



## A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

I would like to wish everyone a happy new year and welcome you to the 2007 Naturalists' Club season.

We have some interesting speakers lined up as well as some good outings. I've tried to find some speakers to talk about lesser known subjects such as insects and the Breeding Bird Atlas to name a few.

I would like also to thank the participants in the Christmas Bird Count for a successful day. Our auction at the pot luck dinner afterwards actually raised more money for the Owl Foundation than last year despite the smaller turnout.

I am looking forward to seeing everyone at the meetings.

Dan Whittam



## The 'Bat'wood Tree

(Like) A Bat out of help

One June day a visitor and his wife were coming into a local government operated nature center and the man stopped to watch some workers taking the dead top off of a basswood tree that was hanging precariously over a picnic table. The wife urged her husband to get going, as he did not need to watch 'work' while he was on his holidays.

A couple of hours later the couple was exiting the facility and saw the workers tying up the top of the tree to its former position. "Look at that," the husband said. "That's the government for you; they take the tree down in the morning and then they put it back up in the afternoon."

Well you have probably figured out that the nature centre in this story is our own Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre. It was formerly run by the government but is now operated by the Friends of Wye Marsh, a non-profit group. At the time, the government workers were actually doing a good thing. It seems that in taking down the tree they had disturbed a nursing colony of silver-haired bats. The bats were all females and most had suckling young attached. They were huddled together inside a basswood tree in a cavity made by a Northern Flicker in a previous year. The staff recognized not only the species, which is a tree dwelling bat but quickly knew that a colony of this species was a unique find. This turned out to be the first confirmed nursing colonies of silver-haired bats in North America and was later documented in the Journal of Mammalogy.

So, who cares? Well, we all should because bats have been around a long time and play important roles in keeping populations of nocturnal insects in balance. A single bat can catch hundreds of flying insects an hour including some which cost farmers and foresters millions of dollars annually. Unfortunately the numbers of bats in some of the largest colonies are decreasing. At one time, the bats of Bracken Cave in Texas would eat more than 200 tons of insects in a single summer night – that's a lot of 'bugs'. In the tropics, bats that eat fruit and nectar and are critical to the health of the rain forest. Many night blooming plants have special odours to attract bats. Valuable crops depend on bats and their role in tropical reforestation by seed dispersal is amazing. Bats have also helped scientists to develop many new medical techniques.

*cont. on page 3....*

Midland-Penetanguishene Field  
Naturalists Club  
Box 393  
Midland, Ontario L4R 2J8  
[www.csolve.net/~mpfnc](http://www.csolve.net/~mpfnc)

President: Dan Whittam  
Vice President: Susan Hirst  
Treasurer:Carolynn Fishleigh  
Secretary: Shirley Tilson  
Past Presidents: Greg Lutick and  
Adrienne Jex

## Schedule



*Here are the club meetings for the Winter season.  
Check the brochure for more information*

BIG CHUTE  
Saturday January 20, 2007,

BOREAL SONGBIRDS  
Thursday February 15, 2007 7:30 p.m.

CRAFTING BEE  
Saturday February 17, 2007

VERNAL POOLS  
Thursday March 15, 2007 7:30 p.m.

WHITTAM WOODS  
Saturday March 17, 2007

WYE MARSH SWEETWATER FESTIVAL  
March 24 & 25, 2007

MYSTERY GUEST  
Thursday April 19, 2007, 7:30 p.m.

MTM CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION  
Waterfowl Viewing Day-Tiny Marsh  
April 2007

ON HURONIA REGIONAL MEETING  
April 2007

UHTOFF TRAIL  
April 21, 2007

DRAGONFLIES  
Thursday May 17, 2007, 7:30 p.m.



### OUR MISSION STATEMENT

*To study and appreciate nature.  
To protect and preserve wildlife and  
the environment.  
To stimulate public interest in, and  
promote protection and  
preservation of  
nature.*

### Midland Penetanguishene Field Naturalist Club 107<sup>th</sup> Audubon Bird Count

On Saturday December 16, 2006 the 107<sup>th</sup> Audubon Christmas Bird Count was conducted in our area.

