



TORONTO FIELD NATURALIST

Number 683 March 2024



Northern Pintail. Photo: Zunaid Khan

REGULARS

About TFN	15
Extracts from Outings Reports	11
Junior Naturalists	9
Keeping in Touch	14
Lecture Notice	16
Lecture Report	3
President's Report	2
TFN Outings Information	4
Weather (This Time Last Year)	7

FEATURES

Being an Ethical Photographer	2
TFN Nature Images Show 2024	5
Toronto Nature Now – Duckweed and Microbes	8
Tree of the Month – European black alder (<i>Alnus glutinosa</i>)	10
A Special Learning Opportunity	13
Outings Leaders 101 Workshop & Social	13
Focus on Nature – Black & White	16

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

TFN has been speaking up for nature since our inception, and no doubt this will continue well into the future. At times, doing so can be frustrating as we face setbacks when fighting for public access to green space. I was struck with this feeling last month while walking on the waterfront trail along the channel leading into Ontario Place after access to the West Island had been cut off. As I stood there taking photos of winter ducks and gazing over at the West Island, I was approached by a man who said, "Better take photos while you can. It's going to be destroyed soon." As we spoke, and I tried to convince him that all hope was not lost, he became more upbeat and my sense of frustration ebbed away. I share this interaction with you because, regardless of how frustrating it can be at times as we fight for our green spaces, we must continue for our own well-being and that of our fellow residents in this beautiful city.

Thank you to all the members who participated in our *Nature Images Show* and those who joined us for the panel on *Volunteering with TFN* in February. I would like to thank Lynn Miller for organizing both events.

As we move toward spring, we anticipate returning to in-the-field activities with our stewardship committee and a larger slate of walks from our outings committee. Members can look forward to announcements of centennial events and new opportunities to engage in nature from both committees.

As we seek to get closer to our pre-pandemic extent of activities where we connect with the public, our promotions and outreach committee is planning involvement in more outreach events this year. I am happy to share our planned participation in two spring events: *Earth Day at Downsview Park* on April 28 and *Colonel Samuel Smith Park Spring Bird Festival* on May 25. If you are interested in helping us promote TFN at these events and others we are planning, please email volunteering@torontofieldnaturalists.org.

Let's get outside, enjoy nature, and remember to speak up for nature when the opportunity arises so that we can preserve its beauty for all to enjoy.

Zunaid Khan

BEING AN ETHICAL NATURE PHOTOGRAPHER

Keep the location of animals a secret!

If you are taking photos with a smart phone or a GPS-enabled camera, remove the location information from your images before sharing them on social media or websites.

The problem with sharing wildlife locations is that it can draw a mob of birders or photographers to the site, hoping to see an especially rare bird or other animal. This is particularly troublesome for birds of prey, like snowy owls, that need to hide and rest during the day. People crowding too close to an animal to get a close-up photo, or just a better look, causes stress and can interfere with hunting, feeding, and sleep.

So, share your photo, but not where you took it!



Snowy Owl, 1981,
Drawing: Diana Banville
TFN Nature Arts Archive

This is the first in a series by TFN's Wildlife Protection Committee

LECTURE REPORT

Wetland Restoration and Management in Canada's Largest City: 30 Years of Lessons Learned and Adaptive Management

February 4, 2024

Ralph Toninger, Associate Director of Restoration and Resource Management, Toronto and Region Conservation (TRCA)

There has been massive (over 68%) loss of wetlands in southern Ontario since the early 19th century. Much of the early loss was due to agriculture. Other anthropogenic factors contributing to more recent loss include urbanization, removal of tree canopy, climate change, road salt and invasive species. In some places, rather than wetland loss, urban development even around protected areas has resulted in too much water, causing massive runoff and attendant problems.

Working in concert with multiple partners, TRCA has restored about 218 hectares of terrestrial and coastal wetland in the last 10 years. Several specific strategic restoration selection tools are used to identify and prioritize projects in the context of thousands of potential sites. Projects can be very large and complex, such as at Tommy Thompson Park (TTP), while others are small, for example the Spadina Quay wetland, or may involve working with a private landowner to alter drainage from a field. Sometimes restoring water to a landscape is easy, with very rapid outcomes, while other projects involve decades of work and continuous learning. This lecture gave an overview of the history, theory, and current status of wetland restoration, emphasizing the importance of the more recent understanding of ecosystems and hydrology in successful project outcomes.

Case studies highlighted in the lecture included successful single-focus species-targeted restoration in the 90s and early 2000s, particularly fish species and species at risk. There was work on northern pike spawning channels, Blanding's turtle overwintering habitat at Toronto Zoo Weston Pond, as well as snake and tern habitats and Wood Duck boxes. A lot has been learned from these endeavours, which were the beginning of wetland rehabilitation, and single species continue to be targeted.

