



Since 1923

# TORONTO FIELD NATURALIST

Number 637 September 2018



Monarch Butterfly on White Milkweed (*Asclepias variegata*). Photo: Jennifer Smith

## REGULARS

About TFN	4
Children's Corner	11
Coming Events	14
Extracts from Outings Reports	7
Keeping In Touch	14
Monthly Meetings Notice	6
Monthly Meeting Report	5
President's Report	2
TFN Outings	3
Weather (This Time Last Year)	9

## FEATURES

TFN Outreach Program	6
Toronto Vines: Gourd Family	7
Q&A: Hawk Watching	8
TFN Junior Naturalists Program	10
The Connected Naturalist: PlantSnap	10
Bird News	12

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Many thanks to all those who renewed their 2018/19 TFN memberships, a warm welcome to all new members, and a gentle reminder that it is not too late to renew if it slipped your mind. I hope you have navigated the new membership fee structure without too much trouble. I

would like to express my sincere thanks again to the member whose anonymous donation ensured that we could keep the print surcharge for the printed newsletter to a minimum, and to all those who generously contributed to the call for matching funds. I, for one, will continue to look forward to finding my printed newsletter in the letterbox every month.

TFN has always viewed our commitment to connecting youth with nature as one of our most important missions, but we haven't always been successful in this respect. This is changing for the better. Last year we saw the launching of a Junior Naturalists page on our website: <http://torontofieldnaturalists.org/kids>. Now, thanks principally to the efforts of TFN Environment Committee chair Anne Purvis and invaluable input from Jason Ramsay-Brown, TFN has a Junior Naturalists events program (see page 10 for details). This will start on September 8 with Margaret McRae, Anne Purvis and Kayoko Smith demonstrating tagging monarch butterflies and talking about pollinators and other insects at the Scadding Cabin on the CNE grounds.

On July 12 the Parks and Environment Committee presented its Draft Biodiversity Strategy of Toronto at City Hall: <https://goo.gl/NDdN5L>. It was a pleasure to hear TFN member Paula Davies make a compelling deputation,

drafted by her and board member Nancy Dengler, in defence of Environmentally Significant Areas and Community Stewardship Programs, among other things. The deputation was well-received by the committee, who were refreshingly enthusiastic about the strategy in

general. With the City's Ravine Strategy, launched last year, indications are that the City is undergoing a fundamental sea change in balancing its priorities regarding the health and protection of our natural spaces. We will have to wait to see if these strategies translate into policies backed by funding and political will.

And talking about Toronto's natural spaces, they are about to be expanded by about 200 acres! On Monday, June 18 TFN members Elizabeth Block, Jane Cluver, Bob Kortright, Jason Ramsay-Brown, Alex Wellington and her husband Peter, and I were treated to a private tour by Parks, Forestry and Recreation specialist Karen Sun of what

is called, for the present, Beare Road Landfill. This landfill, closed since 1983, lies east of Rouge National Urban Park. As Karen explained during our tour, between downpours, the landfill is being repurposed as an urban park. Although the inevitable multi-use trails will be installed throughout, the park will offer invaluable habitat protection. It already provides protection for several species at risk, including bobolinks and milk snakes. Work is already underway removing the worst of vegetative invasive species, which abound, and installing native species. Details of the master plan can be found at <https://goo.gl/C7Pqic>

Charles Bruce-Thompson  
president@torontofieldnaturalists.org



Just before a deluge at Beare Hill, on June 18. Photo: Charles Bruce-Thompson

### TFN OUTINGS LEADER TRAINING

Are you a new or aspiring TFN walk leader? If so, we encourage you to join a special walk in Taylor Creek Park on September 23 to receive training and encouragement from three of our experienced leaders. See details in the Outings list on page 4.



TFN outing at Cottonwood Flats. Photo: Anne Powell

## TFN OUTINGS

- TFN events are conducted by unpaid volunteers.
  - TFN assumes no responsibility for injuries sustained by anyone participating in our activities.
  - Children and visitors are welcome at all TFN events. Children must be accompanied by an adult.
  - If you plan to bring children in a stroller, be aware that there may be steps or other unsuitable terrain.
  - Please do not bring pets.
  - To get to outings on time, check TTC routes and schedules ([www.ttc.ca](http://www.ttc.ca) or 416-393-4636).
- Check for any schedule disruptions on weekends and allow extra time if necessary.**
- Outings go rain or shine: check the weather by calling 416-661-0123 so you will know what to wear.
  - Wear appropriate footwear for walking on trails which may be muddy, steep or uneven.
  - *Please thoroughly clean your footwear before each outing to avoid spreading invasive seeds.*

*The Toronto Field Naturalists wish to acknowledge this land through which we walk. For thousands of years it has been the traditional land of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and most recently, the Mississauga of the Credit River. Today it is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to be on this land.*