33 people took part on a mostly sunny, calm day. They were divided into 11 different count areas to observe and tally our feathered friends. There were 60 different species and 6,740 individuals spotted, including a King Eider .

Susan Hirst was interviewed as part of CBC's Fresh Air and the A Channel's KC Colby met with Dorothy Harper, Susan Hirst and Rob Maciver.

Thanks to all who took part. The day was completed with a potluck and auction at the Wye Marsh Centre where \$326 was raised for the McKeever Owl Foundation. The complete CBC data can be found on our web site.

*David Schandlen*



### THE NATURE BOOK CLUB



**Liz Scanlon hosted our book club on Jan. 7th. E. O. Wilson's grandiosely titled "The Future of Life" was discussed. Most beautiful & most sad item is a composite picture of extinct creatures. He does offer solutions after dire warnings. One lovely quote stands out, "In this world, nothing is too wonderful to be true." On Jan. 28th we will enjoy "The Hidden Life of Dogs" by Elizabeth Marshall Thomas at 2:00 at the Whiteheads. All welcome.**

*David Whitehead*



*cont. from page 1....* The bat that you are most likely to see around Midland-Penetanguishene is the little brown bat, which can consume half of its body weight in mosquitoes each night. In summer you can often see individuals or small groups of bats roosting on walls and in entranceways of downtown stores. The silver haired bat is not as common. There are 20 species of bats in Canada and about 8 of these occur regularly in Ontario. Three of these are arboreal or tree dwelling species; Silver-haired bat, Hoary bat and the Red bat.

Most bats communicate and navigate with high frequency sounds through a system known as echolocation. They can “see by sound.” It is a sophisticated system that still has researchers puzzled by its efficiency.

While not as common as little brown bats, silver-haired bats are not as rare as you might think and are among the most common bats in forested areas. As was discovered at the wildlife centre, they form nursing colonies in tree cavities especially in old growth forests and so managing the forests for diverse age groups is important for them. The ‘snags’ that they prefer are often culled by foresters. They spend the winter in forests as well but northern silver-haired bats will migrate long distances to get to a suitable climate.

Who would have thought that the forest was important for bats? The ‘bat’ wood (a.k.a. basswood) tree nursing colony is an example of the real meaning of ecology, the study of the interconnectedness of living and non-living things. Bats are mammals like us. We should treat them and their habitats with respect.

A few bat facts:

- Moths are the main food for Hoary bats
- A young bat is called a pup
- Mothers may travel more than 15 km to gather food for the young
- Bats are not blind
- While the young are being raised males of some species gather into bachelor colonies
- Bats return very close to their birthplace and wintering site
- Vampire bats adopt orphans
- There are only 3 species of vampire bats and they are only found in Latin America
- Some species of bats will eat fish
- Except for 3 species of nectar feeding bats in Arizona and Texas all bats in the US and Canada eat insects
- A bat can detect a single human hair in complete darkness
- The smallest bat in the world is the bumblebee bat of Thailand weighing less than a cent.
- Flying foxes are the largest with wingspans of 2m
- Scientists believe that primates and bats share a common shrew-like ancestor
- Bats are members of a group called the Chiroptera which means “hand-wing”
- Before human intervention, bats in some locales dominated the night skies just as passenger pigeons dominated the day skies.

*Bob Whittam*

### **Baillie Fund Grants Available for Canadian Bird Research and Conservation Projects**

Bird Studies Canada is now accepting applications to the James L. Baillie Memorial Fund for the 2007 grant cycle, the 30th year of Baillie Fund grants. Since 1976, a portion of funds raised through BSC’s annual Baillie Birdathon fundraiser has been allocated to the James L. Baillie Memorial Fund for Bird Research and Preservation (the Baillie Fund) to provide grants to individuals or groups for projects that further BSC’s mission. Since 1976, the Baillie Fund has provided over half a million dollars to more than 480 bird research and conservation projects across Canada. In reviewing grant applications, the Baillie Fund Trustees give priority to well designed projects that engage the skills and enthusiasm of amateur naturalists and volunteers to help us understand, appreciate and conserve Canadian birds in their natural environments. There are three granting programs, each with a different application and review process. Applications for Regular Grants are due by 15 December 2006, applications for Small Grants are due by 15 January 2007 and application for the James L. Baillie Student Award for Field Research, administered by the Society of Canadian Ornithologists, is due by 15 February 2007. For more information about the Baillie Fund grant programs, past grants, and how to apply for a grant for your project contact the Baillie Fund Secretary at [ahcagy@bsc-eoc.org](mailto:ahcagy@bsc-eoc.org) or phone 519-586-3531, ext. 243.

