



Since 1923

TORONTO FIELD NATURALIST

Number 650 March 2020



Long-tailed Duck. Photo by Bill Cruttwell

REGULARS

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PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Having just spent a great afternoon at our annual Nature Images show, surrounded by scores of wonderful people and hundreds of excellent photos of natural splendor, I'm strongly reminded of two things. First and foremost, I'm lucky to be part of such an amicable, knowledgeable, and enthusiastic community. Secondly, and not that far behind, I'm seriously ready for spring to just get here already! Not that winter isn't full of its own delights but, given the verdant landscapes and vibrant wildlife that our warmer months bring, I do hope you'll forgive me, friends, when I say that I'm counting down the days.

On January 23rd, the Ravine Strategy Implementation Plan went before the City's Executive Committee. TFN has pursued every opportunity to advocate for its quick and robust implementation since the Strategy was adopted by City Council in October 2017, so this was in many ways a milestone moment for both our organization and the entire city. The Implementation Plan not only puts strong emphasis on the protection and rehabilitation of our ravines, but also solidly demonstrates that City staff have been listening to the recommendations of concerned citizens over the last two years. This latter compliment, I hope, delivers more than a little foreshadowing, as the Executive Committee meeting saw almost 30 delegates rise to speak, a great number of whom voiced support for priorities that mirror our own: unlocking the near-limitless potential that volunteers offer in our battle against invasives, garbage and other ecological threats; the need for increased transparency and prioritization in crafting management plans for our ESAs; and the importance of robust ecological monitoring. Included in the ranks of these delegates were many TFN members, allies, and partners

speaking on behalf of groups from all across Toronto. Naturally, Ellen Schwartzel, Chair of our Action Committee, was there as well to deliver a deputation on behalf of TFN (see <https://youtu.be/skJ2d6SU7PU?t=7457>).

I'm pleased to say that City Council adopted the Ravine Strategy Implementation Plan on January 29, 2020. I'm even more pleased that amendments added to its adoption reflect much of what TFN has so passionately advocated for since 2017. In particular, I'd like to extend heartfelt praise to Councillor James Pasternak, who introduced a motion aimed at permitting qualified citizen volunteers to engage in natural stewardship and invasives removal without in-situ City supervision, and to Councillor Josh Matlow, whose motion directed City staff to more deeply engage with the local community in the development of stewardship strategies.

Before closing this President's Report, there is one final bit of important news to share. Following more than a year of service, Anne Purvis has made the decision to step down as TFN Vice-President. I would like to extend to Anne the board's gratitude for her efforts and for her continuing commitment to the Junior Naturalists, a program that has grown by leaps and bounds under her impressive guidance. I would also like to extend thanks to Ellen Schwartzel and Zunaid Khan, who have agreed to take over from Anne as Co-VPs. This arrangement is bound to be of great benefit to TFN and will help to secure its bright and prosperous future.

Jason Ramsay-Brown
president@torontofieldnaturalists.org

WHAT'S NEW ON TFN'S WEBSITE

Discover all this and more at
<https://torontofieldnaturalists.org/for-members/>

- Thank You messages from the 2019 Ontario Nature Youth Summit
- Nature Images Show Round-Up
- The Monarchs of Europe
- Baycrest, Birds & The Brain

Plus: Notes from our latest Junior Naturalists events, opportunities to Take Action, and much more.

Interested in Birds?

TFN members are invited to participate in a research project about how bird identification reshapes the brain's visual system and changes memory and attention.

Participation involves two visits to Baycrest Hospital and an online training component. Compensation provided.

Open to people age 18+ who EITHER

- have 2+ years birding experience and familiarity with bird species of the GTA

OR

- have no specific birding background but are interested in learning about birds.

For details, see "Baycrest, Birds & The Brain" on TFN website.

TFN OUTINGS

TFN events, conducted by unpaid volunteers, go rain or shine. Visitors and children accompanied by an adult are welcome. No pets please. TFN assumes no responsibility for injuries sustained by anyone participating in our activities. **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 Wendat, the Seneca, and most recently, the Mississauga of the Credit River. Today it is still 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.

Thurs WARDEN WOODS – Nature Walk

Mar 5
10:00 am **Leader: Vivienne Denton.** Meet outside the Warden entrance to Warden subway station for a linear walk on mostly paved surfaces, flat with some gentle slopes, ending at Victoria Park subway station. Bring icers if you have them.

Sat TREE STUDY OVER GARRISON CREEK – Nature Walk

Mar 7
10:00 am **Leader: Sara Macdonald.** Meet at the southeast corner of Christie Pits Park across from Christie subway station for a walk above the buried Garrison Creek to Trinity Bellwoods Park. About 2½ hrs, on park paths and sidewalks. We'll identify trees in the watershed and, along the way, break at a café to confer. Return to the subway by the Ossington bus or Bathurst streetcar.

