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*A Publication Concerned With  
Natural History and Conservation*

The Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club

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## The Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club

— Founded 1879 —

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**W.K. (Bill) Gummer**

**Objectives of the Club:** To promote the appreciation, preservation and conservation of Canada's natural heritage; to encourage investigation and publish the results of research in all fields of natural history and to diffuse information on these fields as widely as possible; to support and co-operate with organizations engaged in preserving, maintaining or restoring environments of high quality for living things.

**Club Publications:** THE CANADIAN FIELD-NATURALIST, a quarterly devoted to reporting research in all fields of natural history relevant to Canada, and TRAIL & LANDSCAPE, a quarterly providing articles on the natural history of the Ottawa Valley and on Club activities.

**Field Trips, Lectures** and other natural history activities are arranged for local members; see "Coming Events" in this issue.

**Membership Fees:** Individual (yearly) \$20

Family (yearly) \$22

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Life (one payment) \$500

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# Welcome, New Members

## Ottawa Area

Jeanne D. Ainslie & family  
Martha Aksim  
Jann K. Atkinson  
Lesley S. Barrenger  
Stephen Blight & family  
Bill Bovey  
Derek O. Campfield & family  
Diane M. Chapman  
Clifton J. Charie & family  
Connie M. Clark & family  
Gerald Collins & family  
Marilyn A. Crolla  
Melanie J. Dent  
Barbara A. Desrochers  
Sandra Ferguson  
Robbin Frazer  
Sue & Doug Humphreys  
Alan Hunt  
Michael J. Jaques & family  
Murray & Mary Johnston  
& family  
Janet Knister

Heather Kowpak-Churchill &  
family  
Kathy Krywicki &  
Jean-Claude Dube  
Jimmy Kua  
Coreen Laflamme & family  
J.D. & Helen M. MacKechnie  
Carolyn L. Molson  
Jackie A. & Ralph Oblak  
Jacynthe M.D. Pelletier  
Dr. Jean Piuze & family  
Michael J. Piva & family  
Beverley A. Scott & family  
Robert Sibley  
Huguette Smith  
Mike & Jane Stefaniak  
Hal Tonkin & family  
Pat E. Turk  
Louise Ward-Whate & family  
Mrs. Hazel White  
Patricia J. Whitridge  
M. Denice Willis & family

## Other Areas

Allan Anderson  
Guelph, Ontario  
  
Luke Dewit  
Calgary, Alberta

Roger Perreault  
St. Léonard, Quebec  
  
Marion Strebig  
Etobicoke, Ontario

January 1987

Eileen Evans,  
Chairman,  
Membership Committee.

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## Trail & Landscape Circulation

Circulation of the January - March issue was as follows: a total of 1089 copies was mailed, 1064 of them to members, subscribing libraries and other institutions in Canada. Twenty-five copies were sent outside Canada, 20 of them to the United States. The cost of mailing that 32-page issue was \$68.25.

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# The 1988 OFNC Council

At the 109th Annual Business Meeting held on January 12th, the following slate of officers and members of the Council was appointed.

## Executive:

President:	Bill Gummer	(596-1148)
Vice-Presidents	Jeff Harrison	(230-5968)
	Ken Strang	(733-7695)
Recording Secretary	Roy John	(226-2019)
Corresponding Secretary	Barbara Campbell	(839-3418)
Treasurer	Frank Valentine	(592-6461)

## Other Members:

Barry Bendell	<b>Doreen Duchesne</b>
Ron Bedford	Eileen Evans
Dan Brunton	Peter Hall
Bill Cody	<b>Shane Jordan</b>
<b>Kathleen Conlan</b>	<b>Catherine O'Keefe</b>
Francis Cook	Frank Pope
<b>Peter Croal</b>	Wright Smith
<b>Barb Desrochers</b>	Paul Ward.
Ellaine Dickson	

The names of the six new Council members are highlighted in boldface. Peter Hall joined the 1987 Council at the end of the year when he became chairman of the Conservation Committee.

## Retiring members of the 1987 Council are

Ross Anderson	Lynda Maltby
Allan Cameron	Joyce Reddoch
Mona Coleman	Roger Taylor.
Fern Levine	

Members are urged to look for the full account of this meeting in a future issue of the Club's official journal, *The Canadian Field-Naturalist*. Each year *The Canadian Field-Naturalist* contains the full minutes of the meeting, the reports of the Committees for the year, and the financial report of the Club. □

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# Macoun What's What

Paul Hamilton and David Manga

The junior arm of the Ottawa Field-Naturalists, or more specifically the Macoun Field Club, started its 40th season back in September with the election of officers and editors. For the second year in a row, Heather Hunt was elected as the president for the senior group. Emily Pringle and Craig Cameron were elected as presidents for the first time with the intermediate and junior groups respectively.