### Share your favourite walk photos on social media, hashtag #TFNWalk.

- Sat  
Sept 1  
10:00 am **LESLIE STREET SPIT – Nature Walk**  
**Leader: Charles Bruce-Thompson.** Meet at the foot of Leslie St at Unwin Ave for a circular walk at least as far as the banding station (about 3 hrs). You can drop out at any point and head back along the road to the park entrance. Washrooms and parking available. Bring binoculars and lunch if you intend to stay for the entire walk. Take #83 bus from Donlands subway station to Commissioners St and Leslie St. Flat surfaces. Some narrow footpaths.
- Mon  
Sept 3  
1:30 pm **HUMBER RIVER – Nature Walk**  
**Leader: Mary Taylor.** Meet at Old Mill subway station for a walk along the east side of the Humber ending at Jane St and St Mark's Rd, about 5 minutes by bus from Jane subway.
- Wed  
Sept 5  
10:00 am **WEEDS Part 4**  
**Leader: Miles Hearn.** Meet outside Pape subway station for a circular walk on mostly flat terrain. This is the last of four walks looking for plants that get around on their own, struggle for light, nutrients and water and thrive without our direct intervention (sometimes called weeds). Up to 2½ hours. Bring binoculars and a field guide if you wish.
- Sat  
Sept 8  
10:00 am **TODMORDEN MILLS AND THE LOWER DON – Nature Walk**  
**Leader: Vivienne Denton.** Meet at Broadview subway station. We will walk north through back streets to Todmorden Mills Wildflower Preserve, around the preserve observing wildlife, and then down the Don Valley to Corktown Common.
- Tues  
Sept 11  
10:00 am **PROSPECT CEMETERY – Trees**  
**Leader: Jeff McMann.** Meet at the entrance at St Clair Ave W near Lansdowne Ave for a circular walk.
- Sat  
Sept 15  
1:30 pm **WARDS ISLAND – Nature Walk**  
**Leader: Jenny Bull.** Take the 1:45 ferry to Wards Island. Arrive in time to queue for ticket or buy ticket in advance online. Leader will meet you at 1:55 at Wards dock. Washrooms available. Walk will end at Wards dock for 4 pm ferry.
- Sun  
Sept 16  
2:00 pm **U of T SCARBOROUGH COLLEGE – Lost Rivers Urban Walk**  
**Leader: Prof Carl Mitchell.** Meet at the U of T Scarborough bus loop (#95E from York Mills subway station) to explore urban water at UTSC including bioswales that capture rainwater at the bus loop and parking lot. Lost Rivers has not previously visited this part of Highland Creek. A joint outing with Toronto Green Community.
- Thurs  
Sept 20  
10:00 am **SCARBOROUGH SHORE, GUILD INN TO EAST POINT PARK – Nature Walk**  
**Leader: Linda McCaffrey.** Meet at the parking lot at the Guild Inn for a circular walk on mostly unpaved and uneven surfaces, flat with some steep slopes and stairs. We will descend through a ravine to the lakeshore and proceed east to East Point Park where we will return to the top of the bluffs and back to the Guild Inn. Washrooms at end of walk.

- Sat  
Sept 22  
10:00 am **ROWNTREE MILLS PARK – Nature Walk**  
**Leader: Jim Graham.** Meet in the south parking lot (on Islington Ave just north of Finch Ave W). A 2-hr meander on flat ground (paved and grass) exploring the trees of this large park with some history thrown in. Washrooms at halfway mark. It has been at least 10 years since TFN walked in this park.
- Sun  
Sept 23  
1:30 pm **TAYLOR CREEK PARK – Walk Leader Training**  
**Leaders: Jason Ramsay-Brown, Bob Kortright and Nancy Dengler.** Are you a new TFN walk leader or considering volunteering as one? Please join Nancy, Bob and Jason as they share their tips and experiences on a 5-km walk through sites of natural and historic interest in Taylor Creek Park. Learn more about choosing a route, selecting points of interest, walk pacing, accessibility and trail safety, how to deal with challenging situations, and much more. Your questions are encouraged so come equipped with as many as you like! Meet at Cullen Bryant Park, 50 Barbara Cres. Walk will end just north of Victoria Park subway station. Some stairs, steep slopes and potentially wet trails. Bring water and binoculars (if you have them).
- Wed  
Sept 26  
10:30 am **MIMICO CREEK IN TOM RILEY PARK, ETOBICOKE – Natural and Human History**  
**Leader: Denise Harris (TFN Member and Etobicoke Historical Society Historian).** Meet on the southeast corner of Islington Ave and Dundas St W, two blocks north of Islington subway station, beside Montgomery's Inn Museum. Much of Mimico Creek is hidden from view by industrial parks, subdivisions and cement channelization, but on this 2-hr circular walk we will explore one of the creek's most accessible and serene sections. Stories of the area's flora, fauna, ecology, geology, Indigenous peoples, European settlement and local history will reveal the changes that have taken place, especially over the past 200 years. The walk will be primarily on flat paved surfaces with a few grassy sections. Washrooms available at two locations on the walk.
- Sat  
Sept 29  
1:30 pm **EGLINTON FLATS AND TOPHAM POND – Nature Walk**  
**Leaders: Margaret Meredith and Peter Iveson.** Meet at the bus stop at the southeast corner of Eglinton Ave W and Jane St (bus from Jane subway station). We will observe plant life and waterfowl. Walk will end at a coffee shop at Eglinton Ave W and Weston Rd. Washrooms should be available.
- Sun  
Sept 30  
1:30 pm **HUMBER ARBORETUM – Nature Walk**  
**Leader: Lynn Smart.** Meet at the entrance to the arboretum across from parking lot #1 where parking is free on weekends. TTC riders should walk along the ring road past the residences to the arboretum at the back of the property. Washrooms available.

TFN is a charitable, non-profit organization.

#### MISSION STATEMENT:

Toronto Field Naturalists connects people with nature in the Toronto area. We help people understand, enjoy, and protect Toronto's green spaces and the species that inhabit them.

#### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

President & Nature Reserves	Charles Bruce-Thompson
Past-President & Lectures	Nancy Dengler
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**The office is open 9:30 am to noon on Fridays.**

#### NEWSLETTER

*Toronto Field Naturalist* is published by TFN monthly, September to December and February to May. Views expressed in the Newsletter are not necessarily those of the editor or Toronto Field Naturalists. The Newsletter is printed on 100% recycled paper. ISSN 0820-636X

#### EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

Kathleen Brooks, Jenny Bull, Vivienne Denton, Karin Fawthrop, Nancy Fredenburg, Elisabeth Gladstone, Susan Grimby, Zunaïd Khan, Lynn Miller, Toshi Oikawa, Jennifer Smith, Wendy Rothwell (editor).

Printing & mailing: Digital Edge Printing & Media Services

#### MEMBERSHIP FEES

Youth (under 26)	Free
Senior Single (65+)	\$30
Single	\$40
Senior Family (2 adults 65+)	\$40
Family	\$50

No HST. All members with email address receive digital newsletters. There is a surcharge of \$15 for those who prefer a printed mailed newsletter.

Tax receipts issued for donations.