Wed U OF T ST GEORGE CAMPUS – Trees and Buildings

Mar 11
1:30 pm **Leader: Paul Foster.** Meet outside the Bedford entrance to St George subway station for a leisurely hike on sidewalks and paved pathways. We'll focus on the state of street trees along Bloor, St George and College Streets – how they are faring and the stresses and strains they experience. We'll also enjoy some of the mature trees and historic buildings on the campus and look for birds along the way.

Sat MORNINGSIDE PARK – Nature Walk

Mar 14
10:00 am **Leader: D Andrew White.** Meet in Morningside Park in the first parking lot off the Morningside Ave entrance just south of Ellesmere Rd. A circular walk to Lawrence and back focusing on spring tree identification and bird watching. Bring lunch, water and binoculars. Washrooms should be open.

Sun GARRISON CREEK (CHRISTIE TO QUEEN) – Lost Rivers

Mar 15
2:00 pm **Leader: Richard Anderson and others.** Meet at the northwest corner of Christie St and Bloor St W close to Christie subway station. This walk following Garrison Creek from Christie Pits to Queen St will end at Trinity Bellwoods Park. A joint outing with Toronto Green Community.

Thurs TADDLE CREEK – A Lost River

Mar 19
10:00 am **Leader: Linda McCaffrey.** Meet at the southwest corner of St Clair Ave W and Wychwood Ave for a walk along the upper reaches of Taddle Creek as it meanders through varied historic Toronto neighbourhoods. About 2½ hours on mostly flat surfaces ending at College and Yonge Streets.

Sat HIGH PARK – Winter Wildlife

Mar 21
1:00 pm **Leader: Max Matchim.** Meet at the entrance to High Park at Bloor St W and High Park Ave. We will start by watching the feeders behind the Nature Centre, then walk to the south end of the park on paved paths stopping by the allotment gardens and Grenadier Pond. If we're lucky we may see some early migrants. Some ice may be present. Many of the Park's washrooms will not be open.

Continued on next page

Make sure we have your email address
so you can view the outings list online before receipt of your paper copy.

ONTARIO NATURE 2019 YOUTH SUMMIT FOR BIODIVERSITY & ENVIRONMENTAL LEADERSHIP

Last September TFN sponsored five GTA high school students to attend the Youth Summit at Geneva Park on Lake Couchiching. They were among 102 students from 70 communities across the province who were sponsored by various nature groups such as ours as well as corporate partners and individual conservationists. This support allows students to learn how they can create positive environmental change and helps to inspire them to become future environmentalists.

Over the weekend they participated in a wide variety of outdoor and educational activities addressing diverse environmental matters such as biodiversity and youth action, how to effect change, freshwater ecology, the urgency of climate change and how to become effective leaders, as well as discovering nature. The students' reports speak to the success of the summit in promoting positive change.

“Being a part of such an incredible event was such an inspiring experience and has already led me to make more sustainable decisions in my everyday life that have developed into habits.” (Serena Poonawalla, Marc Garneau CI)

“It was an incredible experience...I was really inspired to do more in my daily life at my school to raise awareness about environmental issues.” (Nina Nissim-Stem, Malvern CI)

“I got to sit in and help launch the campaign to get communities protecting their native species. It was so exciting to see young people inspiring other young people, not only in the workshop but in the whole summit. It fostered a sense of capability that we have all brought back to our communities.” (Cecilia LaRose, Riverdale CI)

“I am so motivated by a keynote speech about how youth are NOT lazy, but instead the leaders of tomorrow.... The speech has stuck with me and will continue to motivate me to ignore anyone/people who attempt to stop me from achieving what I aim to achieve. Whether it is in climate justice, presentations or general small accomplishments, this speech has empowered me to become more resilient as a thinker and activist.” (Grace Gong, Erindale Secondary School)

“‘Eco anxiety’ refers to the anxiety and fear that climate change brings. I definitely feel this on a daily basis. Connecting with others who have those same worries and want to do something about them gives me immense hope. It reminds me that all is not lost and that I have the power to fight for my future.” (DeLenn Kershaw, Alternative Scarborough Education)

Further information on the summit can be found at <https://torontofieldnaturalists.org/2019-youth-summit>

Anne Powell

TFN OUTINGS *continued*

- | | |
|----------------------------|---|
| Tues Mar 24 10:00 am | ASHBRIDGE'S BAY – Birds Leader: Anne Powell. Meet at the southwest corner of Coxwell Ave and Lake Shore Blvd E for a circular walk on mostly flat paved surfaces to view waterfowl. Bring binoculars and dress appropriately for the weather. No washrooms. |
| Sat Mar 28 10:00 am | HUMBER BAY PARK EAST – Birds Leader: Glenn Berry (birding enthusiast). Meet at Humber Bay Park East parking lot (400 meters southeast of Lake Shore Blvd W and Park Lawn Rd) for a circular walk. See a variety of birds including year-round residents at feeders and interesting waterfowl. While the trails are flat, they may be slippery. Bring binoculars and a snack. No washrooms. |
| Sun Mar 29 10:00 am | LESLIE STREET SPIT – Early Birds, Insects and Plants Leader: Bob Kortright. Meet at the entrance to the spit at Leslie St and Unwin Ave for a 4- to 5-hr circular walk on mostly paved, fairly flat surfaces. Many kinds of birds will be back, including thousands of gulls and some cormorants, on this day before the breeding grounds are closed until breeding season is over. If it is sunny, snakes may be on the road trying to warm up. Bring lunch if you intend to stay for the afternoon. Washrooms available along the way. |

