



## COMING EVENTS

•**Friday, March 22, 2002, 7:30 p.m.** - **Larry Lamb** from the University of Waterloo will present an illustrated talk on the **Prairies of Ontario**. Larry's interest in prairies started almost thirty years ago, and he has become one of our foremost experts on tall grass prairie. Until the land was ploughed under to produce crops, much of southwestern Ontario and the Rice Lake Plain was covered with tall grass prairie. Fortunately, a few small but significant remnants have endured. These prairies, with their six foot tall grass, have spectacular flora which most of us have not had the opportunity to see. Larry, our guide on this tour of Ontario prairies, has visited them all. Cobourg Public Library. *Note: a week early because of Good Friday on Friday, March 29.*

•**Saturday, April 6, 2002 - Outing - Trent University Wildlife Sanctuary**

Meet at Port Hope (Arby's) commuter parking lot at 8 a.m. to carpool up to Peterborough. Bring a lunch and wear boots as trails may be mucky or still slightly snow-covered. Call Alison Elliott at (905) 797-2584 for information or car-pooling.

•**Friday, April 26, 2002, 7:30 p.m.** - **James Kamstra** - Durham Field Naturalists. **Butterflies** -

Illustrated talk on these often colourful and attractive insects. Kawarth-Pine Ridge District Health Unit, Rose Glen Rd., Port Hope.

**Thursday Evening Outings in May.** Call Alison Elliott (905) 797-2584 for information and directions.

•**Thursday, May 2,** Ganaraska Millenium Conservation Area, 7 – 8:30 p.m. Meet in the visitor parking lot of the G.R.C.A. located at the northwest corner of Hwy 28 and Hwy 401.

•**Thursday, May 9,** Cobourg Waterfront, 7 – 8:30 p.m. Meet at the parking lot west of the yacht club.

•**Thursday, May 16,** Port Hope Waterfront Trail, 7 – 8:30 p.m. Meet at the parking lot at Gages Creek (east of Esco).

•**Thursday, May 23,** Garden Hill Conservation Area, 7 – 8:30 p.m. Meet at the Port Hope (Arby's) commuter lot to carpool.

•**Thursday, May 30,** Port Hope Conservation Area, 7 – 8:30 p.m. Meet in the parking lot just north of the 401 off Cavan St./Choate Rd.

## DOMBIND – SOME GOOD NEWS

The Ontario Court of Appeal has upheld the Ontario Ministry of the Environment's decision to eliminate the use of Dombind by October 31, 2002. The Court of Appeal has dismissed Norampac's legal challenge, which was the *fifth* attempt to overturn the MOE's orders.

### WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

Marguerite and Donald Doritty, Port Hope  
Barry King, Cobourg  
Brigitte Teleki and Jim Hermeling, RR#1 Baltimore

**A REMINDER** from the Treasurer that 2002 membership dues are now due. If you have not already done so, dues can be paid at the March meeting, or they can be forwarded by cheque to Willow Beach Field Naturalists, P.O. Box 421, Port Hope, ON L1A 3W4. Annual dues are \$20.00 per household, \$18.00 for singles, \$18.00 for senior couples, \$16.00 senior singles or students.

### Notes:

*by Susan Hamilton*

1. On Saturday, December 8, 2001, I noticed a flock of Pine Siskins landing on our frozen gold fish pond and bird bath. They were pecking at the ice. I quickly filled a saucepan with water and headed out the door to fill the bird bath. Several of the flock flew towards me and about eight landed on my sleeves and the rim of the pan and began to drink. They weren't perturbed in the least as I continued slowly to shuffle toward the bath and pour the water in. Immediately, about twenty landed and drank. Talk about thirsty! I'll keep that heated bird bath plugged in from now on!

