



COMING EVENTS

•**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 5, 2001, 9:30 a.m.-noon** - Opening of Peter’s Woods. Walk the trail, pick up garbage, repair the fence. Contact Russell Lake, (905) 372-3636 if you can help and for carpooling.

•**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

•**June 9 & 10** - Northumberland Summer Bird Count. Contact Roger Frost (905) 885-9615.

OOPS!

In Hazel Bird's article in the March 2001 *Curlew*, we accidentally left out Barbara Evans who assisted Hazel on 5 visits to her Bluebird Trail.

Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas Project

This is a repeat of the reminder which appeared in the March *Curlew* of the workshop which will be held for atlasers in this area on Sunday, April 29 from 1-4 p.m. at Presqu'ile Provincial Park. The co-ordinators have still not received details as to the exact location within the park. Car pools can probably be arranged.

*Margaret Bain
Clive Goodwin
Roger Frost*

MEMBERSHIP NEWS

•**Sharon Keogh and David Acomba's** Zephyr Films series, "Down To Earth", has begun broadcasting on Vision TV on Wednesdays at 7:30 p.m. The series continues throughout the month of May.

•**Elizabeth Kellogg and Roger Frost** will be doing bird banding demonstrations at the Ganaraska Forest Centre on Saturday, May 5 and at Presqu'ile Provincial Park on Saturday and Sunday, May 19 and 20. Contact GRCA for more information about the May 5 event and Presqu'ile P.P. regarding the Victoria Day weekend programs.

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

Margaret Grepe, Cobourg
Iain & Maura MacKenzie, R.R. 6, Cobourg

As you can see in the box below, WBFN is still without a 2nd Vice President. If there is a member interested in taking on this job, please contact Bob Short at 905-885-1420.

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.	Carole Payne.....	885-6135	bookbind@eagle.ca
2nd Vice-pres.	vacant		
Secretary	Nancy Stopps.....	372-1028	stopps@eagle.ca
Treasurer	Janette Johnston.....	373-1432	jjohn@eagle.ca
FON Rep.	Joan Norris.....	372-9957	d.j.norris@sympatico.ca
Curlew 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 May 2001 issue should be received by April 30, 2001. Rare or interesting sightings should be reported to Ted McDonald (885-4764) or Norma Wallace (885-5552) for the May Curlew. Correspondence for WBFN should be addressed to: "The Willow Beach Field Naturalists, P.O. Box 421, Port Hope, ON L1A 3W4."

CAPE HATTERAS IN OCTOBER

by Susan Hamilton

I thought you might be interested in hearing about our trip to Cape Hatteras, North Carolina, during the last two weeks of October (2000). Cape Hatteras is a thread of land that juts out into the Atlantic just south of Norfolk, Virginia. Backed by the Pamlico Sound, which is approximately thirty miles wide at its maximum, this fragile strip is vulnerable to ravages by hurricanes that move up the coast every few years. It consists of endless beaches flanked by sand dunes. The marram grasses anchor the shifting sands and behind the dunes low vegetation provides shelter for wildlife and birds. In some protected areas, large trees grow. On the Sound side, there are many stretches of marsh and mud flats. The most well known of these is the Pea Island Nature Preserve. It is part of the protected area of the National Sea Shore. At Pea Island, the water level is controlled to ensure that migratory birds are able to feed successfully. Those of you who have been there know that it is an excellent location for birding.

My husband and I have been to Cape Hatteras in April and October, but autumn is definitely my favourite time to visit. Not only is the weather warmer and drier, but the birds seem to be more plentiful. It is so wonderful to watch them feeding and resting in preparation for the rest of their journey south.

This year, Gary and I were fortunate to find a campsite directly on Pamlico Sound. We were next to a dense wooded area with some mature sea pines and lots of prickly undergrowth. Each morning, I took my binoculars, field guide, glasses and cup of tea and sat out to watch the activity in the woods. I was not disappointed, even once. Indigenous and migratory birds were present. A Northern Mockingbird came every morning and after serenading us, he flew to a nearby bush and regarded me quizzically. I gave him my best song imitations and each day he edged a little closer for a better look at this strange whistling person.