*TFN does not give out its membership list.*

## MONTHLY MEETING REPORT

### Extreme Forces of Nature

May 6, 2018

George Kourounis, Explorer-in-Residence,  
Canadian Geographic Society

Inspired by his childhood heroes, Jacques Cousteau and Indiana Jones, George Kourounis decided early on that he wanted to explore the world and experience as many kinds of extreme conditions as possible. He started chasing tornadoes and other storms over 20 years ago and now travels the globe, documenting extraordinary sights and promoting scientific research and public outreach.

North America provides the best conditions for twister development and over 75% of the world's tornadoes occur here. Not every tornado reveals a condensation funnel in the rotating column of air, but George showed us some spectacular examples as seen from up close.

George is interested in doing dangerous things as safely as possible. When chasing the Category 5 hurricane Katrina, he knew that the winds would be strongest over its right front (northeast) quadrant, so he traveled to Gulfport, Mississippi and the relative safety of a concrete and steel car park to video the high seas, strong winds and objects flying through the air.

He donned a heat-resistant space suit to descend into a crater containing an erupting lava lake on Ambryn Island, Vanuatu. This involved rappelling 400 meters down the inner wall of the crater and photographing the nearby actively erupting lava. Temperatures were so hot that his camera literally melted. Sulphur dioxide emitted by the lava was converted to sulphuric acid, so his equipment had to be acid-resistant as well.

George also needed his heat-resistant gear to enter the Naica Crystal Cave, found in a silver and lead mine in Chihuahua, Mexico. Temperatures inside the cave reach 52°C. Naica Cave is similar to a geode with the inner space lined by giant crystals of selenite (gypsum), some as long as 5 meters. Recently, the mine experienced a flash flood, so the crystal cave is under water again, presumably growing its crystals as it has done for the last 500,000 years.

More recently, George travelled to Darvaza, Turkmenistan, a natural gas drilling site where a rig collapsed into a sinkhole which had started leaking methane. The gas was intentionally set on fire in 1971 and has been burning ever since. NASA was interested in the hot, methane-rich atmosphere as a place to look for bacteria that could survive these conditions. Using his specially-equipped space suit, George descended into the sinkhole to measure ground temperatures (400°C) and sample the substrate for bacteria. Bacteria were found – good examples of “extremophiles” and similar to those found in deep sea vents and hot springs that rely on chemosynthesis for nutrition.

George is the host and co-creator of the TV show “Angry Planet” and recently received the Stefansson Medal from the

Explorers Club for “outstanding contributions to science and to public education by documenting extreme environments through film making.” See [www.facebook.com/ExplorerGeorgeKourounis/](http://www.facebook.com/ExplorerGeorgeKourounis/)

Nancy Dengler

Ed: George Kourounis kindly stepped in when the scheduled speaker wasn't able to attend.



Chasing tornadoes, Oklahoma



### Good news!

Toronto City Council has approved a plan to save the 350-year-old oak tree which was the focus of Edith George's lecture at our February meeting. See report in our March newsletter.

For more information visit: <https://goo.gl/LGQPTV>

## TFN OUTREACH PROGRAM

TFN holds many outreach events throughout the year. We could participate in more and are limited only by the number of volunteers we can recruit to lead walks and staff TFN tables. So I would like to acknowledge all those who have given their time, energy and expertise over the past year at TFN's outreach events.

The year's events included:

- Toronto Botanical Garden (TBG) Ravine Symposium in November,
- TBG Master Gardeners Technical Update at TBG in January,
- Get the Jump on Spring in February also at the TBG,
- Scarborough Seedy Saturday and Green Fair in March,
- University of Toronto Scarborough Campus Invasive Species Awareness Day and Taylor Creek Park cleanup in April,
- spring bird festivals at Tommy Thompson Park and Colonel Sam Smith Park in May,
- Leslieville Tree Festival in June,
- Tommy Thompson Park Butterfly Festival in August
- Morningside Park Salmon Festival in September.

TFN also led some outreach walks for groups sponsored by Park People, including Taylor Creek, Rowntree Mills Park, Earl Bales Park, and Jane and Falstaff area, with more to follow in the fall.

TFN volunteers who represented us this year included: Charles Chaffey, Nancy Dengler, Vivienne Denton, Sally Evans, Karin Fawthrop, Claudius Fehr, Elisabeth Gladstone, Rachel Gottesman, Jim Graham, Peter Heinz, Joyce Johnson, Bob Kortright, Anne Leon, Linda McCaffrey, Margaret McRae, Anne and Jim Purvis, Jason Ramsay-Brown, Jennifer Smith, Mary Taylor, Laura Thompson, Fannie Wong and Charles Bruce-Thompson.



Promoting TFN at the Butterfly Festival, Tommy Thompson Park in August. Photo: Jason Ramsay-Brown

My apologies to anyone whose name I may have missed. Thanks are also due to Stephen Kamnitzer, who coordinated all these events, including handling registrations, recruiting volunteers, and transporting display materials until Jennifer Smith took over these responsibilities earlier in the year. Jennifer also kindly stores our display materials in her home.

The most recent addition to our display materials was donated by Janice Palmer, who passed on to us materials formerly used by the Taskforce to Bring Back the Don. These include a marvellous series of invasive species images which reached us just in time for our participation in the U of T Invasive Species Awareness Day.

Charles Bruce-Thompson

### TFN MEETING .....VISTORS WELCOME

Sunday, September 9, 2.30 pm (Social, 2 pm)

### Raccoons of the GTA: Are we making a smarter raccoon?

**Speaker:** *Suzanne MacDonald*, Professor of Psychology, York University, will discuss her research findings on the behaviour, ecology and evolution of Toronto's raccoons.

Emmanuel College, Room 001, 75 Queen's Park Cres E. Just south of Museum subway station exit, east side of Queen's Park. Accessible entrance second door south on Queen's Park. Elevator inside to the right. Room 001 is one floor below street level. **For information:** call 416-593-2656 up to noon on the Friday preceding the lecture.