LECTURE REPORT

Nature in the City

February 2, 2020

Katie Thomas, Amateur Naturalist

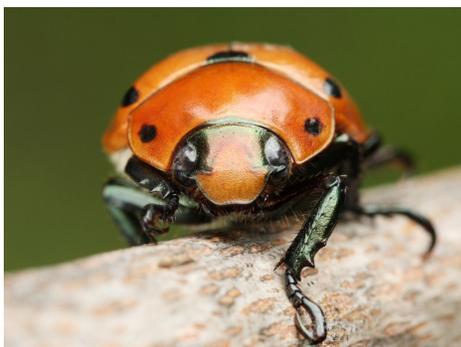
Katie Thomas' engaging and inspiring talk, offering "Notes from a Tiny Urban Backyard," provided a welcome respite from the cold outdoors. She began by describing the space within which she gleans a wealth of fascinating and gratifying observations of nature in everyday life. Katie's observation space is a backyard in downtown Toronto that covers 15 X 15 feet (or 5 X 5 metres). It is the home where she, her husband (freelance illustrator Dave Beadle, who contributed many of the lovely photos that Katie used to illustrate her talk), and son have lived for 21 years. Katie showed a map locating her observation space and orienting it to the nearby railway corridor and flyways for birds. The backyard was once a parking lot, and they have reclaimed the space, making it an oasis for urban flora and fauna. The motto for their coexistence with nature is: "accept all living things."

In that relatively small space, Katie and her family have recorded sightings of a really impressive number of species that have graced their yard: moths, 800 species; birds, 150 species; flies, bees, wasps, beetles and spiders, 60 plus; butterflies, 20 plus; dragonflies, 15 plus; and mammals, 9 species. There is a crucial rule to which they have committed themselves: include only what can be seen from their property, whether up, down or in between. Near misses get noticed (coyote, fox), but not counted. An example was the wild turkey, affectionately named "Rose", that began to roost in the environs and was featured in local news media. Their observations have led them to engage in public education for their community, such as when a proposed laneway name *Mourning Cloak*, after the butterfly of that name, was accepted by the City but initially questioned by neighbours. An explanatory notice they prepared and posted helped to reassure the community.

Katie provided a remarkable tour of what they have seen and counted over the years, starting with moths. Out of the total of 800 moth species observed, 20 were introduced and the remaining 780 were native. Several species noticed have since disappeared, including the dock rustic moth. Katie regaled the audience with a thrilling list of birds, including Parula Warbler (in a neighbour's apple tree), Green Heron, and Bald Eagles (17 in one half-hour period during autumn migration), and some breeding in the locale: Grey Catbird, Red-Breasted Nuthatch and Black-capped Chickadee. Especially striking images were of creatures so small they often escape notice, including the strawberry root weevil, striped cucumber and hermit flower beetles.

Katie shared pictures of some equipment used for observing, such as bird and suet feeders and a moth trap (with mercury vapour lamp and black light, constructed from egg cartons). She assured the audience that no moths are killed. They had put in a pond at one time but it was decimated by raccoons (the furry critters that some say have become an obsession of Torontonians). They endeavour to move plants in buckets around the property, following the sun, to ensure that they flourish. Katie's takeaway message was an inspiration to all: "You too, wherever you live, can appreciate more of the wonders of nature simply by taking the time to observe."

Alex Wellington



Photos from top: White-eyed Vireo, giant swallowtail butterfly, sedge sprite damselfly, striped cucumber beetle, grapevine beetle

TREE OF THE MONTH: COMMON PERSIMMON (*DIOSPYROS VIRGINIANA*)

Common persimmon is celebrated as a distinctive native eastern North American fruit tree that is also cultivated to a limited extent in the southeastern United States. Though its persimmon fruits are flavourful, they are much smaller (at about 3–4 cm in diameter) than their cultivated eastern Asian relative (*D. kaki*), the persimmon of the grocery store. Never pick and eat the fruits, however, before they are fully ripe and their severe astringency (due to a high tannin content) has been knocked out of them by time and hard autumn frosts. The large flattened seeds are arranged side to side in a ring at the centre of the berries, which remain on the tree as an orange ornament well into the winter unless removed by foraging people or wildlife.