The important job as editor of our annual publication, *The Little Bear*, went to David Manga of the seniors. The ever-busy editor of the newsletter this year is another senior, Carina Cojeen. Since September, Carina has produced and distributed three newsletters. David has gotten off to a quick start with three or four articles currently submitted for the annual publication, in addition to many drawings that were entered as part of a natural history drawing contest. David is also the camping trip coordinator and over Christmas organized a four-day winter trip to Mary Stuart's farm. The camping trip was very successful, although it did get a little wet.

To the end of December 1987, 25 meetings have been held with numerous speakers and activities. Topic themes included "The Arctic Environment" and "Collections and Collecting". Three full months of discussions were devoted to Collections and Collecting, comprising information on aquatic insects (plus zooplankton), vascular plants, fish and birds. Guest speakers included Barry Bendell from the aquatic section of the Canadian Wildlife Service, Dr. Brian Coad from the Ichthyology section of the National Museum of Natural Sciences, Dr. Dick Harington from the Quaternary Zoology section of the National Museum of Natural Sciences, Marianne Douglas from the Biology Department of Queen's University, and Stephen Darbyshire from Agriculture Canada.

The club as a whole has been very active in outings around the Ottawa area. We have been to Luskville Falls, Mary Stuart's farm at Pakenham, the Rideau Trail south of Ottawa, and to the Macoun Study Area at Bell's Corners. At this time, we would like to thank all the speakers for taking the time to prepare and enlighten us on many aspects of Natural History. ▣

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# New Records of Skunk Cabbage for the Ottawa District

Albert W. Dugal and Michael J. Shchepanek  
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National Museum of Natural Sciences  
P.O. Box 3443, Station D  
Ottawa, Ontario K1P 6P4

Skunk Cabbage (*Symplocarpus foetidus* (L.) Nutt.) belongs to the Araceae, a large family that contains such familiar plants as Jack-in-the-pulpits, Philodendrons and Dieffenbachias. This plant has a fairly wide distribution in eastern North America extending from Nova Scotia westward to Minnesota and southward to Iowa and Georgia.

For many years, the village of Osgoode was the only known locale for this somewhat foul-smelling plant in the Ottawa District. Here, along the railway tracks just north of Main Street (Figure 1), grows a colony of approximately 190 plants (according to our 1981 inventory). It would appear that there had been more than a twofold increase in numbers of this colony since Bill Dore's (1967) 1957 count of only 86 individuals.

Progress has dramatically altered the configuration of this colony in the interval between the two counts. Most of the plants on the west side of the tracks have been eradicated by extensive land filling and the construction of a chain link fence. A cedar hedge has been planted next to the new fence, and the former adjacent field is now a series of backyards for a recent housing development (Figure 2).

Fortunately, this development did not bring about the demise of the Skunk Cabbage patch. More plants now exist on the east side of the tracks than on the west (a reversal of the 1957 situation), and the colony is expanding northward along the tracks and eastward as well. For example, in 1957 there were only four plants in the field beyond the fence on the east side of the tracks. Now there are at least 19, and two of these are 15 m east of the fenceline.

In the mid-1960s, Ed Greenwood discovered two colonies of Skunk Cabbage near Sarsfield in the eastern part of the District (Figure 1) during the course of his Native Orchid Location Survey work (J. Reddoch, personal communication 1987). Allan and Joyce Reddoch made a collection from one colony in 1978, and we rediscovered the other colony three years later. Probably these colonies were or still are connected through a common habitat of low-lying woodland and willow swale. Although they continue to survive, these sites could be destroyed by country

estate development in the future. A parcel of land next to one patch is at present for sale.