[Share your thoughts about this lecture on social media, hashtag #TFNTalk](#)

Upcoming lecture: Oct 14. The 2017 Ashbridge's Bay Flood: Gulls and Shorebirds.  
Speaker Jean Iron

## TORONTO VINES: GOURD FAMILY

Toronto has two native vine species belonging to the Cucurbitaceae (gourd family). This family includes about 120 genera and 750 to 850 species. Some species such as melons, pumpkins, squashes and zucchini are important food crops. Most species in this family are tropical with comparatively few in temperate regions.

The locally occurring gourd family members are *Echinocystis lobata* (wild cucumber), common here, and *Sicyos angulatus* (angled bur-cucumber) which the TFN's *Vascular Plants of Metropolitan Toronto* (1994, 2nd ed.) reported as uncommon. It was recorded in the Humber valley, at Wilket Creek and the West Don, in High Park and "downtown." *Echinocystis* comes from the Greek *echinos* (hedgehog) and *kustis* (bladder) and refers to its fruits. *Sicyos* comes from the Greek *sikos* (cucumber).

Typical habitats for both species are moist forest and waste areas. Vines of both species can be as much as 6 m long. Wild cucumber flowers, 8 to 16 mm wide, form an erect panicle of male flowers with a solitary female flower. Bur-cucumber flowers, 8 to 10 mm across, form "head-like clusters of female flowers and racemes of male flowers" (*The ROM Field Guide to Wildflowers of Ontario*, 2004). Wild cucumber can bloom any time from June to August, bur-cucumber from June to October.

In Ontario both range from the Georgian Bay ecoregion to the U.S. border. Wild cucumber was also recorded north and west of Lake Superior. Full ranges for wild cucumber, according to the U.S. Dept of Agriculture database, are all Canadian provinces except Newfoundland, and most of the U.S. For bur-cucumber the full range is Ontario, Quebec and most of the eastern half of the U.S.

Bur-cucumber may still be in bloom when you receive this newsletter. Something to look for in late September visits to our natural world?

Article and photos: Peter Money

Above: Wild cucumber (*Echinocystis lobata*);  
Below: Bur-cucumber (*Sicyos angulatus*)



## EXTRACTS FROM OUTINGS LEADERS' REPORTS

**Looking for White-tailed Deer in Warden Woods Park, Apr 17. Leader: Vivienne Denton.** It was pleasant and calm after recent ice and wind storms. We saw no deer, though we did come across deer tracks in the ice. The most interesting birds were migrating fox sparrows. Other spring arrivals included golden-crowned kinglet and phoebe.

**Taylor Creek Park Clean-up, Apr 21. Leaders: Anne Purvis, Paul Abell, Lynn Miller and Margaret McRae.** This Earth Day event, jointly sponsored by Friends of Taylor Creek, TFN and Councillor Janet Davis, was a roaring success. People arriving in small groups and large – families, Scout troupes and neighbours – were assigned a spot to work on and given gloves and bags. It was thrilling later in the day to see bags of garbage lining the trail. After a hotdog and marshmallow cookout at Halden Street fire pit, Anne and Margaret led

a walk along the creek and up on the Hydro cut with a group of teenagers and their sponsoring teacher from the Monarch Park Collegiate Ecoclub. We saw winter birds and early migrants, and talked about mosses, buds and spring ephemerals.

**German Mills Creek, Apr 22. Leader: Theresa Moore.** We retrieved a great deal of garbage from the roadside leading to the park and smaller amounts inside the park. We saw the resident great blue heron, a red-tailed hawk, kingfishers and cardinals. A goose appeared to be nesting at the edge of the golf course pond. Spring migrants included song sparrow, tree swallows at a nest box and a soaring turkey vulture. The highlight was a good sighting of a pileated woodpecker.

*Continued on page 13*

## Q&A: HAWK WATCHING

**Question:** What are the most useful field characters that help in identifying our locally-seen hawks, falcons, eagles and osprey?  
Jenny Bull

**Answer:** Birding often means getting up before dawn to catch glimpses of tiny birds as they flit around at the time of day they are most hungry and active, mostly hidden by leaves. Diurnal raptors (hawks, vultures, eagles and falcons) are more accessible for most of us because they are most active after the sun has warmed the ground; also because we can learn from experts while sitting in a lawn chair at a hawk watch site such as Hawk Hill in High Park or Rosetta McClain Gardens on the Scarborough Bluffs.

We are especially fortunate in Toronto at this time of year because raptors don't generally like to fly over the lake – it is easier to be carried along by thermals (only over land) or air deflected upwards by an obstacle, like the Niagara Escarpment. So, raptors migrating south toward the western half of Lake Ontario tend to turn toward Hamilton when they see the lake. When there is a north or northwest wind, they are blown toward the lake, producing a concentration at sites near the lake. Most raptor populations have been recovering since DDT was banned in the 1970s, although the American kestrel, like most grassland birds, is declining, as that habitat has diminished.

However, raptors often fly at great height and their shape depends on whether they are soaring up or gliding down. Also it can be off-putting to witness more experienced hawk-watchers identifying a bird so high up you thought it was just a floater in your eye. Studying a good field guide will help, but experience in the field trying to keep up with the experts is also very useful, if not essential. My favourite guide is *Hawks in Flight* by Dunne et al. A basic field guide to birds shows raptors perched and in flight, but *Hawks in Flight* shows plumage of each species soaring (tail spread) and gliding, from above as well as below.

The most useful field characters for identification of our locally-seen hawks, falcons and vultures are shape, the

way they hold their wings, and behaviour. Patterns of light and dark are useful, but colour is helpful only in some cases, when light is good. Also patterns and colours vary between juveniles and adults and among colour morphs in some species. Fortunately, only the northern harrier, rough-legged hawk and kestrel differ significantly in plumage. In all our species, except vultures and osprey, the female is larger than the male, often to a degree that is readily seen.

The first step is to learn the raptors that are common year-round: red-tailed hawk (buteo), Cooper's hawk (accipiter), and peregrine falcon, in that order. The red-tail is most commonly seen soaring overhead with unmarked tail spread (red only in adults), but also often showing off its white chest and dark belly band when perched on a building or tree, overlooking a road as it waits for a vehicle to dispatch prey for it.