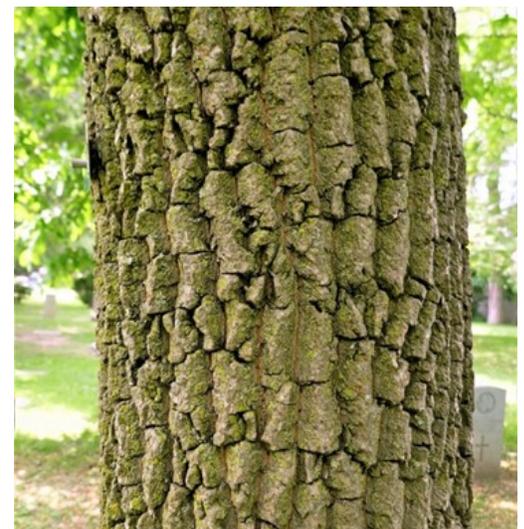
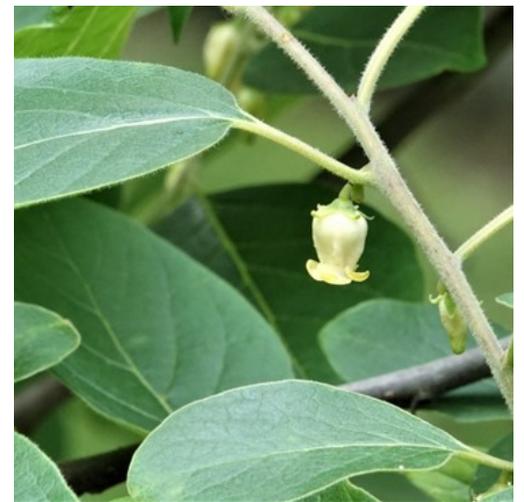
Only half of the trees bear these fruits, however, since the species is dioecious, with separate male and female individuals – a trait that is more common in catkin-bearing trees than in those with “showy” insect-pollinated flowers. The yellowish petals in both sexes are connected side to side into a bell-shaped corolla with four pointed free tips. The smaller male flowers (about 1 cm long in clusters of three) are unusual in having four whorls of stamens (16 in all), whereas flowers of most insect-pollinated plants have either one or two whorls or a whole unordered mess of stamens. The larger female flowers (about 1.3 cm long and borne singly) have a calyx that enlarges with the developing fruit and persists as a four-pointed beanie crowning the mature persimmon.

The leaves, usually about 8–12 cm long, have a tropical look, shared with only a handful of our trees. It is an impression that springs from their simple, oval shape and completely smooth margin, without the slightest trace of either teeth or lobes. The vast majority of winter deciduous trees in cool temperate climates have leaves that are variously toothed (even if only minutely), lobed or both. In contrast, a large majority of tropical broadleaved evergreen trees have leaves resembling those of common persimmon, though varying greatly in size. No attempted explanation of these differences is as yet entirely convincing.

For me, one of the standout features of common persimmon is the handsome bark of mature trees. It is about as blocky-checked as they get, each squared-off, dark grey block sharply set off by narrow, deep, vertical and horizontal fissures which may have touches of red to purple within them. While the heartwood inside this bark is dense and strong, it is light brown, without even a touch of the jet black that characterizes the ebony wood of many of its tropical cousins including Ceylon ebony (*D. ebenum*), the main commercial species.

The natural range of common persimmon lies south of us, reaching its northern limit along a line extending from a little north of the Missouri River in Missouri to Long Island, New York, never getting closer than about 300 km south of Toronto. Nonetheless, it is hardy in this city and in other warm regions of Ontario, though rarely cultivated here. The accompanying photographs show a tree in the eastern half of Mount Pleasant Cemetery by its northern boundary, in the western part of plot 28. It is a female tree surrounded by a scattered brood of suckers, which demonstrate how leaves of vigorous youngsters are often notably larger than those of mature trees, in this case despite the suckers and parent tree being genetically identical.

James Eckenwalder



From top: Mature fruit,
tiny female flower,
blocky-checked bark
Photos: Ron Dengler

VOLUNTEER PROFILE: NANCY DENGLER

How many walks has Nancy Dengler led for the Toronto Field Naturalists? Too many to count, but they have all been marvellous. With Nancy as walk leader, you may stroll through the Glendon Ravine, where Baltimore checkerspot butterflies wait obediently to be spotted (Nancy predicts a 50% chance of sighting one). Or you may be gently handed a fluffy catkin, direct evidence of the sex lives of cottonwoods. Or you may need to duck when Nancy conjures up a Great Blue Heron that swoops past, punctuating her point about riparian habitat. Wherever Nancy's walks take you, you will share in some small natural wonder.

Nancy Dengler came relatively late to the TFN. She had recently retired from a busy academic career as a botany professor at the University of Toronto, where she combined a gift for teaching with a researcher's passion, studying internal structures of plants and their photosynthetic strategies. Nancy recalls, "I knew of the TFN's work through my colleague, Professor Verna Higgins, and I respected the group's advocacy work and breadth of interests in the natural world, but I was a bit reluctant to jump in." She began by leading walks in the Glendon forest and, in short order, Pinky Franklin recruited her for the Board. Ultimately, Nancy Dengler led the TFN as President, all the while continuing to lead walks, and she also managed the Sunday lecture series for a decade.