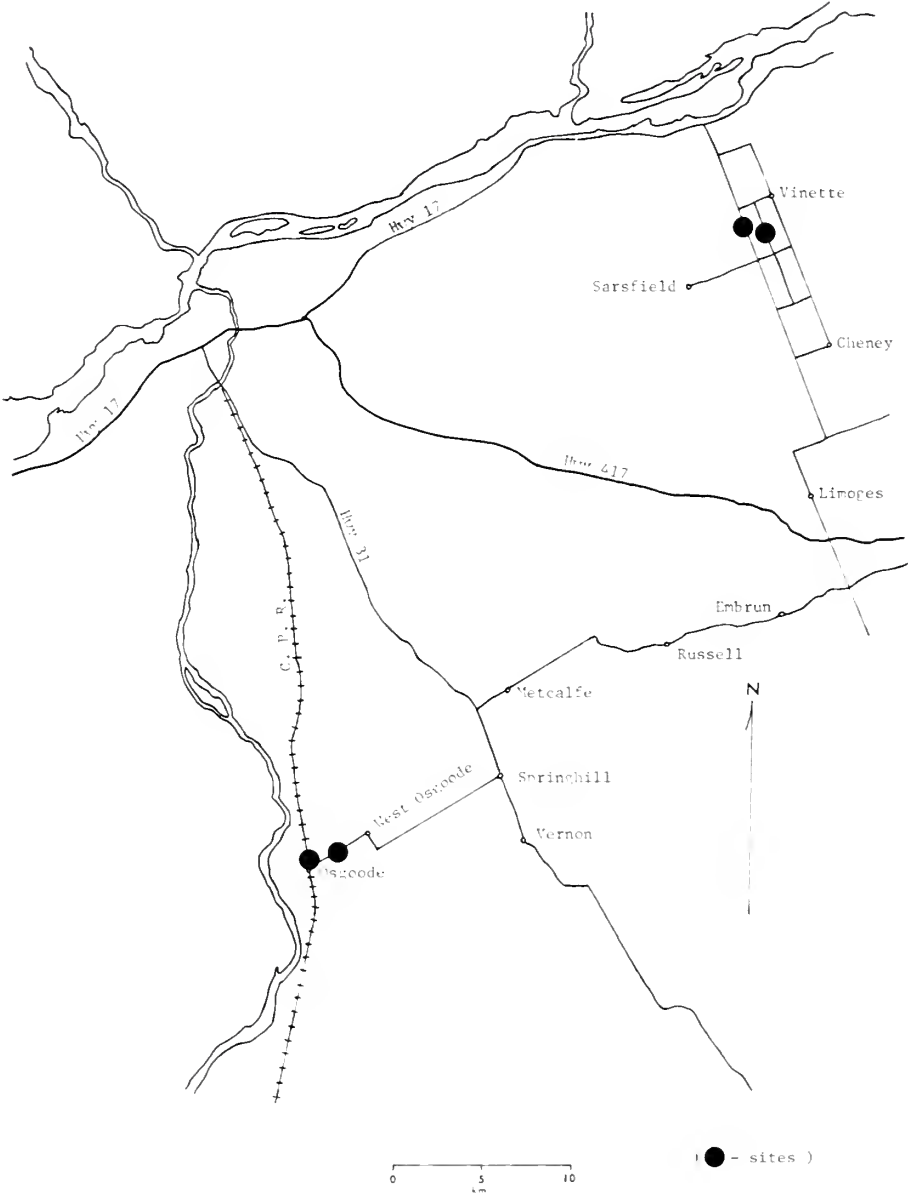
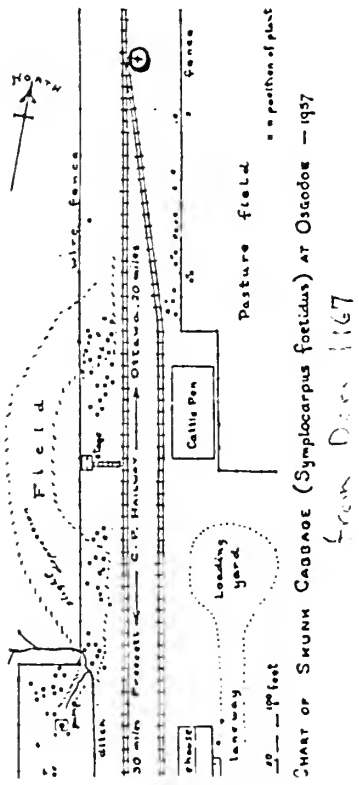


Figure 1. Skunk Cabbage in the Ottawa District





Housing Development

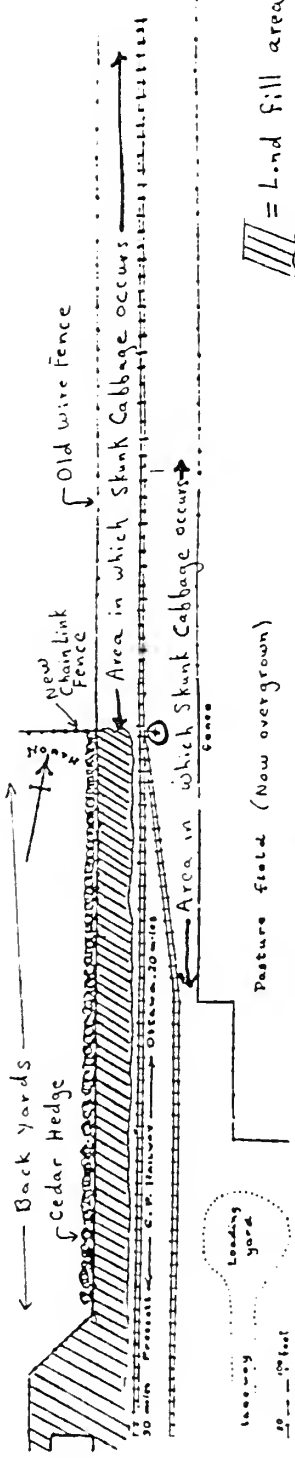


Figure 2. Comparison of the Distribution of Skunk Cabbage at the Osgoode Railway site in 1957 and 1987.