Red-tailed hawk in flight over Crother's Woods.

Photo: Ken Sproule

Accipiters like the Cooper's are birds of the forest, with longer tails and shorter wings than buteos. They often surprise birds at bird feeders but are also seen overhead in migration and occasionally at other times. The sharp-shinned hawk, a smaller version of the Cooper's, can also be found in the city year-round, but is much more

common in migration, distinguished mainly by its tendency to flap a few times between glides and to hold its wrists forward in flight, making its head look smaller than the Cooper's, which holds its wings straighter (and has a relatively longer head and tail). Our other accipiter, the big northern goshawk, also nests in southern Ontario, but is relatively rare at all seasons.

Falcons, closely related to parrots, have long tails like accipiters, but longer pointed wings, and prefer open spaces. Peregrines nest on cliffs (tall buildings in Toronto). Merlins have recently begun to nest in Toronto trees, feeding on dragonflies and small birds, which they overtake in flight. The American kestrel is only 10% shorter than a merlin, but 40% lighter. It lives mostly on insects in grasslands, often hovering, more buoyant but less powerful than its larger cousins.

*Continued on next page*

## WEATHER (THIS TIME LAST YEAR)

### September 2017

The most outstanding feature of this month was the intense, record-breaking heat wave that began as a lengthy though not exceptional warm spell around the 11th and really got going by the 21st. It lasted until the 27th. Temperatures rose as high as 33.6° at Pearson Airport on the 24th, and over 30° each day from the 23rd to 27th. The hottest day downtown was also the 24th, reaching 31.7°.

This hot period was the result of a huge area of subtropical high pressure that moved east from its position over the western USA, which it had occupied earlier in the summer. The bubble of warm air was maintained by several severe hurricanes over the Atlantic, starting with Harvey and ending with Maria. These hurricanes did not affect Toronto directly, but did contribute their outflow of warm air into the upper atmosphere.

Strangely, September 2017 was **not** the warmest on record in Toronto. In fact, it was the coolest since 2014, although about 2° above the long-term average! This attests to the recurrent pattern of very warm autumn

weather over the past several years (going back intermittently to the late 1990s). The monthly mean temperature at downtown was 19.3° and at Pearson was 18.8°, where it ranked 6th of 80 years. The first ten days of the month before the subtropical high built in were quite cool, with several days having minimum temperatures below 10°. The final three days of the month also showed decided cooling, down to seasonable levels. The maximum of 33.6° on the 24th was almost the hottest reading for so late in the season, being exceeded by 33.8° on 25th September 2007.

This summer underwent a gradual shift from soaking wet to near-drought conditions by its end. Rainfall was 26.9 mm downtown and 29.8 mm at Pearson Airport. Most of this fell on the 3rd-5th, with virtually endless sunshine and no frontal passages at all from the 8th until the 28th under the building subtropical ridge. It was the driest September downtown since 1969. The dry weather counterbalanced the wet early summer so that growing season totals (April to September) were almost exactly normal. Growing season average temperatures were also close to normal after September provided the hottest weather of a rather cool summer.

Gavin Miller



Peregrine falcon perched on Canada Malting Silo.

Photo: Ken Sproule

The northern harrier is a long-winged, long-tailed hawk of open country, often flying low and slowly with its wings forming a shallow V, occasionally plunging on a mouse. The turkey vulture is our most common raptor in migration, also holding its long two-toned wings in a shallow V, and is common throughout the summer in agricultural areas.

The first raptor to migrate south is the osprey (fish eagle), which nests in the GTA and may soon nest in Toronto again. It flies with its long wings bent at the wrist so, with its white underside, can look at first like a gull when flying towards you, until you see how big it is with broader wings.

Other raptors we see in migration include bald eagle and three other buteos (red-shouldered, broad-winged and rough-legged hawks), which are roughly the shape of a red-tail. The bald eagle is distinguished by its massive wings held flat and its massive head. The broad-wing is Ontario's commonest hawk, much smaller than the others, and with a dark sub-terminal band across the tail, usually migrating in large kettles (boiling up to high altitudes in thermals) in mid-September. The red-shoulder is an uncommon hawk of the forests of southern Ontario, with a banded tail and pale crescents near the ends of its wings. The rough-leg breeds on the tundra and only visits us from November to March. It is distinguished by dark patches at the wrists and belly contrasting with flight feathers that are white with dark tips.

Bob Kortright

**Correction:** We apologize for misidentifying the swallows in Joanne Doucette's painting on the cover of our May newsletter. They are, of course, bank swallows – so named because their colonies nest in excavated burrows along river banks. Joanne wrote, "The painting is based on my memories of the swallow colony on Duffin's Creek near an old mill house where I lived as a child. I would do my homework by the creek while the swallows wheeled and chattered over the water."

## TFN JUNIOR NATURALISTS PROGRAM, 2018

Children aged 6-14, accompanied by adults, are invited to join the Toronto Junior Field Naturalists this fall for a series of themed hikes, games and activities. The program will take place on the second Saturday of each month from 10 am to noon. A different location has been chosen for each event to enable us to experience first-hand the amazing creatures that visit or live with us here in Toronto.

Register/RSVP: Anne Purvis (kannepurvis@gmail.com) to get on the Junior Naturalists email list and receive detailed information. To become a TFN member contact office@torontofieldnaturalists.org

- September 8: Scadding Cabin on the CNE grounds, the oldest building in Toronto, to investigate a butterfly/pollinator garden and tag monarch butterflies. Location.
- October 13: Rosetta McClain Gardens to watch for hawks and butterflies in migration. Location
- November 10: Hike the East Don Trail to explore seeds, fruits, mosses and fungi, and see the salmon run. Meet at the Don Mills Rd parking lot.
- December 8: Humber Bay Park to welcome Arctic over-wintering ducks. Meet at the Humber Bay East parking lot.