2. On Friday, December 7, 2001, we watched a Hairy Woodpecker at our feeder. It repeated a performance we had seen last year. Picking up a sunflower seed from the ground, it crept up the post searching for a certain crack in the wood. It deposited the seed tightly and proceeded to pound it open. After enjoying that kernel, it backed down, and still holding on, reached out and picked up another sunflower seed. After the first few trips, it didn't have to search for the crack, but went straight to it. After many trips up and down, it hunkered down and had a snooze.

#### THE WILLOW BEACH FIELD NATURALISTS

Past Pres.	Bob Short .....	905-885-1420 .....	mb.short@sympatico.ca
President	Carole Payne .....	905-885-6135 .....	bookbind@eagle.ca
1st Vice-pres.	Bryan Baxter .....	905-372-6273 .....	bbaxter@eagle.ca
2nd Vice-pres.	Simone Mérey .....	905-885-8347 .....	archangel@nhb.com
Secretary	Petra Kennedy .....	905-349-2280 .....	pkennedy@town.cobourg.on.ca
Treasurer	Janette Johnston .....	905-373-1432 .....	jjohn@eagle.ca
FON Rep.	Joan Norris .....	905-372-9957 .....	d.j.norris@sympatico.ca
Curlew Ed.	Norma Wallace .....	905-885-5552	
	Elizabeth Kellogg .....	905-885-9615 .....	ekrf@eagle.ca

*The editor is most grateful to those who have contributed to this issue of the Curlew. Copy for the April 2002 issue should be received by March 31, 2002. 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."*

## 2001 BLUEBIRD REPORT – UPDATE #26

Snow! There were deep layers of it inherited from 2000 and, accompanied by cold temperatures and high winds, it lasted into the new year with scarcely a break before tapering off in early February. Winter, however, was not prepared to give up without a struggle, as my notebook states: “Mar. 12: Freezing rain changing to heavy rain; Mar. 12: -2° C. – cold, icy.” Then the turnabout began: “Mar. 15 – Beautiful day – sunny, cloudless, just like Spring – and thawing.” This positive trend continued with April’s arrival: “Snow finally disappeared following a few very warm days – no flooding, no noticeable runoff, just quietly sinking into the frost-free ground.” Nest box patrol began on Apr. 10 with Marilyn Taylor – and our first Bluebird nest with eggs (5) was found in a box in Project territory south of Harwood – heralding the 34<sup>th</sup> consecutive year of WBFN box operation! By mid-April, we were elated to record: “Influx of migrants into the area, with calls coming in from the outlying countryside – the Bluebirds were back!”

They wasted no time in dispersing into the various fields and, between Apr. 4<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> alone, eight sightings of active pairs at boxes had been reported by: G. Cameron, J. Neilsen, G. May, L. Chamberlain, T. Recoskie, B. MacRae, R. Cooper and L. Street. As the season advanced, it became evident that this was to be an excellent year for bluebirds: “Up to May 11, 2001 – 27 active nests with eggs (many with 5) were counted” – compared to 2000 – up to May 11 – only 9 nests with eggs (usually 4 per nest) – and it was June 30 before the 27 mark was reached for that year. Then, as sometimes happens in mid-May, a sudden, brief but unexpected weather change brought all activities to a temporary halt. “Days of rain, often strong winds but few sunny breaks – bluebird young in danger of exposure and/or starvation.” (This proved to be the case as all five weather-related casualties occurred at the stage when large, feathered young demand food constantly).”

Good times were soon to come, however. “Month of June – best nesting in several years.” and in July “Encouraging second brood successes.” From later July to early August: After several weeks of the hottest, driest, most humid

period to date, the later nestings seemed not be have been affected and, because of the large number of still active nests, box checking continued well into September.