In June 1981, Sharon Smith, a summer student who was accompanying us on a Skunk Cabbage inventory, spotted some plants in a roadside ditch 1.6 km (one mile) east of Osgoode. These plants were part of a large colony that straddles the highway leading to the Old Prescott Road. Although several plants were growing in a wet field north of the roadway, most were in a swampy section of a large woodlot to the south.

The discovery of Skunk Cabbage a mile from Osgoode along a road that was in use before 1879 is most interesting. For years it was assumed that the Osgoode railway locality was the site where this plant was first discovered in the Ottawa District. Dore (1967) quoted James Fletcher as saying in 1899, "*Symplocarpus foetidus* - Abundant in a swamp about one mile from Osgoode. Collected by Mr. R.H. Cowley early in May". Yet, Dore was convinced that Cowley meant Osgoode, for as he stated, "Today, one can look a long time in much swampy land 'about a mile from Osgoode' and not find a trace - nary a whiff, as one might say - of Skunk Cabbage!". We now know that there is a large old colony of Skunk Cabbage growing in swampy conditions one mile east of Osgoode. It appears that Cowley's original colony has been rediscovered at long last. Undoubtedly many botanists and naturalists (ourselves included) have driven through this colony en route to the Osgoode railway patch.

This Skunk Cabbage site also appears to be seriously threatened by encroaching housing developments. Most of the southern, better drained, portion of the Skunk Cabbage woodlot already has been transformed into large treed lots with houses. West of the woods, the village of Osgoode is actively expanding. As economic opportunities (i.e. possible profits) rise in the area, there will be great pressure to subdivide and landfill the swampy ground where the Skunk Cabbage flourishes. The "found again" colony would then be lost forever.

Who, then, discovered the railway site in Osgoode? It now appears that the honour goes to Herbert Groh who found these plants by the railway tracks in 1932 (Dore 1967).

All the sites where Skunk Cabbage occurs in the Ottawa District are underlain by deep, black, wet, organic soils that are essentially neutral (pH 6.3 to 7.1). Locally, there are many similar-looking habitats. Why is this plant not more prevalent? It is certainly hardy, it produces viable seed which germinates, and the numbers of plants are increasing.

More undiscovered colonies may exist in the Ottawa District. The best time to look for Skunk Cabbage is in the spring when the trees are leafing out and the large, bright green, spade-shaped leaves are most easily seen (Figure 3). If you should be fortunate enough to find another colony, we would appreciate knowing of your discovery.



*Figure 3. Skunk Cabbage in swampy woods*  
Photograph by Albert Dugal.

*Literature Cited*

Dore, W.G. 1967. Skunk Cabbage in the Ottawa District. *Trail & Landscape* 1(1): 5-8. ▣

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## Book Review: *Orchids of the Western Great Lakes Region*

Revised edition, by F.W. Case, Jr. 1987. Cranbrook Institute of Science, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan. 252 pp. US\$28.95.

Almost a quarter of a century after its first appearance, a classic of the orchid literature has returned in a revised edition. Case's book has nearly doubled in size, partly because of new information and new colour photographs. Anyone interested in the orchids of northeastern North America will find this book a valuable and informative reference.

Case's range, the western Great Lakes region, is centred on Michigan and Wisconsin, which are covered completely. Most of the land bordering the four upper lakes is covered, including eastern Minnesota and northern Ohio, Indiana and Illinois. Ontario is mapped south of Lake Nipigon and west of a line from about Bowmanville to Deux-Rivières on the Ottawa River. Thus, eastern Ontario and the lower Ottawa Valley are excluded.

Nevertheless, this range has allowed the author to include every species known to occur in Ontario and consequently every species of eastern Canada except *Platanthera albida* of Newfoundland and Quebec. He omits, however, the names of some of our varieties and forms, such as the albino flowered forms, although he has good photographs of a number of them.

The book begins with a brief and standard account of the structure and pollination of orchid flowers. The next chapter deals with orchid ecology including seed germination and development, habitat disturbance and orchid conservation. This excellent treatment is based on the author's many years of careful field observation and also his work in growing some of these plants. The resulting chapter is often enlightening, sometimes fascinating and occasionally depressing.