## THE CONNECTED NATURALIST: PLANTSNAP

PlantSnap is a mobile app “that’s doing for plants what Shazaam did for music by identifying plants, flowers, trees, cacti and mushrooms at the touch of a button.” You simply take a picture with your phone or tablet and the app attempts to intelligently match your specimen to its own inventory of over 300,000 species of flora. After several seconds, it provides you with a list of potential identifications listed from most to least probable. These suggestions offer some useful tidbits of information, such as scientific name and taxonomic rank, and usually come with photographic references.

To test the reliability and accuracy of the app, I made frequent use of it over several months, mostly during sessions of the TFN’s Cottonwood Flats Monitoring Project. It served quite dependably with trees, easily identifying species like eastern cottonwoods and Manitoba maple, and correctly locking in on genus for green ash and Siberian elm. Shrubs and herbs were a bit more hit and miss. Virginia creeper, bull thistle and riverbank grape, for example, it identified with ease. Staghorn sumac it dubbed tree of heaven once, but was otherwise correct each use. Amusingly, it once tried to convince me that a sulphur cinquefoil was *Cannabis sativa*, but eventually settled on a bevy of potentilla species. Interestingly, it consistently failed to ID purple-flowering raspberry, and all forms of the milkweed family (including dog-strangling vine). Grasses were a complete washout.

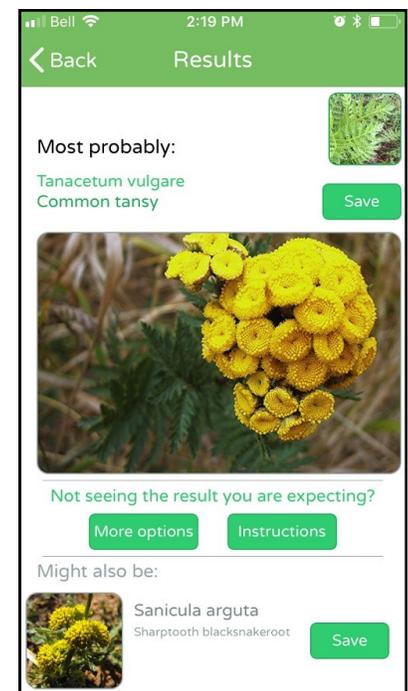
Getting the best from the app sometimes requires experimenting a bit. As a general rule, close-ups that include only a limited number of leaves produce the most reliable results. This is even the case when flowers are present – a flower by itself is more likely to fail than when the shot includes a few leaves. Busy backgrounds and

intersecting material from other plants should be avoided. Sharp focus and good lighting, as you might imagine, are also of great importance.

Will PlantSnap replace your favourite keys and ID books? Not any time soon. But it does fit right in your pocket and can be carried with you everywhere you go, making it a nice option for those spontaneous field trips or unexpected discoveries. If nothing else, it encourages you to take more useful photos and might even give you a jumping-off point for further research, both of which should prove useful once you’re back to your more-trusted reference materials.

The app is constantly evolving. I noticed several accuracy improvements over the last few weeks alone. It learns largely by community usage, so experienced naturalists could even help in its ongoing development by using the app and contributing their findings.

PlantSnap is created by Earth.com, Inc. of Telluride, Colorado. Available for Android and iPhone.



## CHILDREN'S CORNER

## Match the Skull to its Owner!



A. I am a \_\_\_\_\_

I have long orange teeth for gnawing bark. My back teeth are very flat for gnawing plants. My eyes point up so I can see while swimming.

**Beaver**



B. I am a \_\_\_\_\_

My teeth have an edge for cutting plants, but are mostly flat. My eyes look sideways so I can watch for predators while eating.

**White-tailed deer**



C. I am a \_\_\_\_\_

I have long fangs called canines for catching and trapping animals. My eyes point forward giving me depth perception for hunting.

**Coyote**



Answers on page 15. Project and skull photos by Anne Purvis Animal photos: Ken Sproule

**Attention Junior Naturalists!** Visit TFN online (<http://www.torontofieldnaturalists.org/kids/>) to view fascinating nature videos, download brain teasers, print nature scavenger hunt sheets and get inspired to explore nature in our city.

## BIRD NEWS

### Once in a lifetime ....

I went to Colonel Sam Smith Park on July 23 to look for the least bittern. It wasn't around so I meandered over to the whimbrel watch in case anything might be going by. Turns out they smashed the record for the entire ten years since the 'watch' began!

More than 4,000 whimbrels passed by the point that day. Remarkably about 2,000 were there when I arrived around 2:30 – large flocks littering the sky in all directions, sitting below us on the rocks, coming low, flying high, circling, swooping, leaving and returning. [See photo back cover.]. Somehow at about 4 pm they heard the clarion call and, together, well over 1,000 vanished to the north and not a single one was seen or heard again.



Whimbrels. Photo: Lynn Pady

The dozen of us gazed in total amazement at this staggering sight, thrilled by the magnificent sound of endless trilling. Nobody could put into words what happened. We were simply overwhelmed. And then it was over, and we wondered if we had imagined it. Synchronicity? Kismet? Serendipity? Perhaps simply one of the great miracles gifted to us by Mother Nature.

Lynn Pady

### Piping plovers fledge chicks in Toronto for the first time since 1934

Three piping plover chicks from the clutch of four eggs laid on Hanlan's Beach in June have successfully fledged and are now likely on their way to their wintering grounds. Volunteers took shifts to watch over the tiny birds and educate beach users about piping plover conservation.

The Great Lakes population of piping plovers fell to very low numbers with only a few pairs nesting on Lake Michigan by the 1970s. A recovery program, started in Michigan, was joined by other agencies including the Canadian Wildlife Service and Bird Studies Canada. This year 67 nesting pairs on the Great Lakes produced well over 100 fledged young.

The first recent nest at Hanlan's was in 2015.