There has also been a focus on restoring vernal pools. Work at Claireville Conservation Area has allowed chorus frogs to proliferate. Led by increased understanding of the importance of hydrology and topography, other projects

have achieved very positive habitat outcomes and biodiversity opportunities at Rouge National Urban Park, the Kortright Centre for Conservation, the Reesor Road Wetlands, and the Brampton Humber Valley Lands. Some locations have seen a resurgence of historic seed banks consisting of cattails and other aquatic plants, even though the seeds may have been buried or otherwise impeded for 100 or more years. In some locations, simply removing old agricultural clay tile drainage has allowed wetland areas to re-establish very quickly, providing great wildlife opportunities and improved crop productivity.

Vegetation is key in wetland design. Different wetland plants are very selective as to what depths they prefer for growth, and coastal restoration has been complicated by changes in Lake Ontario water levels. Historical data show widely varying water levels, with some very pronounced lows. Implementation of water level management in the mid 1960s, in the service of flood control, shipping, and pleasure boating, resulted in complete loss of the lows. Water lows, unlike highs, permit proliferation and expansion of vegetation. Now, even the less pronounced lake lows are mistimed with seasonal growth times, causing vegetation to stagnate. However, even ideal water depth may not be sufficient for restoration, as seen at Embayment D at TTP, where common carp intrusions have resulted in increased water turbidity, making the habitat too dark for plant growth. At Duffins Marsh, installation of fish gates and water controls instantly improved water clarity, allowing massive expansion in vegetation.

Understanding of the various factors contributing to a positive turbidity feedback loop has been applied at TTP Cell 1, "a lesson in patience," along with work on soil improvement. This has culminated in a successful biodiverse coastal habitat supporting the near-shore fish community and thriving vegetation as well as wildlife populations with various hibernacula and breeding habitats. The more recent work at TTP Cell 2, which has more deep water habitat, incorporates the knowledge gained from previous projects as well as from greater fish and wildlife information. The lecture closed with a series of photos depicting the progress at Cell 2 since 2014. Turbidity issues continue, and more years are needed for vegetation to become established, but now Cells 1 and 2 are connected to each other and the lake, representing around 15 hectares of wetland replacing the very large marsh, previously at Ashbridge's Bay, that was lost due to urbanization.

Michele Macartney-Filgate

This lecture can be viewed on the *Members Only* website.

TFN OUTINGS INFORMATION

A list of walks available to members is posted at the beginning of each month on the walks page of our *Members Only* website (<https://tfngo.to/memberswalks>) and can be downloaded or printed. You are welcome to bring one non-member guest. Listed below are two March outings you might like to consider.

Nature Arts: *Drawing on the Past* at the ROM

Leader: Joanne Doucette

Tuesday, March 19, 4:30 pm

Meeting Point: Outside the old entrance to the Royal Ontario Museum on Queen's Park.

Outing Details: Four hours. Wheelchair accessible. Wheelchairs are available for those who may not be able to stand for long periods.

Note: Museum entrance is free but all participants must register with Joanne (joannedoucetteto@gmail.com, 647-236-4980) by March 4, as tickets must be arranged in advance.

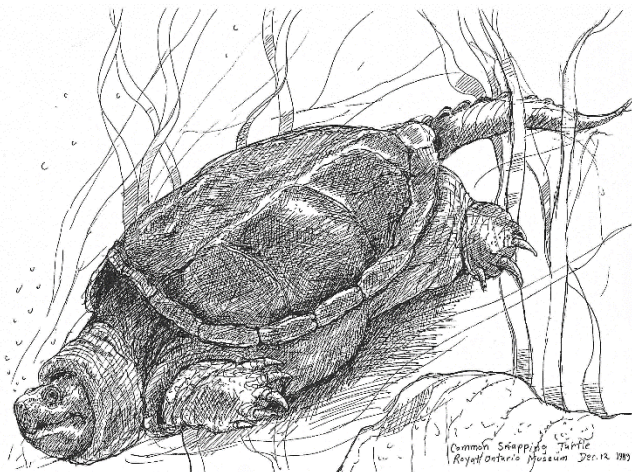
Outing Description: There is so much to see and experience here and lots of natural science to draw upon for arts projects. We will eat in the Museum's café where we will discuss our experience to that point. At the end of the event we will meet to review our art.

TTC: Museum subway station, west exit.

Washrooms: Available.

What to bring: This is a drawing event, so bring your sketch pad, pencils and other materials plus money for lunch. We are not taking photographs so please do not bring your camera.

Walk Leader's Cell Number: 416-707-2164



Common snapping turtle at the ROM.

Drawing: Diana Banville. TFN Nature Arts Archive.

Signs of Spring along the Humber

Leader: Lillian Natalizio

Sunday, March 24, 1:30 pm

Meeting Point: Humber Arboretum Welcome Gazebo, Arboretum Blvd

Walk Details: A 2.5-hour, 4-5 km circular walk over mostly unpaved, uneven surfaces with some gentle slopes and stairs.

Walk Description: We'll explore a variety of habitats supported in the arboretum lands as we look for tree buds that have opened or are preparing to open, ephemerals that may be emerging from the soil, and early spring migrants. The route will take us through mature woods, down to the West Humber River, to revitalised ponds and aquatic habitats, and back through meadow trails.