The following chapter, Origins and Distribution Patterns of Great Lakes Orchids, outlines the major types of continental distribution patterns of orchids and possible influences of the glaciers on them. This chapter closes with descriptions of a dozen major orchid habitats in the region covered by the book. While the definition of generalized habitats still seems to be more an art than a science, these descriptions do offer some useful insights. For those of us in eastern Ontario, they sometimes reveal familiar orchids in habitats which are quite unfamiliar here.

The final introductory chapter, and one likely to be controversial, proposes growing native orchids, outlines the horticultural problems and offers solutions based on the author's considerable experience. While his objectives are commendable, at least two objections are not well answered. Firstly, the author agrees that botanical gardens do not offer a satisfactory solution to the preservation of endangered plant species. Private gardens, which rarely last more than a few decades, must be an even more precarious solution. Secondly, since growth from seed is generally unsuccessful, the source of the plants must be considered. This will almost certainly be the natural populations. The author seems surprisingly idealistic in believing that such collecting will be done without harm, especially since he has his own collection of horror stories and is well known for the (justifiable) secrecy with which he guards some of his more significant discoveries.

Aside from a glossary and a selected bibliography, the remainder of the book is devoted to illustrated keys and to accounts of individual genera and species. For each of 64 species, there are some often interesting general comments, a terse but very detailed description of the plant and flowers, some brief general remarks on the blooming season, a description of the continental distribution, a fairly detailed account of the habitats, a distribution map, and one or more colour photographs. Each of these topics deals with the species within the western Great Lakes region, except, of course, for the overall distribution. The photographs are generally clear and useful for description and identification. Some are grouped together for comparison of related species, a very worthwhile feature.

The maps should give a good and reliable account of the distribution in Michigan and Wisconsin. However, some problems arise in the Ontario parts of the maps. The author has followed the practice of some local American floras in recording the presence of a species in a county by a single dot regardless of the number of collections in that county. This is a convenient procedure which works fairly well when all the counties are about the same size, as they often are in American states. However, Ontario counties are usually larger than those of Michigan and Wisconsin, and some of the districts north of Sudbury are some 30 to 50 or more times larger than the American counties. As a result, the maps give the impression that most orchids are much scarcer north of Lake Superior than south, which is not always true. Such maps cannot represent relative abundances. Another problem is, as the author points out, that some collections may not have been seen when he made the maps. Some instances of this can be found by comparing his Ontario records with those of Whiting and Catling's *Orchids of Ontario*. On the other hand, the author records some collections that Whiting and Catling do not.

Very few errors of fact or typography were noted in the book. Some orchidologists may dispute some of the author's opinions and interpretations, but he has provided good food for thought until all the evidence is in.

Students of our orchids will welcome Case's revised edition. Those who already own Whiting and Catling's book, *Orchids of Ontario*, will still want to have Case's book because the two are complementary. The weaknesses of one tend to be the strengths of the other.

Allan H. Reddoch   ▣

*Orchids of the Western Great Lakes Region is available at the Nature Canada Bookshop, 453 Sussex Drive, Ottawa (telephone 238-6154). The regular price is \$38.95 (\$35.05 for Canadian Nature Federation and Federation of Ontario Naturalists members).*

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# An Interesting Fen at the Purdon Conservation Area, Lanark County

David J. White

Joyce Reddoch has written about a number of fens in the Ottawa area (Reddoch 1979, 1984). I would like to publicize the Purdon Fen located in Lanark County (Figure 1). Although several of Joyce's fens are closer to Ottawa, larger in size or richer in plant species, none is as easily accessible as the Purdon Fen.

The Purdon Conservation Area, owned and managed by the Mississippi Valley Conservation Authority (Figure 2), consists of approximately 25 hectares of swamp, upland mixed forest, shallow lake, shoreline marsh, and open and treed fen. It is the fen habitat which has the most interesting and unusual plants.

The site has been developed both to provide better access for visitors and to protect the sensitive areas from trampling. There is a parking lot, a picnic area overlooking Purdon Lake,