Nancy is grateful that, under Alex Wellington's capable stewardship, TFN's lecture series continues to feature topics ranging across the whole spectrum of biodiversity, and aims to make people learn more and enjoy our region's natural history. Nancy is also pleased to see TFN's renewed outreach to children and youth, with Anne Purvis's dedicated leadership of the Junior Naturalists, and with TFN's ongoing support for Ontario Nature's Youth Summits.

Despite many concerning pressures on Toronto's vulnerable natural areas, and despite the frustration of seeing protective bylaws unenforced, Nancy chooses to be hopeful. That our ravines are well visited is actually a good sign, she believes. Urban dwellers are recognizing that nature is a vital part of everyday living.

Nancy doesn't hesitate to advise anyone new to TFN: "Go on our walks! That is the best way to connect directly with – and be surprised by – nature." She illustrates with a story of a TFN walk led by Bob Kortright in Glen Stewart ravine some years ago. Perched in an apple tree was a fluffy grey animal – a cat was Nancy's first guess. But gradually the fluffy mass came into clearer focus: three baby screech owls. Remembering, Nancy beams with delight. "Just steps from Queen Street!" she exclaims.

Ellen Schwartzel

NATURE IMAGES EVENT

(See page 8)

Liz Menard shared her passion for depicting, through her art, the beauty of the Don River Valley and the exciting spectacle of monarchs on their winter grounds in Mexico.

Her techniques include etchings and embroidery. She makes paper from natural fibres, such as milkweed and purple loosestrife, and uses it to create hundreds of leaves and butterflies to form installations for exhibit.



NATURE IMAGES EVENT, FEBRUARY 1, 2020

An enthusiastic audience of 60 was treated to an eclectic array of images by 15 presenters, each with their distinctive way of celebrating nature. Jason Ramsay-Brown kicked off with a presentation about TFN's Cottonwood Flats Project (page 10). Liz Menard shared her passion for depicting nature through art (page 7). The following gallery is a brief sampling of contributions by talented TFN photographers. See also Bill Cruttwell's stunning photo on the front cover.



Captivating beaver by Theresa Moore



Delightful Ruby-crowned Kinglet by Lillian Natalizio



Mute Swan in flight by Zunaid Khan



Field chickweed (*Cerastium arvense*) in Prince Edward County by Danielle Pellatt-Hall



Whimsical prairie smoke at Carden Plain by Frank Miles



Iridescent Common Grackle by Jessica Nelson



Rare *Bombus vagus* bumble bee queen on Toronto City Hall's green roof by Dave Barr



Orchid exhibit at TBG by Martin Chen



Tulip tree by Margaret McRae



Spicebush caterpillar by Carol Pasternak



Teasel at the Brick Works by Wendy Rothwell



Well-camouflaged Brown Creeper by Jenny Bull

Many thanks to all who contributed to the success of this event – Lynn Miller and Margaret McRae for organizing it; their volunteer helpers; all who generously shared their images, and the supportive audience.

Be sure to check out the Nature Images Show Round-up at <https://torontofieldnaturalists.org/nis2020/>

As you enjoy nature through the coming year, keep it in mind to capture images to share with other TFN members, either at this event or through the newsletter.

Wendy Rothwell

COTTONWOOD FLATS MONITORING PROJECT



Jason Ramsay-Brown's presentation at the recent Nature Images event focused on TFN's Cottonwood Flats Monitoring Project. In this photo, volunteers Paula Davies, Agneta Szabo, Gavin Miller, Tim Dickinson and Mike Donnan were intrigued by the plants sprouting up from a tiny chunk of remnant roadway. These included thyme-leaved sandwort, prickly sedge, hairy sandmat and field pepperwort, all found nowhere else in the Flats.

The fourth year of our Cottonwood Flats Monitoring Project kicks off in April and we'd love you to be a part of it! If you are interested in citizen science and want to make positive contributions to nature in the city, we'd like to hear from you. Information can be found at <https://torontofieldnaturalists.org/cfmp>. To volunteer or to learn more, please email cfmp@torontofieldnaturalists.org

| CFMP Call for Volunteers | |
|--------------------------|--|
| Role | Duties |
| Site Ambassadors | Talk with the public about the TFN and CFMP |
| Photographers | Photograph plants, birds, and other animals, as well as project activities. Must have their own equipment. |
| Bird ID | Identify bird species during monitoring sessions. |
| Plant ID | Identify plant and tree species during monitoring sessions and/or vegetation surveys. |
| Observers | Provide an extra set of eyes/hands or other assistance to team. |