TTC: There are multiple transit options, including #96 Wilson bus or #927 Hwy 27 bus from Kipling subway station. See also <https://humber.ca/arboretum/contact/directions.html>.

Parking is available in Humber College Lot #1.

Washrooms: Not available.

What to bring: Field guide or ID app, camera, binoculars, water.

Walk Leader's Cell Number: 416-577-7618



Red-winged Blackbird. Photo: Diana Turchin

TFN NATURE IMAGES SHOW 2024

On February 3rd, 47 members signed onto Zoom to view nature images created by TFN photographers. We were welcomed by our president, Zunaid Khan, who thanked Lynn Miller for once again organizing and hosting this popular annual event. Many of the 12 presenters are members of TFN’s photography group, and three were new to the show. The program included a wide range of subjects depicting nature in Toronto and further afield in Ontario.



Jim Goad shared a variety of sightings in local natural areas including this exciting image of a Great Blue Heron in flight.



Theresa Moore presented a magical video, with musical accompaniment, of flowers, pollinators and birds seen in early summer on the Duncan Creek Trail. This silvery blue butterfly on purple loosestrife is one of her many stunning images.



Susan Pekilis chose an imaginative approach in her presentation, using the themes *looking out*, *looking down*, *looking up close* and *looking up*. This vibrant mushroom, *Hygrocybe*, is something she saw when looking down.

June D’Souza shared a video (with music) of sightings during late summer 2023, including this delightful shot of two sparrows feeding on berries.



Cody King’s presentation of remarkable macro shots took us into the fascinating world of insects. This image depicts red ants farming aphids.



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NATURE IMAGES SHOW *continued*

Joanne Doucette has been working on a project to painstakingly colour sketches and historic black and white photos *one pixel at a time!* This 1912 photo is of Bloor Street West at the edge of High Park.



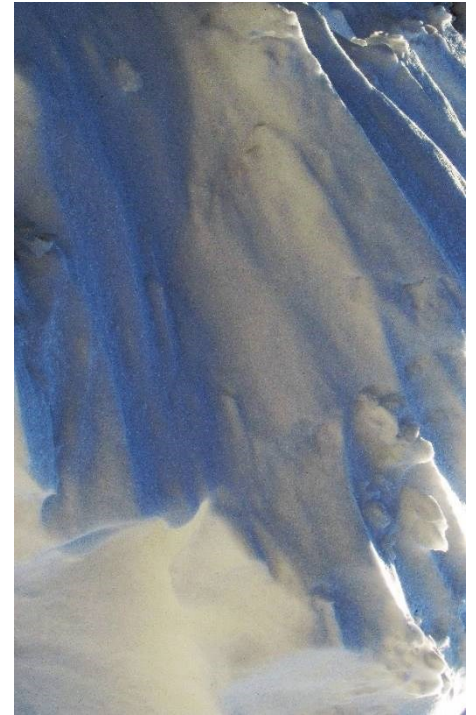
Wendy Rothwell's video (with music) was entitled *Herbaceous Plants, Flowers, Fruits and Seeds*. This example is butterfly milkweed.



Jane Goad's photos included a variety of fungi, birds, flowers and damselflies, and this panoramic view in Algonquin Park.

Charlotte Broome

invited us to *walk with me in beauty*. Her video of abstract photos (with music) explored the often unnoticed shapes and colours to be found in snow.



Martin Chen, in honour of our Centennial, showed us photos from recent TFN outings. This one was at Cedarvale Park in July.

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NATURE IMAGES SHOW *continued*

Zunaid Khan presented a video (with music) including snowy scenes, pollinators, and wildflowers such as this beautiful image of a white trillium.



Lynn Miller shared photos of autumn, her favourite season, and interesting textures like this birch log.

Our thanks go to all participants for generously sharing your love of nature and your artistic talents.

If you would like to join TFN's photography group, please email photography@torontofieldnaturalists.org.

Members may view some of the videos from this show at: <https://tfngo.to/2024imagesshow>

Wendy Rothwell

WEATHER (THIS TIME LAST YEAR)

March 2023

March was a strange and overall unpleasant month, mostly because of continued cloud cover and the absence of either crisp, cold or bright, warm weather. The overall seasonable temperatures of the month, a mean temperature of 2.0° downtown and 0.9° at Pearson Airport, were combined with a lot of rain and wet snow.

Total precipitation was 100.6 mm downtown and 90.0 mm at Pearson; not in record territory but about double the long-term average. The city was near the boundary between cold Arctic air to the northwest and unseasonable heat to the southeast, and so was also subject to persistent precipitation: lots of snow to the north, rain and thunderstorms to the south. Toronto got both snow and thunder during the heaviest storm of the month on the 4th.

Temperatures didn't vary much, the warmest being 12.5° at Oakville in the southern reaches of the Greater Toronto Area and -11.3° at King City in the northern reaches. We were just cold enough to get a lot of snow, particularly in the northern areas of the GTA. Pearson got 44.6 cm of



High Park after the snowfall on March 4th.

Photo: Charlotte Broome

snow, while downtown got somewhat less. Pearson had snow cover for the first 20 days of March, peaking at 28 cm of snow on the ground on the 4th. Downtown melted slightly earlier, with snow cover for the first 18 days.