Unfortunately the eggs were smashed by waves during a strong wind storm. This year's nest was described as a "superstar" by Andrea Gress, coordinator of the Ontario Piping Plovers, as it's unusual for three chicks to successfully fledge. The parents were helped by the enclosure installed around the nest by Andrea and the team she assembled but were also "particularly feisty" in protecting the eggs and chicks from predators.

Jenny Bull

More pictures and information at:

Audubon: <https://goo.gl/rVsTtz>

Globe&Mail article: <https://goo.gl/FLhr4b>

<http://www.jeaniron.ca/2018/pipldarl.htm>

[https://twitter.com/nature\\_girl!](https://twitter.com/nature_girl!)

<https://trca.ca/?s=piping+plover>



Piping plovers chicks sheltering under a parent at Hanlan's Point beach. Photo: Mark Peck

EXTRACTS FROM OUTINGS LEADERS' REPORTS *continued***G. Ross Lord Park – Birds and Bird Boxes, Apr 28.**

**Leaders: Deirdre and Robert Bean.** We started with a short talk about the types of cavity nesters and the pros and cons of bird boxes. We stopped at 15 boxes ranging from wood duck, small owl/raptor, woodpecker and many for chickadee, nuthatch and house wren. Box placement and construction and Project Nest Watch were discussed. We spotted 14 bird species including three Cooper's hawks, one eating prey.

**Taylor Creek Park, May 3. Leader: Charles Chaffey.**

Despite threat of rain, the sun had enough strength to persuade the trout lilies on the steep north side of west Taylor Creek to open and reflex their petals, making a fine show along with blue cohosh, bellwort and wild ginger. In the East Don valley red-winged blackbirds and blue jays managed to make themselves heard over the din of the Don Valley Parkway, and on the hillside we saw a colony of spring beauty, uncommon in this area.

**Leslie Street Spit – Family Hikes at Birding Festival, May 12. Leaders: Anne and Jim Purvis.**

The early hike was attended by families with younger children, several new to birding and excited to see our lovely Ontario birds. On the way to the Nature Centre we saw red-winged blackbirds, American goldfinches, a kingbird, a brown-headed cowbird, song sparrows, Baltimore orioles, tree and barn swallows, gulls, Canada geese, white-winged scoters, long-tailed ducks, robins and



Spring beauty. Drawing by Eva Davis.

yellow warblers. We talked about native plant species including white pine, white spruce and red-osier dogwood. Further south we saw a mink swimming close to shore.

The turnout to the second hike was smaller, but the kids were inquisitive and keen. Hiking in the base lands we saw chestnut-sided, magnolia, bay-breasted, Nashville and Blackburnian warblers. We also saw a coyote den and a partially constructed yellow warbler nest consisting mainly of 'insulation.' The kids found the remains of a silk moth cocoon and a raccoon skull. On the return trip a Cooper's hawk landed in a nearby tree.

We are disappointed that construction, starting later this year to connect the east and west parts of the Martin Goodman trail, will take land away from the base lands.

**Glen Stewart Ravine – Joint walk with Friends of Glen Stewart, May 22. Leader: Bob Kortright.**

White trilliums were a pleasant sight among too much garlic mustard, celandine, lily-of-the-valley, Japanese knotweed, and a bit of dog-strangling vine, beneath what is still a great remnant ravine forest dominated by red oak and red maple, with maple-leaved viburnum, mountain maple, pagoda dogwood and witch-hazel in the understory. We heard indigo bunting and great crested flycatcher, and glimpsed two raptors.

**Wildflowers, High Park, May 23. Leader: Wendy Rothwell.**

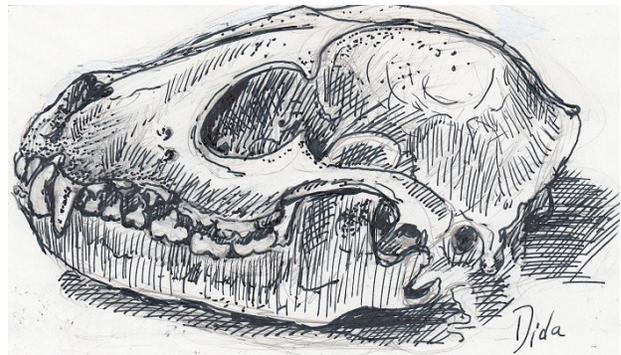
We focused on spring ephemerals in woodland areas. Native wildflowers in bloom included violets (woolly blue, yellow and sweet white), wood anemone, white trillium, starry false Solomon's-seal, Jack-in-the-pulpit, kidney-leaf buttercup, naked miterwort, foamflower, wild sarsaparilla, pussytoes, strawberry (woodland and barren) and wild geranium. We enjoyed seeing an American goldfinch plucking seeds off a dandelion head, a red-tailed hawk perched high in a tree and many delightful chipmunks. We encountered several fallen trees resulting from the recent windstorm.



Wood anemone. Drawing by D. Andrew White

**Toronto Islands, May 24. Leaders: Anne and Jim Purvis.**

Among 35 bird species spotted were blue-headed vireo, yellow-bellied and olive-sided flycatchers, wood pewee, Swainson's and grey-cheeked thrushes, Baltimore orioles and rose-breasted grosbeaks.



Raccoon skull found by Jean Macdonald at Todmorden Mills, 1988. Drawing by Diana Banville.

## COMING EVENTS

If you plan to attend any of these events, we recommend that you contact the organizing group beforehand to confirm time and place.

### **Jim Baillie Memorial Bird Walks – Toronto Ornithological Club ([www.torontobirding.ca](http://www.torontobirding.ca))**

Aimed at the intermediate birder, but beginners also welcome. Free to the public.

- Sun Sept 2, 8 am – noon. High Park. Leader: Howard Shapiro. Meet at the parking lot inside the park entrance at Bloor St W and High Park Ave. Fall migrants, raptors.
- Sat Sept 8, 8 am – afternoon. Leslie Street Spit. Leaders: Justin Peter and Caroline Biel. Meet at the park entrance, Unwin Ave and Leslie St. Fall migrants.
- Sun Sept 16, 8 am – noon. Lambton Woods. Leader: Don Burton. Meet at James Gardens parking lot (access from Edenbridge Dr east from Royal York Rd north of Dundas St W). Fall migrants.
- Sat Sept 22, 7:30 am to afternoon. Toronto Islands. Leader: Jack Alvo. Meet at Toronto Islands ferry docks at the foot of Bay St off Queens Quay to catch the 8:15 ferry to Hanlan's Point (fare required). Bring lunch. Late migrants, raptors and more.