Thanks to the help of willing volunteers, we were able to cope with the extended season. As in the past two years, the lion’s share of the work was done by these people – taking care of transportation, walking the box trails and (a welcome break for me) carrying the ladder. Without this concerted effort, the project would certainly not be as successful as it is today. This applies also to those members and others who make generous donations to the nestbox fund, the landowners as well who, since 1968, have allowed our group to walk their fields freely and put up bluebird boxes. Throughout the season, 17 participants made 82 checking trips (not counting Spark, my Corgi-mix, who made them all): Bill Henricks – 12; Louise Sofka – 11; Marilyn Taylor – 10 (Andrew subbed for one); Colin Jones – 10; Ron and Mary Ann Cooper – 8; Audrey Wilson – 8; Alan Croxall (Peterborough) – 4; Bob and Norah Sheppard – 4; Laura Manley – 4; Louise Baxter – 3; John Lyons – 2; Barbara Evans, Barbara Brown, Linda Reidt, Bill Crowley and Linda Huggins – 1 each. Our hired handyman, Les Chamberlain, also qualified as a volunteer, donating overtime hours to the project and providing the paper, free of charge, for photocopying 60 copies of the #25 Bluebird Report – available for those who are interested but do not receive the *Curlew*. Visitors accompanying drivers on trips – Sheila Joel, Cambridge; Bob and Diane Fisher, Barb Pellow, Cobourg; and from Toronto – Diane and Kevin Doran and Jane Irvine – all very enthusiastic birders.

June 11 – Annual Bluebird-Whip-poor-will Walk. Breaking with tradition, the location was changed to a new farm – large open fields of pastureland, dotted with nine bluebird boxes and bordered by mature oaks – excellent bird habitat. The 35 walkers, however, soon became aware of the abundance of varied and colourful wildflowers along the trails – common species blended with a number of unusual plants that can be expected only in areas such as this. At once, it

became obvious that, for this walk at least, the focus was on the vegetation.

We saw bluebirds, of course, but the date had come between the first and second broods so there was less feeding activity at the boxes than usual. Other birds included American Robin, Eastern Kingbird, Tree and Barn Swallows, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, American Crow and Field Sparrow. Among the plants in flower were: Sheep Sorrel, Hairy Beardtongue, Field and Upright Bindweed, Field Anemone, Slender Stitchwort, Philadelphia and Daisy Fleabane, Yellow and Orange Hawkweed, Tower Mustard, Corn Gromwell, Common and Bulbous Buttercup, Rough-fruited, Silvery and Common Cinquefoil, Canada Mayflower, Nodding Thistle, False Solomon's Seal, Black Swallowwort, Yellow Bedstraw, Bladder Campion, Viper's Bugloss and Orange Milkweed.

A group of fourteen drove on to the usual Whip-poor-will stop, adding to the bird list: Indigo Bunting, Hermit Thrush, Common Nighthawk, Whip-poor-will (1<sup>st</sup> heard at 9:14), American Woodcock, Ovenbird and Veery.

On June 21, a small but keenly interested group from the flower branch of a University Women's Club (including some husbands), also came to study and enjoy the flora found on the new farm.

### **Side Interests – a curious mix:**

**Snakes:** July 24, with Les Chamberlain, on a back road we surprised an Eastern Hog-nosed Snake making its way across the gravel. At once it stopped, quickly coiled and with neck inflated, watched us intently until after several minutes, it slowly unwound and glided off into the roadside ditch and out of our sight.

**Bats:** Each year, we record sighting of Little Brown Bats. In 2001, there were two: August 22 – one curled up under the false floor of one box and, on August 27, the second, hanging upside-down by one claw to the back of the door

in another.

**Ants:** Occasionally, while cleaning out boxes between nestings, new, unexpected tenants – such as ants – might be found. On July 10, I was abruptly reminded of this fact as I opened #178, reached inside and removed the old nest. Instantly, I felt a familiar sensation and quickly withdrew my hand – too late! Already a dark coating was covering the skin like a glove and soon scores of ants could be seen (or felt) over my sleeves, down my neck, in shirt pockets, hat, equipment bag – everywhere, it seemed. Then I remembered a similar experience – on June 14, 2000 – and in #178!