Gavin Miller

DUCKWEED AND MICROBES: EPISODE #127 OF *TORONTO NATURE NOW*

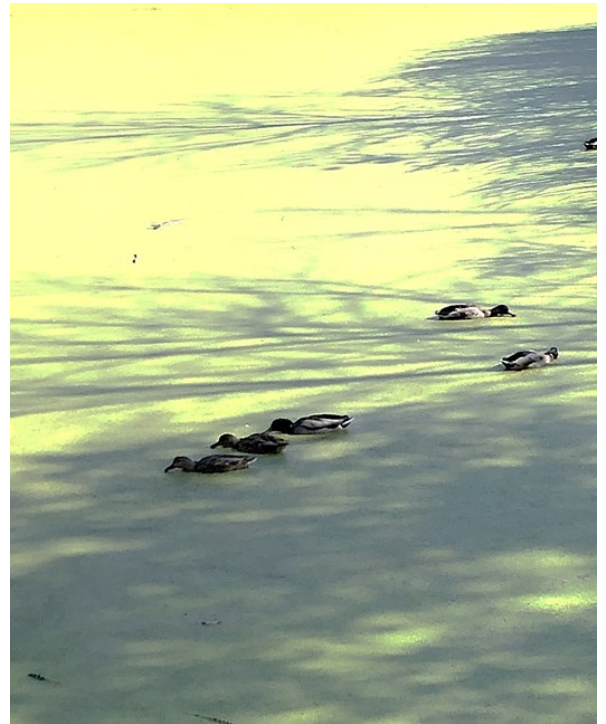
One good source of interesting information for TFN members and the broader public is our terrific weekly radio show, *Toronto Nature Now*, created by the TFN's Jason Ramsay-Brown in partnership with Met Radio (formerly CJRU) at Toronto Metropolitan University and launched in 2018. A secret no longer! Over coming months, this space will showcase past gems of *Toronto Nature Now*, with links to the full treasure-house of 180-plus [audio episodes](#), to savour at your leisure. Each episode invites a guest speaker to mix nature facts, insights and whimsy in a short, accessible format, usually less than 15 minutes. If you or someone you know is interested in contributing an episode to *Toronto Nature Now*, please contact volunteering@torontofieldnaturalists.org and specify your interest in TNN."

This month, we focus on pond duckweed. Duckweed is often overlooked (except by ducks), but it grows the world over and is, incidentally, the world's smallest flowering plant. Duckweed has practical applications in water quality remediation, as explained by biologist Anna O'Brien, a U of T postdoctoral researcher, in episode 127 of *Toronto Nature Now*.

As Anna O'Brien outlines, duckweed particularly likes nutrient-rich waters. A classic example would be urban stormwater ponds receiving runoff high in nutrients from lawn fertilizers, dog poo and other pollutants. Thus it's not surprising we can observe abundant duckweed at Toronto's Brick Works wetlands and on the pond at Todmorden Mills. Luxuriant growths of duckweed can remove nutrients from pond water and help improve water quality downstream. What is surprising, however, is the range of other urban water pollutants that can also be remediated by mats of floating duckweed. Duckweed is always associated with a community of microbes, and it seems that the microbes have key roles in breaking down pollutants typical of urban stormwater. Listen to [the duckweed episode](#) to learn more (13 minutes).

Still can't get enough of duckweed? This four-minute [video](#) reveals the clever evolutionary strategy allowing duckweed plants to escape icy surfaces of winter ponds and then return to pond surfaces in spring, to flourish.

Ellen Schwartzel



Duckweed at the Brick Works.

Photo: Ellen Schwartzel

Next time in this space, watch for Pussy Willows: Episode #24 of *Toronto Nature Now*.

UPCOMING JUNIOR NATURALISTS' EVENTS

Please join us for the TFN Juniors program with children/grandchildren aged 6-14 yrs. We meet one Saturday each month from 10 am to 12 noon. An adult must remain with their children for the duration of the program. Once registered, you will receive invitations to our monthly events with detailed instructions on the location and activities. Register here: juniortfn@torontofieldnaturalists.org

Upcoming Events include:

- | | |
|----------------|--|
| March 9 | Tree identification in the East Don Parklands |
| April 13 or 20 | Ontario Snakes and Turtles with Jenny Pearce |
| May 11 | Join the Spring Bird Festival at Tommy Thompson Park to kick off the songbird migration. |

JUNIOR NATURALISTS

Detected by and Detecting a Red Fox

My husband, Jim, and I were finishing a 13-kilometre hike on Amherst Island, Ontario, walking west into a spectacular sunset, and conscious of catching the 5 pm ferry.

Dusk is a time when lots of creatures feel safe to start prowling around looking for food. Suddenly, just 50 metres ahead of us, a creature appeared, turning over its vole supper.

He was sporting a rusty brown fur coat made of hairs about 3 inches long, a white vest, black knee socks and a bushy tail almost the length of his body. A red fox, of course, maybe the handsomest, healthiest one I had ever seen. And he took his time with his prey as we approached.