### **High Park Walking Tours ([www.highpark.org](http://www.highpark.org))**

1st and 3rd Sundays of each month, 10:30 am to noon. Meet at the benches across the road south of Grenadier Restaurant.

- Sept 2 Touch the Earth, Joanne Doucette
- Sept 16 Passion and Poetry, Julia Bennett

### **The Market Gallery ([www.toronto.ca/marketgallery](http://www.toronto.ca/marketgallery))**

To Nov 17. Bike City: How industry, advocacy and infrastructure shaped Toronto's cycling culture. Admission \$5 - \$8. Location: South St Lawrence Market, 2nd floor, 95 Front St E. The gallery is closed Sundays, Mondays and holidays.

### **Local Enhancement & Appreciation of Forests, LEAF ([www.yourleaf.org](http://www.yourleaf.org))**

Wed Sept 12, 6:30 – 7:30 pm. Toronto Volunteer Orientation. Free. Registration required at above website.

### **TRCA 2018 Salmon Festival at Highland Creek ([www.trca.ca](http://www.trca.ca))**

Sun Sept 30. 11 am – 4 pm. Morningside Park, 390 Morningside Ave.

### **Ian Wheal Walks**

- Sun Sept 2, 6 pm. Wilcott Creek, a lost river. Meet at the northeast corner of Old Finch Rd and Morningside Ave. A 4 km walk.
- Sun Sept 9, 11 am. When High Park was called Wolf Park. Meet at the Bloor St W entrance to High Park opposite High Park Ave. Approx 1.5 hr.
- Sat Sept 15, 1:30 pm. A complete relief line – CNR's route to Portlands and eastern harbour (safe route to school and Indigenous portages). Meet at the entrance to Donlands subway station. A 10 km walk.
- Fri Sept 21, 4:30 pm. Globe lights on Toronto waterfront pier (1881). Meet at Queens Quay terminal entrance, foot of York St.

## KEEPING IN TOUCH

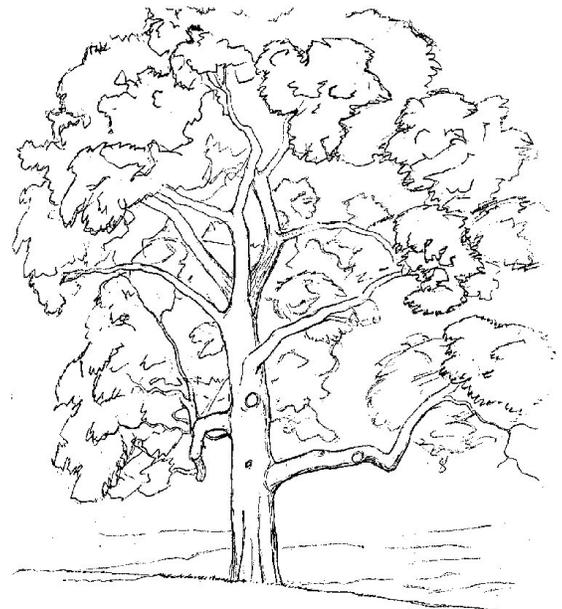
Just the oak tree looks the same

*Went back to my childhood home again  
Up the streets and down the lanes  
Sad how everything has changed  
Just the oak tree looks the same*

*Our house and the neighbours' homes remain  
But the folks inside have changed  
Now everything is rearranged  
Just the oak tree looks the same*

*That tree was home for games like hide and seek  
Count real slow and don't you peek  
All the memories that I retain  
Just the oak tree looks the same*

Song lyrics by Roger Powley



Red oak in High Park. Drawn by Joanne Doucette

BIRD NEWS *continued***Canada Jay**

Are we a step closer to designating Canada's national bird? In May the American Ornithological Society, in response to a proposal spearheaded by Canadian ornithologist Dan Strickland, agreed to officially change the common name of *Perisoreus canadensis* to Canada Jay – the name by which it was known from 1831 until 1957 when the name 'Gray Jay' was adopted.

The Canada Jay is found in every province and territory and is non-migratory, toughing out the Canadian winter. It has the reputation of being curious, intelligent and friendly. What better choice for Canada's national bird?

For more information see <https://goo.gl/eTbMtC> and [www.jeaniron.ca/2018/canadajay.htm](http://www.jeaniron.ca/2018/canadajay.htm)



Canada Jay. Photo: Jean Iron

KEEPING IN TOUCH *continued.*

Jennifer Smith photographed these "happy pollinators," in her garden.  
Left: Bee in *Helonium*. Right: Bee on *Monarda didyma*. See also front cover.



TFN is on Twitter and Facebook!

Got something interesting to share? We'd love to get your photos and insights on TFN activities, Toronto nature events and interesting nature news.

Email [media@torontofieldnaturalists.org](mailto:media@torontofieldnaturalists.org) and be sure to include what your photo is and where it was taken.

To read posts, go to [www.torontofieldnaturalists.org](http://www.torontofieldnaturalists.org) and click on Twitter or Facebook.

**IT'S YOUR NEWSLETTER!**

We welcome contributions of original writing (between 20 and 500 words) of nature observations, especially in the Toronto area; also reports, reviews, poems, sketches, paintings and digital photos. Please include "Newsletter" in the email subject line or on the envelope. Please re-name digital photos with subject and your name. In the accompanying email include location, date and any interesting information associated with the photo.

**Submissions deadline for October issue: Sept 1**

**Toronto Field Naturalists**  
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Registration No. 40049590



Whimbrels at Colonel Sam Smith Park, July 23, 2018. Photo: Lynn Pady. See article on page 12.