JUNIOR NATURALISTS OUTING REPORT

Thanks to everyone who braved swirling snow and a choppy ferry crossing to join us on January 18 for a wonderful winter nature adventure at Ward's Island. Our Arctic-nesting and over-wintering ducks were staying close to shore to take advantage of sheltered coves. We had good sightings of Long-tailed Ducks, scaup, Redheads, Mallard, Buffleheads, goldeneye, plus Common and Red-breasted Mergansers. At the very end we sighted a few White-winged Scoters. To read more, see <https://torontofieldnaturalists.org/notes-from-junior-naturalists-event-on-jan-18th/>

UPCOMING JUNIOR NATURALISTS EVENT

Children age 6-14 years and accompanied by an adult are invited to join TFN Junior Naturalists events. Hikes, games and activities take place on Saturdays from 10 am to 12 noon. Dress warmly and bring binoculars, your curiosity and your sense of adventure. Junior Naturalists will receive an email with meet-up locations a few days prior to the event. To join, please contact juniortfn@torontofieldnaturalists.org

March 7 Come and explore the Humber Arboretum with us and discover the trees of the Carolinian forest – the deciduous forest of southern Ontario. It is a season to notice the remarkable bark, unique buds and shapes of trees. It's also maple sugaring season! Let's learn how First Nations people related to this forest and how they made maple sugar. You might also meet a famous explorer, Etienne Brule!

JUNIOR NATURALISTS

Early Signs of Spring

Spring officially begins on March 19 this year and, while there might still be chilly temperatures and snow on the ground, what signs of spring can you see or hear when you go outside?

Birds: While robins are the best-known harbingers of spring, there are other familiar birds that start singing to establish their territories such as chickadee (whose song sounds like "fee-bee" rather than their familiar "chick-a-dee-dee" call) and cardinal. Grackles and Red-winged Blackbirds are early migrants. Several owl species, most commonly Great Horned and Eastern Screech Owls, breed during this time. Their calls can be heard in Toronto starting at dusk and continuing into the evening.



Red-winged Blackbird



Sugar maple bud

Tree Buds: With the warmer temperatures, tree roots start to transport water back into the trees after their long dormancy during the winter. This increased flow of water will cause the tree buds, formed in the fall, to get larger just before opening into leaves. This is also when sugar maple trees are tapped for their sap and many communities have maple syrup festivals during this time.

Mammals: While groundhogs are famous for getting up and forecasting weather conditions, in truth, the males do wake up in early spring to search for females, which continue their hibernation for a few more weeks. Other wild animals, such as fox and coyote that have actively overwintered, mate during February. The first litters of eastern grey squirrel and Virginia opossums are born in early spring. Hibernating mammals, and those that went into torpor (a slowing down of the animal's metabolism - but not true hibernation), start to wake up and become more active as they look for food and mates.



Groundhog

So, while it may seem that spring is slow to arrive, even in the earliest parts of the season there is a lot of activity going on, underground and overhead. See what you can notice next time you are walking outside.

Photos by Ken Sproule

Vanessa McMMain

TORONTO WILDFLOWERS: FALSE SOLOMON'S-SEAL

Two or three locally occurring species known as false Solomon's-seal were considered in the TFN's *Vascular Plants of Metropolitan Toronto* (TFN) as belonging to genus *Smilacina*, family Liliaceae. These species are now assigned to the genus *Maianthemum* along with *Maianthemum canadense* (Canada mayflower). This genus is considered by *The ROM Field Guide to Wildflowers of Ontario* (ROM) to be in the Ruscaceae (butcher's broom family). For comments on classification, refer to the article on true Solomon's-seal (TFN newsletter, 2020 February).

Toronto's common *Maianthemum* species are *M. canadense* (Canada mayflower), *M. racemosum* (false Solomon's-seal), and *M. stellatum* (star-flowered or little false Solomon's-seal). The local status of the fourth species, *M. trifolium* (three-leaved false Solomon's-seal), is uncertain. It was listed as uncommon (TFN) and only reported in Sunnybrook Park (Don watershed), which would make it locally rare. I have not found it here. *Maianthemum* comes from the Greek *maios* (May) and *anthemom* (blossom).

M. canadense is an upright species with stems up to 20 cm tall. Its flowers are star-shaped, with four small white tepals and occur as a compact raceme about 3 cm long. A woodland species, it commonly forms colonies. It flowers in May or June, occurring throughout Ontario except the far northwest (ROM). Its full range is across most of North America except Nunavut and the southern and western states of the U.S. (USDA).

M. racemosum and *M. stellatum* both have arching stems, up to 80 cm and 60 cm tall respectively. *M. racemosum* has clusters of tiny white flowers with 6 tepals forming pyramid-shaped panicles up to 15 cm long. *M. stellatum* has small white star-shaped flowers with 6 tepals clustered in racemes up to 5 cm long. These two species commonly occur in a variety of habitats from forests to savannas. *M. stellatum* also occurs in swamps and on roadsides and dunes. Both can bloom locally from April to June. They both occur across southern Ontario and in parts of northern Ontario (ROM) as well as across most of North America (USDA).