Our fox knew we were coming. We intuitively stopped moving as soon as we saw him. And this made us less noticeable to the fox in low light. Vision receptors are either rods or cones in the mammal eye. Rods detect brightness of an object, but become saturated and stop working in too much light. They are useful for detecting movement and work best at dusk. Cones work well in bright light and add colour to an object, so fill in the detail. Foxes have both types of receptors, but predominantly rods. They can hunt day or night, but their eyesight is best adapted for hunting at dusk. Our handsome fox saw us coming and saw us stop moving.

Sometimes people have observed a fox's eyes glowing at night. This is another feature of fox vision that equips it for low light situations. The light entering the eye hits something called the tapetum, a layer of reflective cells behind the retina. Light is reflected back into the eye,

along the same path it entered, increasing the amount of light for interpreting an image.

Our fox no doubt also heard us. As legend has it, a fox's hearing is so acute it can hear a mouse squeak 30 metres away. Our feet crunching on the gravel shoulder made a low-frequency sound. This might be similar to the rustling of prey in grasses, something fox hearing is adapted to pick up. A fox's ears point forward, but can rotate 130° in opposite directions to pick up a sound. Maybe, while exploring his prey, the fox's right ear was rotated in our direction to notice whether we had started walking again. The distance between his two ears would have helped him determine how far away we were. The fox also has something called the 'tympanic bulla' which surrounds the inner bones of the ear and may act as an echo chamber to magnify sound.



Red Fox. Photo: Lillian Nataliziol

And what about smell? Did our handsome fox smell us coming? That is unlikely in the very still wind conditions. Not too much is known about a fox's sense of smell, except that it is very important in communication and mating. A fox keeps its nose moist all the time to aid in picking up scents.

Foxes have had a bad reputation over the years as being chicken thieves. Remember the song, *The Fox went out on a chilly night*? We had just witnessed a red fox catching his own vole supper. Would he have preferred chicken? Farmers today consider foxes an asset to their farm operations because of the number of rodents and insects they consume, keeping these away from their valuable crops.

Anne Purvis

References:

<https://tfngo.to/redfoxsenses>

<https://tfngo.to/wildliferedfox>

TREE OF THE MONTH: EUROPEAN BLACK ALDER (*ALNUS GLUTINOSA*)

As an unmistakably single-trunked tree, European black alder (*A. glutinosa*), introduced and both planted and naturalized in and around Toronto, finds itself among a minority within the largely shrubby alder clan. Our other common alder here, speckled alder (*Alnus incana* subsp. *rugosa*), a widespread native, stands squarely among the majority in almost always being shrubby. Slightly muddying these waters, however, speckled alder is part of a circumboreal species whose European subspecies, European grey alder (*A. incana* subsp. *incana*), can be found occasionally in Toronto and is also typically a tree, unlike its native relative. A fourth Ontario alder, the shrubby Canadian green alder (*A. alnobetula* subsp. *crispa*), is prominent in the boreal forest region and only gets as far south as the Ottawa River Valley north of Algonquin Provincial Park.

The alders are more homogeneous in their leaf shapes and margins than are different oaks, maples, or poplars. They typically have wavy-margined leaves, the waves themselves edged by dense, fine teeth. Leaves of European black alder differ from those of the other three local alders in having a blunt or notched tip (rather than pointed) and in having the margin of the leaf wavy up and down as well as side to side. Reflecting a more three-dimensional arrangement of leaves around the twigs than in other birch family



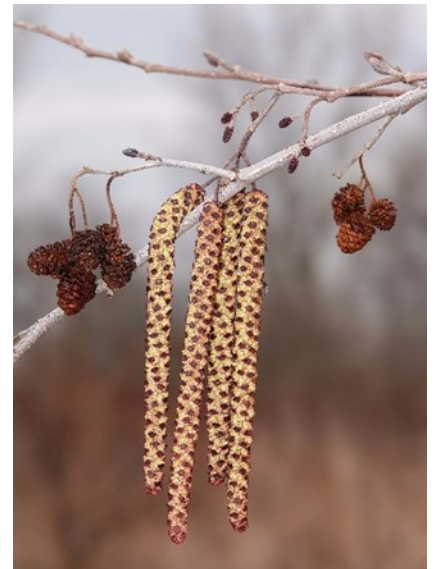
members, the tips of twigs are often somewhat 3-angled in feel and appearance. This also shows up inside the twigs, which have a sharply 3-angled pith that turns brown at maturity. Even more obviously distinctive for the winter twigs are their prominently stalked buds. Both twigs and buds are essentially hairless in European black alder, unlike our other local alder species.

During the growing season, twigs often support conspicuous colonies of woolly aphids. Where alders are abundant, their woolly aphids are the preferred food of our only



carnivorous butterfly caterpillar, that of the harvester (*Feniseca tarquinius*). Adult harvester butterflies tend to hang around their birth alder patches after emerging because they don't visit flowers, instead feeding on the woolly aphid honeydew, just like the ants that tend the caterpillars in addition to their flock of aphids.