Another bird that resided in this copse of trees was the Gray Catbird. I confirmed his identity by the lovely rust colour under his tail. Although I saw him several times, it was never more than a quick look because the aggressive Mockingbird was usually chasing him away. One bird that did not seem intimidated was the wren. I believe it was a Carolina Wren, judging from its rich reddish back and white eyebrow stripe.

On our third morning, a Solitary Vireo put on quite a show as it caught a small butterfly. It struggled with it but subdued its catch, and sitting on a low bush, proceeded to devour its meal while the pale yellow wings of the insect dropped to the ground.

On the tree tops, there were plenty of dead branches so I was able to get a close look at some Least Flycatchers darting about feeding on flying insects. I observed them for five days running, then I didn't see them again.

One afternoon I noticed some movement on the trunk and lower branches of a shaggy tree and there were five Brown Creepers working their way up.

The most pleasure I derived from watching this little woods was seeing the warblers. I found it difficult to identify all the species I was seeing, but I did manage to make a positive identification on some. The Yellow-rumped (or "Myrtle") was almost as bright as it is in summer. The Blackburnian had lost some of the blaze of its orange but I was able to see both the male and the female. The warbler that was most difficult to identify was the one that was also the most plentiful. Flocks of tiny olive drab – perhaps 20 to 25 at a time – came and fed on the ground all around us. So intense was their search for insects that they seemed oblivious to our presence. My only conclusion was that they must have been Tennessee Warblers. They displayed no distinct wing bars, had an unstreaked chest and a faint eyebrow stripe. It was at times like these that I longed for someone from WBFN to come along

and help me identify these little travelers. Most of the migratory birds were quite without song. Their entire attention was occupied with food seeking. The olive coloured warblers were busy near us for six days, then no further sightings.

No description of our private little woodlot would be complete without mentioning the resident owl. Most nights, we heard his quiet hoot but one night, Gary was outside to latch a flapping vent when the owl sailed past and landed in a dead tree about twenty feet away. We grabbed a flashlight and took a peek at him. He was about 18” high with large ear tufts. Judging from the Hoo-hoo-hoo-hoo we had been hearing, we presumed he must have been a Great Horned.

One morning we awoke to an absolute calm. The Sound was mirror still and the light mist made the line between water and sky indecipherable. Looking out from our camper, we saw hundreds of gulls floating on the water – not feeding, just floating. Herring Gulls, Ring-billed Gulls, Great Black-back and Laughing Gulls (with their heads dull for the winter). Even the raucous Caspian Terns were quiet where they sat on the pier pilings. As the sun rose, the activity increased.

This little stretch of shoreline also provided some other interesting sightings. One evening we watched while two Great Blue Herons engaged in a stand-off. They were so intent on stalking one another that they completely stopped their search for minnows. This duet went on for almost one hour at which time one flew off. On several early evenings, we observed one Great Egret who gracefully searched for minnows in the shallow water. Along the water’s edge we saw various sandpipers, Killdeer, Willets and a pair of plovers. They had a single black breast band and a black bill which led me to believe they were Wilson’s Plovers.

No trip to Cape Hatteras is complete without some time spent at Pea Island. We were camped just south of the Oregon Inlet

so we were close enough to take a walk there on two days. Near the entrance there is a deep pond with a wooden bridge over it. From here, you can watch huge snapping turtles lolling about. The sign says not to feed them but judging from their beady eyes staring back at you, it can be concluded that they have been fed on more than one occasion.

The preponderance of birds at the Reserve at this time of year is overwhelming. We saw ducks by the hundreds – Northern Pintails, Wood Ducks, Teals, Buffleheads, American Black Ducks. They were so numerous you could hardly sort them out. Amongst them were tall white egrets. We saw one Little Blue Heron, three American Oystercatchers and two Pied-billed Grebe. The ever present Canada Geese were there, of course, and off by themselves in a mud flat was a flock of about two hundred Snow Geese.

As we were leaving, we passed through an area of dense brush. Hearing some rustling in the dry leaves on the ground, we crouched low and saw two Rufous-sided Towhees. They also ignored our presence while they searched for food.

I think that what makes the Outer Banks so special is that the opportunity to view bird life is unbounded. We are given a rare chance to not only see their beauty, but also to closely observe their behaviour as they rest and regain their strength before continuing on their long journey.

If anyone is interested in visiting Cape Hatteras, please feel free to give us a call. We have been making the trip for many years and we would be happy to share our information on its many attractions.