M. trifolium is up to 40 cm tall with small widely spaced flowers forming an open raceme. It is a plant of moist woodland, bogs and swamps (ROM), blooming in late spring or early summer. My illustration is from Muskoka. Its full range is all of Canada and into the northern fringes of the U.S. (USDA). A challenge: find, photograph and notify TFN about where to see it in Toronto.

Article and photos by Peter Money

References:

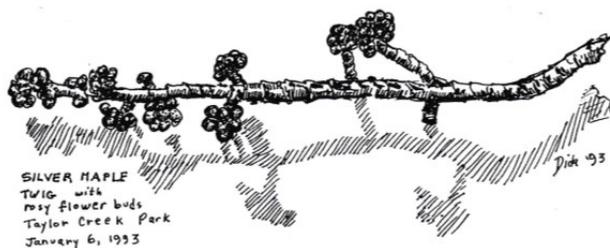
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- USDA U.S. Department of Agriculture Plants database online at <https://www.plants.usda.gov/java/>



From top:
 Canada mayflower (*Maianthemum canadense*)
 False Solomon's-seal (*M. racemosum*) Photo: Wendy Rothwell
 Star-flowered false Solomon's-seal (*M. stellatum*)
 Three-leaved false Solomon's-seal (*M. trifolium*)

EXTRACTS FROM OUTINGS LEADERS' REPORTS

Plants in Winter, Guild Inn Estate, Scarborough Bluffs, Dec 11. Leader: Miles Hearn. We concentrated on identifying trees and shrubs from their twigs and buds. Tree species included crack, weeping, sandbar, Missouri and peach-leaved willows, maple, ash, cottonwood, yew, Norway and white spruce, white and Scots pine, basswood and linden. Among shrubs observed were buckthorn, red-osier and silky dogwood, sumac and autumn olive. As we walked along the lake below the bluffs we spotted Red-breasted Merganser, Bufflehead and Common Goldeneye; Ring-billed Gulls, crows and ravens in the sky; and White-breasted Nuthatch, chickadee and junco along the trail. Photos can be seen at <https://mileshearn.com/2019/12/11/trees-and-shrubs-in-winter-at-the-guild-inn-area-december-11-2019/>



Drawing by Diana Banville

Ashbridge's Bay, Dec 21. Leader: Bob Kortright. The ice edge was halfway down Coatsworth Cut, providing excellent views of an Iceland Gull and 11 kinds of ducks, geese and swans, both there and south of the Ashbridge's Bay Yacht Club. We compared female Red-breasted and Common Mergansers; Gadwall and Mallard; and were surprised to find three Brown Creepers. There was much evidence of beavers: recently-cut trees as well as branches stored in the bay for food after the bay freezes over.

Toronto Islands, Dec 28. Leader: Paul Overy. We explored some of the rich natural and human history of Ward's and Algonquin Islands beginning with the creation of the sand bar which later became the Islands. We spoke about the long-standing First Nations presence on that land and the status of the Islands in the three Toronto Purchase Treaties. We explored the development of the Ward's Island community beginning in the late 1800s and the Algonquin Island community beginning in 1937. Many trees on Ward's Island were gloriously full of (probably) sparrows. A family of ducks accompanied our group along the southern shore (the ducks were in the water; we were not). Signs of the Islanders' response to the Spring 2019 floods were evident along the shorelines, most areas being sandbagged, and many trees near the shore have highly exposed roots from soil erosion.

Winter Birds, Humber Bay Park, Jan 4. Leader: Bob Kortright. We had good looks at Red-necked Grebe, Mute and Trumpeter Swans, wigeon, all three mergansers, Gadwall and Redhead as well as a few Greater Scaup, Bufflehead, Common Goldeneye, Mallards and hundreds of Long-tailed Ducks. Other birds seen included cardinals, goldfinches, chickadees, Herring and Ring-billed Gulls, robins, mockingbird, Downy Woodpecker and a starling. We noted green ash trees (both treated and young untreated), nannyberry, wayfaring tree and European spindle tree. There were a few interesting fungi including *Schizophyllum* on sumach, and black witch's butter (*Exidia glandulosa*) on a cut stump surface beside a curly bracket similar to *Bjerkandera adjusta*.

Continued on page 15

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)

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

Sunday, March 1, 9 am to 3pm. West Toronto lakeshore to Burlington. Leader: Garth Riley. Meet at the parking lot at Humber Bay Park East (south of Lake Shore Blvd W at Parklawn Rd). We will drive between hotspots. Carpooling opportunities available. Waterfowl, geese, swans.

Royal Ontario Museum (<https://www.rom.on.ca/en/exhibitions-galleries/exhibitions>)

- to Mar 22: Bloodsuckers: Legends to Leeches
- to Mar 29: Wildlife Photographer of the Year

WEATHER (THIS TIME LAST YEAR)

March 2019

March brought some sunny and pleasant days mid-month but overall it was cold. The first eight days were particularly cold, with temperatures never rising above freezing (fractionally so downtown). The rest of the month was fairly close to seasonable but the average was about 1.5° below normal. Downtown averaged 0.1° and Pearson Airport, 1.2°. The highest temperature was 12.5° at Pearson Airport on the 28th.