The reproductive features of European black alder show no significant deviations from standard alder stereotypes. Male and female flowers on each tree are arranged in separate catkins, which are produced in the fall and remain conspicuously exposed over winter in an arrested state, enlarging to full size and exchanging wind-dispersed pollen in early spring before leaf expansion. Male catkins, produced in clusters of three to five, are similar at first glance to those of other Betulaceae, differing primarily in minute details. The fruiting catkins are a different story.



No other local hardwood trees or shrubs have infructescences, presented in branched clusters, that each resemble

Alder leaves with notched tips and wavy margin;
long-stalked winter bud;
alder twig with woolly aphids being tended by ants;
flowering male and female catkins
with previous year's fruiting catkins.

Photos: Ron Dengler

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EXTRACTS FROM OUTINGS LEADERS REPORTS

Woodbine Park, Dec 9. Leader: Joanne Doucette. We watched for the ways plants and animals adapt to winter and saw signs of a number of species from beaver (gnawed trunks and paths), muskrat (paths), deer (prints), a white-footed mouse (dead beside path), a flock of American Robins, the usual Ring-billed Gulls and Black-capped Chickadees as well as trees, including much-vandalized birches, Fraser fir, etc., and shrubs, including gray dogwood and red osier dogwood. We talked about the Indigenous use of these species and others, such as goldenrod. I told a few Indigenous stories including the Mi'kmaq story of the creation of the first people. I also talked about my enjoyment of clouds and why I joined the International Cloud Appreciation Society. I identified a striking series of

undulatus clouds. It was, as advertised, a slow walk through a great park.



Goldfinch at Moore Park Ravine.
Photo: Zunaid Khan

Moore Park Ravine, Dec 12.

Leader: Zunaid Khan. Following Mud Creek as it winds through the ravine, we discussed work the City of Toronto and TRCA have done to stabilize the Hudson Drive slope, resulting in a new paved trail and improved protection of the ESA. At the bridge leading into the Brick Works we discussed the photo of the Moore Park Ravine taken by Mel Whiteside in 1957. We walked around the wetlands in the Brick Works discussing advocacy issues and stewardship, and observing the proliferation of phragmites.

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TREE OF THE MONTH *continued*

small, woody, conifer cones. These persist through the winter and so overlap with the much smaller, undeveloped clusters of the next year's crop.

One of the most ecologically important features of European black alder and all its fellow alder species is that, like the more familiar situation in legumes, its roots have conspicuous, swollen nodules harboring nitrogen-fixing bacteria. The bacteria living symbiotically with alders belong to the genus *Frankia* and are unrelated to the *Rhizobium* bacteria found in legume roots, indicating that this kind of partnership evolved independently in the two groups. While nitrogen fixation is not ordinarily that ecologically important in our generally rich young soils, it does enhance plant growth around the margins of bogs and fens, where Canadian green alders often form extensive thickets. In British Columbia, Alaska, and the northwestern United States, soluble, plant-growth-friendly forms of nitrogen are readily leached from the soil by heavy winter rains. There, while growth of the mature rainforest giant trees may well be enhanced by rotting salmon carcasses, the establishment of these trees in the

first place, whether in primary or secondary ecological succession, is made possible in part by the nitrogen-fixation symbiosis of quickly pioneering red alder (*Alnus rubra*) and other western alder species following disturbance or emergence of fresh land at the margins of

retreating mountain glaciers. This latter circumstance may well echo a greater role that our native alders had 12,000 years ago, when our continental glaciers were last retreating.

Beyond alders, other species of *Frankia* are symbiotic in the roots of a scattering of unrelated trees and shrubs. Russian olive, buffaloberry and sea-buckthorn (Elaeagnaceae), sweet gale and sweet-fern (Myricaceae), and New Jersey tea and redroot (Rhamnaceae) are all examples of additional native or introduced trees and shrubs harbouring symbiotic *Frankia* bacteria that may be found in southern Ontario.

One rewarding place to see European black alder in Toronto is at Humber Bayfront Park East, near the miniature boat basins, where larger individuals show the cracked black bark that gives the tree its name.

James Eckenwalder



Bacteria-housing nodules on alder roots.
Photo: Ron Dengler

EXTRACTS *continued*

Bird sightings included robins, goldfinches, Dark-eyed Juncos, Downy Woodpeckers, Mallards and a lone Cedar Waxwing.

Colonel Sam Smith Park, Dec 17. Leader: Lillian Natalizio. A mild start to winter had the robins singing. The white fruits of snowberry, pink peduncles of grey dogwood and shiny orange bark of willow twigs brightened the rainy afternoon. Walking east along pebbled beach, marina boardwalk, rocky shoreline, meadow, pond and woodland, we saw the usual suspects, including Red-necked Grebe, Red-breasted Mergansers, Hooded Mergansers, American Black Ducks, American Widgeons, Gadwall, Lesser Scaup, Long-tailed Ducks, Buffleheads, Common Goldeneyes, Northern Cardinals, Blue Jays, crows, and American Tree Sparrows.

