. in Cobourg, 1 Gadwall, 1 American Wigeon, and 2 American Coot in Cobourg Harbour, 3 White-winged Scoters off the Wensley's on Lakeshore Rd., Cobourg, and a Hooded Merganser just west of Nawautin Shores.

SPECIES	NO.
Horned Grebe	4
Canada Goose	229
American Black Duck	38
Mallard	752
Gadwall	1
American Wigeon	1
Greater Scaup	17
Long-tailed Duck	272
White-winged Scoter	3
Common Goldeneye	1,986
Bufflehead	177
Hooded Merganser	1
Common Merganser	43
Red-breasted Merganser	151
American Coot	2

RECENT SIGHTINGS

compiled by Norma Wallace, Elizabeth Kellogg & Roger Frost

Mute Swan	Feb. 22	6	Cobourg Harbour	CEG
Canada Goose	Feb. 25	9	over Young St., PH	PI
Pintail	Feb. 26	3	Cobourg Harbour	CEG

Sightings - cont'd.

Red-shouldered Hawk	Feb 15	1	Ganaraska Forest Centre	AE
Rough-legged Hawk	Feb 27	1	over Durham St. PH	EK
American Kestrel	Feb 18	1 m	Hwy 28 & Dale Rd	DSv
Ring-necked Pheasant	Feb. 1	1	Little Rd. & Hamilton 7 th Line	JB, WB
	Feb. 27	1	Hwy 28 & Hamilton 6 th Line	RI
Wild Turkey	Feb 9	1 f	Harwood Rd. s. of Turk Rd	RH
	Feb 11	5	Deer Park Rd. & 401	DSv
	Feb 12	4	Harwood Rd. s. of Turk Rd	RH
	Feb 24	8	Deer Park Rd. & 401	EO, FO
Iceland Gull	Feb 18	3	Cobourg Harbour	CEG
Lesser Black-backed Gull	Feb 3-28	1	Cobourg Harbour	CEG
Glaucous Gull	Feb 19	4	Cobourg Harbour	CEG
Eastern Screech Owl	March 3	1	Dunn Rd. Hope Twp	RF
Great Horned Owl	Feb 6	1	Ganaraska Forest Centre	AE
Snowy Owl	Feb 16	1	Hwy 115 & 401	VSv
Barred Owl	Feb 7	1	Ganaraska Central Forest	AE
Northern Saw-whet owl	Jan 23 Feb 6 7 19	1	Ganaraska Forest Centre	AE
Pileated Woodpecker	Jan 27	1	Northumberland Forest	AW
Northern Shrike	Jan 24	3	Archer Rd., Haldimand Twp.	RL, MC
	Feb 8	1	Ganaraska Forest Centre feeders	AE
	Feb 23	1	Durham St. PH	EK, RF
Common Raven	Dec 20	1	Northumberland Forest	AW
	Jan 12/14	1	Northumberland Forest	AW
	Feb 11/18	1/2	Lakenort	JF, KB
Red-breasted Nuthatch	Dec 20	8	Northumberland Forest	AW
	Jan 8	8	Northumberland Forest	AW
Brown Creeper	Feb 11	1	Northumberland Forest	RF
Golden-crowned Kinglet	Feb 11	3	Northumberland Forest	RF
	Feb 23	3	Victoria St. S. PH	EK
Eastern Bluebird	Dec 26	1	Roseneath Landing	AW
American Robin	March 2	1	n. of Colborne	JF
Bohemian Waxwing	Feb 19/24	25/40	Grafton area	RoH, MH
Northern Cardinal	Feb 7	4 (2 pr.)	Bedford St. PH	DSv
Chipping Sparrow	Feb 11	3	Telephone Rd.	RLo
	March 4	1	Knoxville Rd., Hope Twp.	RF
Song Sparrow	Feb 24	1	Spragge Cres. Cob	RLa
Snow Bunting	Jan 14	200	Lakeshore Rd. Hope Twp	RL, MC
Red-winged Blackbird	March 1	1	Cambellcroft area	BN
Common Grackle	Feb 23	1	Hwy 2 w. of Cob	RLa
White-winged Crossbill	Jan 1-Feb 28	10-15	Northumberland Forest	AW
Pine Siskin	Feb 11	8	Northumberland Forest	RF
Red Fox	Feb 10/12	1	Mill Golf Course, Cob	AW
Chinmunk	Feb 26	2	Ganaraska Forest	BN
Chinmunk	March 3	1	n. of Colborne	JF
Coyote	Jan 8	1	Cobourg Harbour, w. headland	CEG

Observers: KB=Kim Bratt; JB=Jim Burry; WB=Wyn Burry; MC=Maureen Campeau; JF=Jo Foster; RF=Roger Frost; CEG=Clive Goodwin; MH=Marilyn Harris; RoH=Robert Harris; RH=Reese Hunt; RI=Rachel Irwin; PI=Peter Irwin; EK=Elizabeth Kellogg; RLa=Russell Lake; RL=Rod Lee; RLo=Rita Lortie; BN=Bill Newell; EO=Ellen Oliver; FO=Fred Oliver; DSv=Daphne Svenningson; VSv=Victor Svenningson; AW=Audrey Wilson