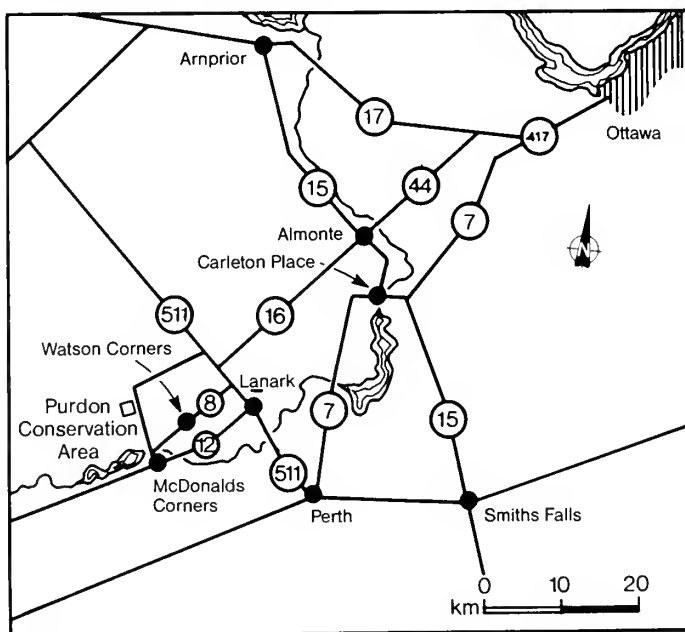


Figure 1. The location of the Purdon Conservation Area. Base map courtesy Mississippi Valley Conservation Authority

outdoor toilets, hiking trails, and stairs leading to a carefully built boardwalk which makes a loop around the open fen habitat. For many years, I have considered bogs and fens to be among my favourite habitats and I have fought my way into many. It was a real treat to get onto this interesting fen with dry feet and no thrashing through alder thickets.

I first saw the fen in 1981 when people from the Mississippi Valley Conservation Authority, the Nature Conservancy of Canada and several of us from The Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club met with the late Joe Purdon for a site tour of the fen (Figure 3). Mr. Purdon was in poor health and he wished to find someone to take over the property and his "caretaker" role of protecting and nurturing the fen and its large colony of Showy Lady's-slipper (*Cypripedium reginae*; Figure 4).

Further meetings and discussions took place over the next few years culminating in 1984 with the purchase of the fen and some surrounding property for the MVCA by the government of Ontario and a number of private donors.

In 1985, a detailed life science inventory was carried out and a management plan was drawn up (Mosquin 1985). Site development took place to provide interpretive signs and the amenities described above. Access for the handicapped is planned for 1988. Interpretive pamphlets are available at the site.



Figure 2. Visitors to the Purdon Conservation Area are expected to stay on the boardwalk in order to protect the fragile fen habitat. Photographs by the author, except as noted.

The management that has been proposed for the wetland consists of carrying on the good work of Joe Purdon. From the 1930s to the early 1980s, he kept the beaver population and the water level within bounds and undertook some selective cutting of White Cedar (*Thuja occidentalis*). He had noticed that as the cedar trees became tall and thick, the lady's-slippers began to disappear, so he selectively cut some areas in winter on a trial basis, and over the years observed that the orchids increased in those thinned-out areas. It is hoped that a continuation of this gentle management will ensure the long-term survival not only of the lady's-slippers but of the other interesting plants as well, most of which require an open fen habitat.

The site was officially opened by the MVCA on June 21, 1986, at the height of bloom of the Showy Lady's-slippers. From the boardwalk can be seen thousands of lady's-slippers. Mosquin (1985) estimated the Purdon Fen population of the orchid to be 16,000 plants.

Certainly, the fen is most impressive in mid-June; however, it is also attractive at other times of the year. For example, late summer finds many Bog Goldenrod (*Solidago uliginosa*) and Shrubby Cinquefoil in bloom.

The life science inventory conducted by Mosquin (1985) and field visits by the present author have turned up a number of rare and uncommon plants that demonstrate the significance of this wetland (Table 1). Several plants known from this fen are not known elsewhere in Lanark County.

In summary, I would encourage you to pay a visit to this interesting wetland and enjoy the boardwalk over a wet fen. If you are interested primarily in seeing the Showy Lady's-slippers in bloom, the best time is around the 12th to the 21st of June.

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- Reddoch, J. 1979. Calcareous fens in the Ottawa District. *Trail & Landscape* 13(1): 16-27.



Reddoch, J.M. 1984. White Lake Fen. Trail & Landscape 18(3): 134-141.

White, D.J. 1988. A preliminary checklist of the vascular plants of Lanark County. In progress.