Leslie Street Spit, Dec 26. Leader: Charles Bruce-Thompson. We walked as far as the pedestrian bridge,



Juvenile Red-tailed Hawk at Leslie Street Spit. Photo: Richard Longley

then returned via the banding station. We saw most of the usual waterfowl including Northern Shovelers, all three merganser species, many Trumpeter Swans and hundreds of Greater Scaup. We also saw a

juvenile Red-tailed Hawk that seemed oblivious to the admiring crowd. Two mink crossed our trail. The resident beaver colony in Embayment D has successfully blocked the latest attempt by the TRCA to keep a carp-exclusion gate clear.

Winter Ducks at Colonel Samuel Smith Park, Dec 30. Leaders: David Creelman and Kayoko Smith. We followed the lakeshore, including the inner marina bay, looking primarily for ducks. Our dozen participants saw quite a few of the regular winter inhabitants. Of special interest were four Harlequin Ducks that had shown up the day before. We also saw a Common Loon fishing quite far out. There was a small grebe, but it was too far to tell if it was the rare Eared Grebe that has been staying in the area or the more common Horned Grebe. Among the ducks, we saw Long-tailed, Bufflehead, Common Goldeneye, Greater Scaup, Gadwall, Red-breasted Merganser and, of course, Mallard. Other birds on the water included Mute Swans, Canada Geese and a huge adult Black-backed Gull. There were numerous Ring-billed Gulls, and a few

Herring Gulls, part of any winter lakeside visit. Of 'land birds' the highlights were close-up views of Golden-crowned Kinglets, American Tree Sparrows, Downy Woodpeckers, Dark-eyed Junco, Mourning Dove and Northern Cardinals.

East Don Parklands, Jan 6. Leader: Zunaid Khan. As we enjoyed a lovely walk along the Don River, we discussed work the City is doing to improve the water quality in the river and mitigate flood risk. Due to this construction, the trail access points at Sheppard and Leslie along with the parking lot are closed. This work is scheduled to be completed by the summer of 2024.

From the trail access point on Leslie we walked down a steep hill into the East Don Parklands, then followed the river to where it crosses under Finch Avenue and along the Upper Don Trail. Along the way we discussed



Belted Kingfisher at East Don. Photo: Bill Cruttwell

work the City's Urban Forestry division is doing this winter, specifically the removal of invasive tree species (European buckthorn, Norway and Manitoba maple) and the planting of native species. It is amazing to see the impact this work is having. Bird sightings included Red-tailed Hawks, a Belted Kingfisher, robins, Mallards, Downy Woodpecker, White-breasted Nuthatches, and American Goldfinches.

Royal Ontario Museum, Wildlife Photography, Jan 10. Leaders: Kathy Chung and Ellen Schwartzel. We attended the 2023 *Wildlife Photographer of the Year* exhibit at the ROM, showing the work of winners and finalists of the annual wildlife photography contest hosted by the Natural History Museum in London. The photographs were variously beautiful, inventive, painful (photojournalism works on the wild cat fur trade and recreational hunting), and marvelous. Subjects included a wide range of species and environments. Many of the photos also touched on naturalist concerns of environmental degradation, loss of habitat and diversity. We were impressed by the work of young photographers, some aged 10 years or under! A fascinating and thought-provoking outing with pleasant company on a cold winter day.

A SPECIAL LEARNING OPPORTUNITY

During the pandemic, I enrolled in the *Ontario Master Naturalist Program* established by Lakehead University in partnership with Ontario Nature, and offered online. I heartily recommend this community program.

The first of its kind in Canada, the OMNP certificate program “provides naturalists and those interested in nature and environmental stewardship an opportunity to broaden their knowledge and expertise of the natural world through formal training and guidance”. I found out about this program through Ontario Nature after I became involved in their campaign in 2020 to stop the erosion of the powers of Ontario’s Conservation Authorities. I wanted to help protect an Environmentally Significant Area, and I keep learning more about what that means.

Not having a background in the natural sciences nor needing a degree, I embraced the option of the university course, its interactive modular design, and encouraging weekly webinars with the program’s content experts. It was the start of a longer journey, for which I am grateful. The program consists of eight learning modules: *Geology and Anthropology, Mammals, Plants, Birds, Reptiles & Amphibians, Wetlands, Invasive Species, and Insects*.

As I took the course, I was pleased that I could read the signage and website materials about my favourite places – nature preserves – with more understanding of their history, the work of restoration, and the vegetation communities. I enjoyed spending a lot of time outdoors on field assignments and the satisfaction of learning by doing.

Subsequently I joined Toronto Field Naturalists, and have seen the same places through new eyes.

An unexpected broadening of horizons occurred as I travelled from Toronto to related participant workshops in the area of Lakehead University Orillia, thus traversing a changing urban-rural divide. I especially enjoyed a Carden Alvar workshop and *The World of Mushrooms*, both led by master naturalist, founder and program coordinator, Bob Bowles who was inducted into the Orillia Hall of Fame on October 30, 2023. With regard to stewardship and speaking up passionately for nature, his work in the course and his articles in Orillia newspapers are educational and inspiring.