NOTICE: FOR YOUNG NATURALISTS
Federation of Ontario Naturalists
Young Naturalists Junior and Senior Camps

The *Willow Beach Field Naturalists (WBFN)* plans to sponsor a young person, aged 10 to 12, to *The Federation of Ontario Naturalists (FON)* Young Naturalists Junior camp to be held July 21 – 28, 2001.

Also, a young person aged 13 – 15, will be funded for the Young Naturalists Senior camp to be held July 28 – August 11, 2001. This camp will be funded by the ***Ruth Mallory Wilson Scholarship*** administered by the FON on behalf of Willow Beach.

Applicants aged 10 to 15 years who have been recommended by the Laurie Lawson Outdoor Education Centre staff, the Ganaraska Forest Outdoor Education staff, and children (or grandchildren if living in Nothumberland County) of WBFN members are invited to apply. If you are interested in natural history and have a keen desire to learn more about nature as well as experience outdoor recreational activities with other young people of the same age from across the province, obtain and complete the appropriate application form and return to:

Carole Payne
WBFN Vice President
80 Brown Street
PORT HOPE, Ontario
L1A 3E3

Deadline for receipt of application: **May 6, 2001**

To Obtain an Application Contact

In Cobourg:

Janette Johnston
329 Ball Street
COBOURG, Ontario
K9A 3J1
Phone: 373-1432

In Port Hope:

Carole Payne
80 Brown Street
PORT HOPE, Ontario
L1A 3E3
Phone: 885-6135

About the Camp:

1. Young Naturalists Camp '01 – will be held at the Leslie M. Frost Natural Resources Centre, Minden, Ontario, an excellent location for a variety of wildlife and habitats.
The *Junior* campers will investigate the mysteries of a 200-year-old bog; do a pond study; learn about plants and wildlife, and participate in a conservation project. They will enjoy hiking, canoeing, swimming, crafts and campfires.
The *Senior* campers will explore Ontario's wild places by canoe. The campers will meet new friends and learn outdoor skills. After six days at the Leslie Frost Centre planning their canoe trip route, menu and equipment, learning paddling and canoe-rescue skills, campers will set off on a canoe trip through the lakes in the surrounding area. The pre-trip activities will include an overnight hiking adventure to test their skills.
2. The entire fee (\$595 for the Junior Camp and \$990 for the Senior camp) will be funded by *Willow Beach Field Naturalists* or by the *Ruth Mallory Wilson Scholarship fund*. This covers all meals from arrival to departure, accommodation, leadership, instructional material and off-site trips. It is the parent's responsibility to arrange travel to and from camp. Applications will be dealt with by a WBFN selection committee. One camper will be selected for each camp. Call 885-6135 if more information is required.

WILLOW BEACH FIELD NATURALISTS OWL OUTING TO AMHERST ISLAND

by Allyson Parker

On Saturday February 4, my Dad and I waited anxiously in the commuter parking lot at Highway 45 for the other owl watching enthusiasts to join us on the outing to Amherst Island. We had been monitoring the daily bird alerts from for the past month and knew we had a good chance of seeing at least 5 different species of owls on the island plus other birds of prey that had been seen over the past month. A sixth species of owl was also possible as several had been spotted in two different places that we would pass on our way. A recent posting also told about a juvenile Gyrfalcon that had been seen at the Dupont plant in Kingston. I was thinking of the number of life birds that I could add to my list when Bob Short's van pulled in at 8:00 a.m. Andy McLaughlin joined us in our car while Elizabeth Kellogg, Roger Frost, Bill Crowley and Alison Elliott travelled with Bob. It was a beautiful sunny but cold February day with the temperature hovering around -15°C . Alison said we should be able to make the 9:30 ferry across to the island and off we went.

We had a very uneventful birding trip to the ferry only seeing the usual crows and a few Blue Jays. We arrived at the ferry docks at 10:00 and headed around the island to the woods. On the way we saw several Red-tailed Hawks and a dark phase and a light phase Rough-legged Hawk. We reached the woods, parked, and started walking down the road towards the woods. We didn't know that we could drive down the road, but it was a good thing we didn't because we saw three Short-Eared Owls in a field on the way in. When we got to the path to the woods we saw a flock of chickadees who were eating seed someone had put on the snow. By then it was around -7 degrees, and I was glad I wore my snow pants.