TABLE 1

Significant Vascular Plants of the Purdon Fen

Common Name	Botanical Name	Lanark Co. Status <sup>1</sup>	O.D. Status <sup>2</sup>
Bog Clubmoss <sup>3</sup>	* <i>Lycopodium inundatum</i>	rare	sparse
Brownish Sedge	* <i>Carex brunnescens</i>	rare	sparse
Lead-coloured Sedge <sup>3</sup>	* <i>Carex livida</i>	rare	rare
Sartwell's Sedge	<i>Carex sartwellii</i>	rare	rare
Three-fruited Sedge	* <i>Carex trisperma</i>	uncommon	sparse
Three-way Sedge	<i>Dulichium arundinaceum</i>	uncommon	sparse
Slender Cotton-grass <sup>3</sup>	* <i>Eriophorum gracile</i>	?rare	rare
	<i>Eriophorum viridicarinatum</i>	uncommon	sparse
Green Cotton-grass	<i>Scirpus hudsonianus</i>	rare	sparse
Hudsonian Club-rush	* <i>Juncus canadensis</i>	?rare	sparse
Canada Rush	<i>Platanthera dilatata</i>	rare	rare
White Bog Orchid#	<i>Salix candida</i>	uncommon	sparse
Hoary Willow	* <i>Salix pedicellaris</i>	?rare	rare
Bog Willow <sup>3</sup>	<i>Potentilla fruticosa</i>	uncommon	sparse
Shrubby Cinquefoil	* <i>Viola nephrophylla</i>	rare	sparse
Northern Bog Violet	* <i>Viola renifolia</i>	rare	sparse
Kidney-leaved Violet	<i>Galium labradoricum</i>	rare	sparse <sup>4</sup>
Bog Bedstraw <sup>3</sup>			rare <sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The status in Lanark County is based on White (1988). The term "rare" indicates that three records or fewer are known for the county; the term "uncommon" indicates a species that is not easily found, even in suitable habitat. This latter term is equivalent to the terms "sparse" and "uncommon" as used by Gillett and White (1978).

<sup>2</sup> Status in the Ottawa District (O.D.) is based on Gillett and White (1978).

<sup>3</sup> Known in Lanark County only from the Purdon Fen.

<sup>4</sup> Refer to Dugal (1982).

\* Additional species reported by Mosquin (1985).

# See Figure 5.



*Figure 3. The late Joe Purdon (right) and the late George Findlay during the 1981 visit. Photograph by Allan Reddoch.*



*Figure 4 (left). A group of Showy Lady's-slippers.  
Figure 5 (right). Flowers of the White Bog Orchid, a less common orchid in the Purdon Fen. Photograph by Allan Reddoch. ▣*

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# An Unusual Shoreline Flora Along the Mississippi River, Lanark County

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University of Ottawa  
Ottawa, Ontario K1N 6N5

Although close to Ottawa, Lanark County has not been thoroughly explored botanically. In particular, the Mississippi River Valley seems to offer opportunities for further investigation. This would provide a better foundation for the recognition and protection of unique habitats. Recent work in this area includes documentation of the Carleton Place Hackberry (*Celtis occidentalis*) (Brunton 1971).

Here we describe an unusual flora and vegetation found along the Mississippi River between Sheridans Rapids and Playfairville Rapids. This area is located 95 km southwest of Ottawa, just west of the Ottawa District (Figure 1). We report both a species not yet recorded from the District and several species considered rare in the District.

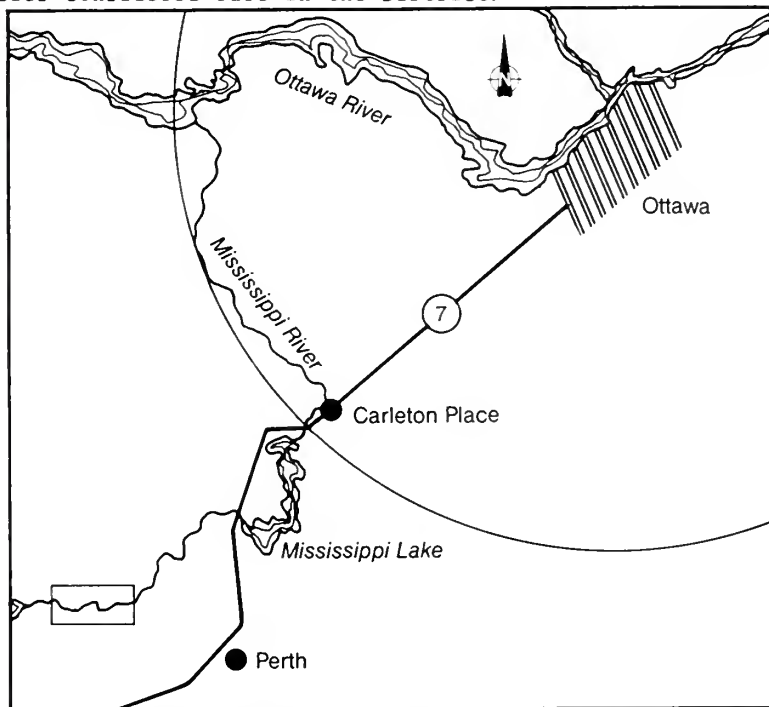


Figure 1. Location of the study site (box). Part of the boundary of the Ottawa District is also shown (circle).

A section of the north shore of the river near Playfairville Rapids was studied. Although at one time this particular site was under water due to a sawmill dam (Brown 1976), a similar flora occurs in other parts of the river which would not have been inundated by the dam.