The OMNP certificate program is taught in a hybrid model including interactive videos and PowerPoints created for the program, virtual learning resources, a virtual trailhead meeting space, and weekly Zoom webinars with the program’s content experts. While the program includes live Zoom sessions, it can be completed asynchronously, as the weekly webinars are recorded and posted to the online course site allowing students to review them in their own time.

Participants receive a certificate after successfully completing the eight modules that combine in-class instruction and fieldwork. The course fee is \$599 + HST. For information or questions about the *Ontario Master Naturalist Program*, visit their website and check out the *Workshops* page: <https://tfngo.to/onmp>

Alja Pirosook



TFN walk at Cottonwood Flats.

Photo: Lillian Natalizio

Save the Date!

The Outings Committee invites you to the
Leaders 101 Workshop

followed by the

Leaders and Shepherds Social

Thursday March 21, 2024

Workshop 6:30-7:30 pm Social 7:30-9:00 pm

Friends House, 60 Lowther Ave

[More information to follow.]

KEEPING IN TOUCH

Life in the urban food chain.

These photos were taken on Jan 15 in my backyard at Bloor and Dufferin. A juvenile Cooper's Hawk swooped down from a tree where it had been perched for half an hour, caught a pigeon, and proceeded to tear it apart and eat it while staying in the same place in full view for over two hours. Even though a squirrel came right up to it, the hawk ignored the squirrel.



The hawk now knows that my yard is a buffet, so comes by every day. I haven't noticed any further feedings though. It must be finding enough food in the neighbourhood.

Sharon Lovett

Surprise!

In the fall, I noticed these huge fungi in David Balfour Park and have kept an eye on them ever since.

On January 31st they had a visitor that stayed in the same spot for quite a while after it darted in, sat down, wrapped up its tail and enjoyed the view down into the ravine.

Lynn Pady



Wildlife Photographer of the Year 2023

Exhibit at the ROM until May 26, 2024

Each year, aspiring photographers of all ages and skill levels submit tens of thousands of images in the annual international *Wildlife Photographer of the Year* competition organized by the Natural History Museum in London, UK. One hundred remarkable images from this year's competition – the best of the best – are currently on view at the Royal Ontario Museum.

Experience our world in vivid detail and see some of the most extraordinary species in ways you never imagined. Each photograph is back lit, providing exquisite quality and depth. Through the camera's lens, viewers become witnesses to the lives animals live and the challenges they face. Emotive, surprising glimpses of life on our planet are showcased through exceptional talent, technical expertise, and the perfectly captured moment.

ABOUT TFN

TFN is a volunteer-run non-profit nature conservation organization. We connect people with nature in the Toronto area, helping them to understand, enjoy, and protect Toronto's green spaces and the species that inhabit them.

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NEWSLETTER

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Views expressed in the newsletter are not necessarily those of the editor or Toronto Field Naturalists.

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

Submissions deadline for April: March 4

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TFN LECTURES

Each year TFN offers eight free talks by noted experts, exploring everything from nature in the city to global environmental issues. Talks are presented Sunday afternoons at 2:30 pm, from September to May. They are usually 45 minutes in length followed by discussion. Visitors are always welcome. TFN Members have access to recordings of past lectures via our *Members Only* website.

Learn about this month's lecture on the back page.

You may join the March lecture via Zoom. The link will be posted on the Lectures page of TFN's *Members Only* and public websites. If you prefer, you can dial in to the lecture by phone:

Dial in: 1 647 558 0588 Meeting ID: 837 1549 0570 Passcode: 537619

FOCUS ON NATURE – BLACK & WHITE

The December challenge for TFN's Photography Group was Black & White. This image was submitted by Theresa Moore.

I find that landscapes are well suited to monochrome photography, especially scenes that have high contrast. So, after the first snowfall, I took my wide-angle lens and headed out to a nearby golf course. I chose this composition because I could isolate the tree from most of the background.

It was shot at f9 and I added one stop to the camera's recommended exposure so that the snow would appear white rather than 18% grey. In Adobe Camera Raw I chose one of the black and white profiles. Once the image was open in Photoshop, I selected 'Invert' from the Image Adjustment menu. This inverted the colours, adding more drama and contrast, and creating an image similar to those obtained with infrared equipment.

Theresa Moore



If you would like to join the Photography Group, email photography@torontofieldnaturalists.org.

TFN LECTURE

Sunday, March 3 at 2:30 pm

Via Zoom. See page 15 for information



Toronto Ravine Strategy

Wendy Strickland, Project Manager, City of Toronto's Ravine Strategy, will give an overview of this strategy, designed to provide a coordinated vision and approach to managing our ravines, and will tell us what has been achieved to date.

Upcoming Lectures:

Apr 7 (Zoom only) **The Impacts of a Changing Climate on Toronto's Nature**, Yuestas David, TRCA, and David Macleod, City of Toronto.

May 5 (Zoom only) **The Biodiversity Value of Small Natural Spaces in Cities**, Dr. Lenore Fahrig, Chancellor's Professor of Biology and Gray Merriam Chair in Landscape Ecology at Carleton University, Ottawa.