**“Bugs”:** Have you met the “Mealy Bugs”? I have. This summer I visited them in their home - hundreds of them – frantically writhing about in a large, deep tray half filled with bran and oatmeal. They were an inch or more in length, fat and bristly with greyish skin showing through – and had a fifteen-cents-a-worm price tag. However, the species does have an important part to play – serving as vital survival food for early spring migrants at a very crucial time if, upon arrival at their nesting grounds, periods of harsh weather should await them. The staff at Viking Nursery near Harwood were trying an experiment. By providing ready access to a constant supply of these “bugs” the parent bird might find relief in the demanding feeding schedule of a young bluebird family in a nearby nestbox. The result? From the first bite it was obvious that the birds had discovered Utopia! The word spread quickly and friends moved in to share the wealth – why migrate! For week, Mealy Bugs were the order of the day, devoured by the dozen until, as gathering time came for southbound flocks, this gourmet fare was wisely withdrawn to discourage the birds from attempting to over-winter in this spot (and prevent the Nielsens from going bankrupt?).

*This is a reminder that Hazel Bird will be continuing the WBFN Eastern Bluebird project in the 2002. She welcomes the participation of volunteers to assist with driving and nest box checks. If you are interested in helping with this, please call Hazel at 905-342-5218*

### FINANCIAL STATEMENT FOR 2001

Balance forward from December 31, 2000		\$1,385.86
<b>Receipts:</b>		
Donations:		
L. Reidt	\$25.00	
N. Wallace	\$30.00	
A. Johnstone	\$25.00	
C. & M. Comerford	\$30.00	
Signe Bebee	\$25.00	
Norma E.A. Lee	\$50.00*	
H. Hunt	\$15.00	
Life Membership – H.B.	<u>\$18.00</u>	
Total Receipts		\$218.00
<b>Expenses:</b>		
Labour – digging, moving, repairing boxes, numerous “catch-up” checks, gas	<u>\$395.00</u>	
Total Expenses		<u>\$395.00</u>
Excess expenses over receipts		<u>(\$ 177.00)</u>
<b>Balance on hand December 31, 2001</b>		<b>\$1,208.86</b>

\*in memory of Royal Lee

<b>STATISTICS:</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2000</b>
First bluebird sighting – G. Bird	Mar.22	
My first bluebird sighting	Apr. 7	Mar. 25
First egg found	Apr. 19	Apr. 28
First young found	May 10	May 17
First nest fledged	May 30	May 30
No. of nesting starts	63	37
Non-successes	14	7
No. of nests fledged	49	30
No. of checking rounds	8+	8+
Nests with 6 eggs	1	1
Nests with white eggs	1	1
Last bluebird sighting – J. Neilsen	Oct. 31	
Presumed egg or young losses: 14. Weather – 5; Unknown – 4 (eggs or young abandoned); House Sparrow – 3 (+ adult male bluebird killed in one); House Wren – 1. A single malformed egg in one box: length 1 1/8” and diameter at widest point less than 1/2”, tapering gradually to a small, rounded end. It did not hatch.		
*During the season, 10 boxes had to be removed because of Scots Pine overgrowth, gravel pit expansion, soybean farming and this year, more acres were lost with the widening of a County road. One box was added on a new site.		

**Bluebird Observations:**  
Late summer and fall: all in Harwood area – Sept. 30, small flock, Colin Jones; mid-Sept., pair, D. Bird; throughout September, the annual gathering of about 8 regularly on lawn and driveway, J. Harvey; Oct. 2, pair at nest box, L. Reidt; Sept.-Oct., numerous sightings or pairs and larger flocks in small fruit trees, at feeder and lawn, J. Neilsen; Oct. 30, flock of 10 feeding from the ground and overhead wires, R. Bird.