Cool conditions and dry air helped to make the disappearance of snow cover a gradual affair. Sidewalks remained icy in places until late in the month and there was at least discontinuous patchy snow cover until almost the end of the month. Total snowfall, however, was light: 8.2 cm at Pearson Airport, which is close to half the 30-year average of 16.2 cm. Most of the month was dry; however, a soaking rain on the 30th brought precipitation totals to slightly above normal (63.8 mm at Pearson Airport and 67.2 mm downtown).

The winter of 2018-2019 was rather long and cold by recent standards. If one includes November, the five-month period of November to March was the coldest since 2014-2015, running about a degree below normal.

Gavin Miller

IN THE NEWS

Life, death and High Park

On January 13, The Toronto Star published an article by Kate Allen about TRCA's recently released comprehensive inventory of High Park's flora and fauna. While the report reveals a huge amount of biological richness (620 plant species and 62 animal species), including a surprisingly healthy oak savannah, it also exposes the extent to which this valuable habitat is under intense pressure due to "extensive trampling" by humans and dogs.

You can read the Toronto Star article on High Park Nature's website:

<https://www.highparknature.org/wiki/wiki.php>

Moose under attack!

Canadian researchers studying the impact of warming winters as parasites move north have discovered that moose in New Brunswick are being infested by thousands of blood-sucking ticks. A CBC News series, which looks at the effects of climate change in Canada, posted this item on February 6: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/new-brunswick/winter-ticks-climate-change-moose-1.5452694>

ABOUT TFN

TFN is a charitable, non-profit organization.

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NEWSLETTER

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Members are encouraged to contribute letters, short articles and digital images. Please email to: newsletter@torontofieldnaturalists.org

Submissions deadline for April issue: Mar 2

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Address: 2 – 2449 Yonge St, Toronto M4P 2E7. The office is normally open 9:30 am to noon on Fridays.

Note: If you wish to drop by on Friday, please phone first to ensure that someone will be there.

KEEPING IN TOUCH

EXTRACTS *continued from page 13*



Rare visitors

On January 25, a rainy drizzly foggy windy day, I saw two Greater White-fronted Geese in Bluffer’s Park.

These are also known as Speckled Geese on the Prairies – their usual habitat. They were a long way from home!

Lynn Pady

Plants, Chorley Park and Park Drive Ravine, Jan 11. Leader: Stephen Smith. We walked in steady rain through the maintained part of Chorley Park discussing urban park plantings over the years; then to the switchback trail area to inspect results of new plantings and current trail construction. Along the Moore Park trail we identified butternut and walnut trees, bitternut and shagbark hickories and many live white elms. On the bike trail near Bayview Avenue we encountered a raccoon having seizures due to canine distemper. We reported it to 311 and City staff arrived later in the afternoon to take the sick animal away. The cold rainy weather wasn't good for animal sightings; we saw only a few black squirrels and no birds.

Birds, Taylor Creek Park, Jan 18. Leader: Glen Hamilton. As we started out, the resident Red-tailed Hawk was chasing pigeons around the Victoria Park apartments. Down on the valley floor we spotted chickadees and heard a nuthatch following them. There were goldfinches and Tree Sparrows along the riverbank but, surprisingly, no Mallards in the creek. With the storm moving in we were lucky to spot a Cooper’s Hawk. Along the hydro corridor a flock of House Finches caught our attention. It was a slow day for birds considering that 23 species had been spotted here during the Christmas Bird Count.

Lower Don Trail (Riverdale to the Brick Works), Jan 21. Leader: Vivienne Denton. The valley looked splendid under a cover of fresh snow with seed heads and trees silhouetted against the white. On the Don River we saw about a dozen Common Mergansers, male and female, and a couple of groups of Mallards. Near the weir we heard the rattle of a kingfisher and watched it swoop down and dive into a pool. On land we saw a White-throated Sparrow, a pair of cardinals, a Downy Woodpecker, a hawk perched high up on an aerial on an apartment tower, and a small group of Tree Sparrows flitting around in a clump of bushes.



Belted Kingfisher sequence. Photos by Theresa Moore

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TFN LECTUREVISITORS WELCOME

Sunday, March 1, 2:30 pm (Social, 2 pm)

“There are no flying squirrels in Ontario” and other myths.

Dr. Jeff Bowman, Senior Research Scientist with the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, and Adjunct Professor at Trent University, will provide insights into the natural history of flying squirrels



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 lectures:

Apr 5 Stuart Livingston, University of Toronto

Dog-Strangling Vine

May 3 Paul Zammit, Toronto Botanical Garden

Rethinking Beauty: Inspiring Gardeners in a Changing World