## Hemlock, Spruce, Pine, Cedar, Fir, Yew, Maple, Oak & +++

It was November 20, 2005.  
when the M.P.F.N.  
visited Wymbolwood Forest  
a thin skin of ice  
cuddled the duckweed under the wooden bridge  
but trudging up and over dunes  
and slodging through snow-wet leaf-litter  
on slippery corduroy trails  
kept us warm enough to stop  
to examine bird and animal activity on treebark  
and though the birds were scarce  
and most of the animal tracks  
were made by homo sapiens  
we experienced from the path a forest  
as messy as those  
our forebears slogged their way  
through and over  
over 100 years ago 200? 300?  
(Champlain passed nearby)  
where nature has the upper hand  
for now  
though Wymbolwood Beach  
is oh so close  
totally humanized except for a few gulls.  
Hope. Pray. Declaim.  
That tiny precious Tiny woodland  
survives.

Betty Carter

## Report Trumpeter Swan Sightings! *by Friends of Wye Marsh*

Gathering information about Trumpeter swans is vital to the success of the program. The Trumpeter Swan Reintroduction Program needs your help! We rely on calls from members of the community to report swan sightings. It is especially important in the spring when pairs of swans are establishing their nesting territories, and in the summer when cygnets have hatched.

Many swans have plastic yellow wing tags and metal leg bands, both of which are marked with numbers. These numbers help us to track and monitor the swans throughout the year, and to gather information about migration, nesting and production of young. Trumpeter swans are large, white birds with black legs, feet and bills. Cygnets (young swans) hatch in June and are grey in colour with pinkish bills and feet. If you see a Trumpeter Swan, please note the following information: number of birds, tag and/or band numbers whenever possible, date and exact location of sighting. Please report this information to the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre at (705) 526-7809 or by email at [swans@wyemarsh.com](mailto:swans@wyemarsh.com)

## SPRAWL CRAWLS TO SIMCOE



Urban sprawl continues to encroach on Simcoe County, which lies just outside the northern boundary of the Golden Horseshoe Greenbelt. The county is

the scene of an unprecedented land speculation rush that has led to numerous urban expansion applications, now the subject of appeals to the Ontario Municipal Board. Residents and local politicians are becoming increasingly concerned about Lake Simcoe's capacity to assimilate such growth without lake water quality being impaired further.

Many demands are made on Lake Simcoe, which include swimming, boating, fishing and other recreational activities. Approximately 350,000 permanent residents live by its shoreline, along with thousands of cottagers and campers during the summer. In recent years, the water quality in Lake Simcoe has deteriorated, the fishing is poor and weeds in the lake and along the shoreline are increasing. These symptoms are caused primarily by increased nutrients, especially phosphorus, entering the lake as a result of agricultural practices and development activities.

Tory MPP Garfield Dunlop has taken a strong position with respect to sprawl and its impacts. This spring, he introduced the Lake Simcoe Protection Act into the legislature. The proposed legislation will create a comprehensive protection program for the Lake Simcoe and Nottawasaga River watersheds and natural heritage systems. As a member of Campaign Lake Simcoe, Ontario Nature expects that all political parties will support this legislation when it comes to a vote this fall.

More information on the bill and how you can help is available on the Campaign Lake Simcoe website, [www.environmentaldefence.ca/campaignLakeSimcoe/home.php](http://www.environmentaldefence.ca/campaignLakeSimcoe/home.php).

*This article, written by Wendy Francis, appears in the Autumn 2006 issue of ON Nature magazine.*