**Bluebird sightings reported from outlying areas:**  
(Several Observers) – Castleton, Baltimore, Bewdley. At Roseneath Landing, D. Kerby reported 2 females attacking their south-facing windows; also R. and M. Adams and others again reported several small groups overwintering. Nests fledged – J. Lyons, Baltimore; B. Evans, Camborne, L. Bird, Castleton (also 2 bluebirds seen Sept. 27. Unsuccessful nestings – 4,

## DISEASED BIRDS AT FEEDERS

by Elizabeth Kellogg

In the past few weeks, I have been contacted by two people in Ward 2 of Port Hope who were alarmed to find dead birds at their bird feeders. In both cases, the affected birds were Common Redpolls. Although we did not collect specimens to send away for analysis, the culprit was probably Salmonellosis. This is a bacterial disease caused by a family of bacteria with the genus name *Salmonella*.

Infected birds shed the bacteria in their droppings. The disease passes to other birds when they eat contaminated seed. Outbreaks of disease in feeder birds are somewhat more common in a warm winter such as we have just experienced. In a cold winter, sick birds do not live long and therefore have less opportunity to pass along bacteria.

If you should find dead birds around your feeder, the bodies should be disposed of very carefully. *Salmonella* can be passed to other warm-blooded animals including humans. After first placing your hand inside a plastic bag, pick up the dead birds and either bury them well or, if you have facilities, burn them. Take down all feeders and discard any remaining feed. Clean the feeders well in a 10% bleach solution (1 part household chlorine bleach to 9 parts of water.). Leave the feeders down for about two weeks. As well as you can, clean up seed hulls from underneath the feeding area with a shovel, rake and/or broom. Exercise great care in all of this so as not to infect yourself – i.e. wash your hand thoroughly after handling carcasses, feeders or seed debris; wash the feeders in a pail or laundry tub (not your kitchen sink). After two weeks, it should be safe to the birds to re-erect your feeders if you wish.

There are several precautions which feeder operators can take to reduce the incidence of disease around a feeder.

**Give them space** – Avoid crowding by providing ample feeder space. Lots of birds using a single feeder looks wonderful, but crowding is a key factor in spreading disease. If birds have to jostle each other to reach the food, they are crowded. This crowding also creates stress which may make birds more vulnerable to disease.

**Clean up wastes** – Keep the feeder area clean of waste food and droppings.

**Make feeders safe** – Provide safe feeders without sharp points or edges. Even small scratches and cuts will allow bacteria and viruses to enter otherwise healthy birds.

**Keep feeders clean** – Clean and disinfect feeders regularly. Use one part of liquid chlorine household bleach in nine parts of tepid water (a 10 per cent solution) to disinfect. Make enough solution to immerse an empty, cleaned feeder completely for two or three minutes. Allow to air dry. Once or twice a month should do, but weekly would help more if you notice sick birds at your feeders.

**Use good food** – Discard any food that smells musty, is wet, looks moldy or has fungus growing on it. Disinfect any storage container that holds spoiled food and the scoop used to fill feeders from it.

**Prevent contamination** – Keep rodents out of stored food. Mice can carry and spread some bird diseases without being affected themselves.

**Act early** – Don't wait to act until you see sick or dead birds. With good prevention you'll seldom find sick or dead birds at your feeders.

**Spread the word** – Encourage your neighbours who feed birds to follow the same precautions. Birds normally move among feeders and can spread diseases as they go. The safest birdfeeders will be those in communities where neighbours cooperate with equal concern for the birds.

*Prepared with information obtained from the web site of the  
National Wildlife Health Center, USGS, [www.nwhc.usgs.gov/](http://www.nwhc.usgs.gov/)*

## RECENT SIGHTINGS

*compiled by Ted McDonald*

Horned Grebe	Feb. 10	4	off Lakeshore Rd., Cob.	LW
Great Blue Heron	Mar. 2	1	Garden Hill	RF
Tundra Swan	Feb. 26	26	Cobourg Harbour	CEG
	Feb. 28	7	over Garden Hill	DW
Mute Swan	Feb. 16	1	off Lake St., PH	EK, RF
Snow Goose	Feb. 28	4	Cobourg Harbour	CEG
Wood Duck	Feb. 18, 24	1 f	D'Arcy St. & Cobourg Harbour	MB
	Feb. 24	1 f.	off Henry St., Cob.	BL

Sightings - cont'd.