The first owl we saw in the woods was a Northern Saw-whet Owl that a man showed us sleeping in a cedar tree beside the path. If he

hadn't shown it to us we could have walked right by it! He also told us that there were several Boreal Owls in the woods too.

As we continued down the path we saw people that were heading off on a side-trail to several cedar trees. There were two Saw-whet Owls in the trees! One was sitting quietly on a branch holding a mouse or vole in its talons. People could walk right into the cedar grove and take pictures. My dad tried to take a picture of it but his camera froze so Alison took the pictures. The other one was more active and was eating a mouse right in front of everyone. It ripped off pieces of the mouse and ate them, then after awhile seemed to think what the heck and gulped the rest of it down. For a moment only the tail and back legs were sticking out, and then it swallowed the rest of the mouse and wiped its beak on a branch. It was very cool but when I told my friend that she thought it was gross. I guess you have to like birds to be into that sort of thing.

Next we travelled down the path to the first of the two Boreal Owls that had been seen. It was in a large cedar tree on a branch that was over the path. It was half hidden from view and we didn't get a very good look at it. We continued down the trail and went off another side-trail into another cedar grove where we saw the second Boreal Owl. A bunch of people were taking pictures of it. This one was in the middle of the branch and we got a much better look. Alison got some good pictures. Then we went to a pine plantation where Roger said we would see some Long-eared Owls. We saw as many as 6 flying around, and saw two perched on different trees that stayed so we could look at them. The first was at the edge of a small clearing, and was beautiful in all its detail in the sun. The second one was at the edge of the plantation and its head was hidden by a branch. Everyone was getting hungry by then. I was starving as it was almost

one clock when we reached the cars. Alison said we would try and make the 2:00 pm ferry back to the mainland. We had to head all the way around the island to reach the dock. We took a wrong turn, ended up at a dead-end, but we made it just in time. We saw 1 American Kestrel male, 12 Rough-legged Hawks, 1 Red-breasted Merganser, and a Short-eared Owl sitting on a tree stump right in someone's front yard. We thought it was fake because it was just sitting there. On the way back on the ferry, I watched the ice go by. Alison and I thought the big chunks looked like giant pancakes. We went to Kingston to see if we could see the immature grey-phase Gyrfalcon that had been seen near a plant hunting the ducks in Hot Pond. We looked for a while but didn't find the Gyrfalcon. Then we headed to see a Northern Hawk-Owl that

had been seen a country road. We saw it sitting in a tree in a field. If I hadn't known what it was I would have just thought it was crow. We got good looks through scopes. We also saw a Pileated Woodpecker and a Starling. The total species count for the day was: American Kestrel male, Blue Jay, Short-eared Owl, Long-eared Owl, Boreal Owl, Saw-whet Owl, Northern Hawk-owl, Red-breasted Merganser, Rough-legged Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, Pileated Woodpecker, Starling, Snow Bunting, House Finch, Chickadee, Common Goldeneye, Downy Woodpecker, Gadwall, Mallard

RECENT SIGHTINGS
compiled by Ted McDonald

Horned Grebe	Mar. 15	2	off Lakeshore Rd., Cob.	LW
	Apr. 10	6	off Candlewick Woods	RF
Great Blue Heron	Mar. 20	2	n. of Colborne	JF, KB
Tundra Swan	Apr. 1	1	w. of Welcome	RuT, RT
Mute Swan	Feb. 14	3	off King St.W., Cob.	AC

The Curlew, Vc

April 2001

Sightings - cont'd.

Red-breasted Merganser	Mar. 3	140	off Lakeshore Rd., Cob.	LW
Turkey Vulture	Mar. 22	1	Garden Hill area	DW
	Apr. 8	2	Lakeshore Rd.W., PH	JB, NW
Northern Goshawk	Apr. 8	1	s-w of Osaca	EK
Greater Yellowlegs	Apr. 7	2	7 th Line, Hope. Twp.	RF
The Curlew,				
Great Black-backed Gull	Mar. 3	3	off Lakeshore Rd., Cob.	LW

Observers: DA=David Appleman; EB=E. JB=J. Burns; AC=A.

Acoma; KA=Kurt Bahr; KB=Kim Bratt; Chenevert; JF=Jo

April 2001