Common Raven	Feb 9	1	Roseneath Landing	DS
Red-breasted Nuthatch	Feb 27	1	Port Britain feeder	AKS
White-breasted Nuthatch	Feb 27	3	Port Britain feeder	AKS
Horned Lark	Feb 9	2	Marsh Rd PH	AKS
Golden-crowned Kinglet	Feb 10	1	Lakeshore Rd PH	LW
American Robin	Feb 15	1	Ontario St & Martha PH	KB
	Feb 19	35	Wesleville	MB
	Feb 25	1	Victoria Park Cob	BL
Bohemian Waxwing	Jan 20	30	Hwy 2 e of Cob	LW
	Feb 8	25+	Roseneath Landing	DS
	Feb 9	60	centre of Grafton	MB
	Feb 15	40	Sylvan Glen	SM
	Feb 23	51	Cobourg area	CEG
	Mar 2	100	Port Hope Conservation Area	RF
Cedar Waxwing	Feb 8	15+	Roseneath Landing	DS
	Feb 19	25	Wesleville	MB
Northern Shrike	Feb 15	3	Grafton area	CEG
Snow Bunting	Jan 20	500	e of Grafton	LW
Red-winged Blackbird	Feb 25	50+	Colborne	MB
	Feb 25	2	Cranberry Rd PH	EK
	Feb 25	1	Munroe St Cob	RF
	Feb 26	6	n of Colborne	JF KB
	Feb 27	1	Choate Rd PH	MH
	Mar 2	1	Ontario St Cob	AEW
	Mar 2	100	Morrish Church Rd	RF EK
Common Grackle	Feb 24	1	Hwy 401 & Division St Cob	MB
	Feb 24	2	Baltimore	SH
	Feb 28	1	Choate Rd PH	MH
Brown-headed Cowbird	Feb 26	25	Garden Hill	DW
	Mar 2	10	Morrish Church Rd	RF EK
Purple Finch	Feb 26	1	n of Colborne	JF KB
White-winged Crossbill	Feb 10	3	Deblaquire St PH	GMCD
Common Redpoll	Feb 18-25	25	Baltimore	SH
Pine Siskin	Feb 15	2	Durham St PH	EK
	Feb 18-25	1	Baltimore	SH
	Mar 3	3	Durham St PH	EK
Beaver	Feb 26	2	n of Colborne building a dam	AB
Muskrat	Feb 26	2	n of Colborne	JF KB AB
Red Squirrel	Feb 27	2	Port Britain	AKS
Raccoon	Feb 18	1	Brand Rd PH	AKS
	Mar 2	1	Ontario St Cob	AEW
Garter Snake	Feb 2	1	Camborne	RF
Ladybugs	Jan 1-29	150	Camborne	RF
	Feb 10	1	Young St PH	NW
	Feb 11	15	n of Colborne	KB
Woolly Bear Caterpillar	Jan. 1-29	1	Camborne	BE

**Observers:** MB=Margaret Bain; HB=Hazel Bird; AB=Arne Braat; KB=Kim Braat; KB=Kelly Brooking; GMCD=Geoff Dale; BE=Barbara Evans; JF=Jo Foster; RF=Roger Frost; CEG=Clive Goodwin; SH=Susan Hamilton; MH=Marguerite Huggins; EK=Elizabeth Kellogg; BL=William Logan; NL=N. Logan; EL=Elsie Lowry; LL=Lynford Lowry; SM=Simone Mèrey; LS=Louise Schmidt; AKS=A.K. Sculthorpe; IS=Ian Sculthorpe; DS=Dave Shirley NW=Norma Wallace; DW=Doug Watkins; LW=Lori Wensley; AEW=Audrey Wilson;