Three distinct habitats and vegetation types exist: an alluvial terrace, an eroded bank, and an aquatic zone. In the first week of June, the alluvial terrace is covered by *Ophioglossum vulgatum*. In late June, *Eupatorium maculatum*, *Onoclea sensibilis* and *Phalaris arundinacea* are the dominant species. The aquatic zone contains species such as *Carex flava*, *Carex lasiocarpa*, *Carex retrorsa*, *Sagittaria latifolia*, *Scirpus cyperinus* and *Sium suave*. The eroded zone is of most interest. In early July, *Selaginella apoda*, *Iris versicolor*, *Spiranthes lucida*, *Thalictrum polygamum* and *Campanula aparinoides* are apparent. At the end of July and in early August, *Carex aurea*, *Cladium mariscoides*, *Lobelia cardinalis*, *Lobelia kalmii*, *Lythrum salicaria* and *Parnassia glauca* are the most noticeable species.

The list of noteworthy species at this site includes those shown in Table 1 (opposite).

The largest number of rare, sparse and uncommon species was located in the eroded zone. The mechanisms responsible for the erosion are presumably flowing water, scraping and gouging by ice, and wave disturbance. These disturbances remove fertile soil, leaving a rocky or sandy substrate, as well as causing river bank slumping. Many of the species found in this zone may be poor competitors which cannot survive more heavily vegetated sites but persist because they are able to occupy these disturbed and infertile river banks.

*Parnassia* species occupy disturbed river banks in other provinces including New Brunswick and Manitoba. It is noteworthy that the endangered species *Pedicularis furbishiae* also occurs on eroded river banks (Menges, Grawler and Waller 1985). At Shirleys Bay, *Selaginella apoda*, a plant considered rare in the Ottawa District, also occurs on ice-scoured shores (Brunton 1985a). Another group of shoreline species with Atlantic coastal plain affinities, for example *Rhexia virginica* and *Xyris difformis*, are known from lakeshores which are disturbed by waves (Keddy 1985) or fluctuating water levels (Keddy and Reznicek 1982). Therefore, disturbance may allow shorelines to support a variety of unusual species.

We consider the vegetation at Playfairville Rapids to be significant, at least at the local scale within the Mississippi River watershed. We hope this report will encourage further botanical exploration of this region. The ecological significance of this site should be considered in conservation planning by the Mississippi Valley Conservation Authority.

Table 1

Species	Status in the Ottawa District *	Status in Lanark County **
Grass-of-Parnassus	<i>Parnassia glauca</i>	not recorded
Meadow Spikemoss	<i>Selaginella apoda</i>	rare
Adder's-tongue Fern	<i>Ophioglossum vulgatum</i>	sparse
Arrow-grass	<i>Triglochin maritima</i> **	rare
Twig-rush	<i>Cladium mariscoides</i>	sparse
Jointed Rush	<i>Juncus articulatus</i>	rare
Shining Ladies'-tresses	<i>Spiranthes lucida</i>	rare
Shrubby Cinquefoil	<i>Potentilla fruticosa</i> **	uncommon
Golden Sedge	<i>Carex aurea</i>	uncommon
Woolly Sedge	<i>Carex lasiocarpa</i>	uncommon
Bottle Gentian	<i>Gentiana andrewsii</i>	uncommon
Turtlehead	<i>Chelone glabra</i> #	uncommon
Cardinal-flower	<i>Lobelia cardinalis</i>	uncommon
Kalm's Lobelia	<i>Lobelia kalmii</i>	uncommon

\* Status from Gillett and White (1978) and Brunton (1985a, 1985b, 1985c).

\*\* Courtesy of D.J. White.

# No voucher collected because of its rarity at the site.

### Acknowledgements

We thank D.J. White and T. Mosquin for helpful comments on the manuscript. We particularly thank David White for allowing us to use his information on status in Lanark County and for providing the records of *Triglochin maritima* and *Potentilla fruticosa*. We also thank S.J. Darbyshire and G. Baillargeon for checking our vouchers. The vouchers are deposited in the herbarium of the Department of Agriculture (DAO).

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# The Clay Bank Alvar

## An Important Natural Area in the Ottawa Valley

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In May 1986, Ruth Partridge and Ross Layberry told me about an area of limestone flats that they had recently visited at Clay Bank, near Arnprior, where they'd found a number of interesting spring butterflies. Ross had been visiting the site since early 1980, but this was the first time much attention was paid to the plants. They brought back a specimen of an unfamiliar buttercup from that visit, and I was delighted to recognize it as the Early Buttercup (*Ranunculus fascicularis*), an uncommon species of limestone flats and sandy, open places in southern Ontario (Figure 1).



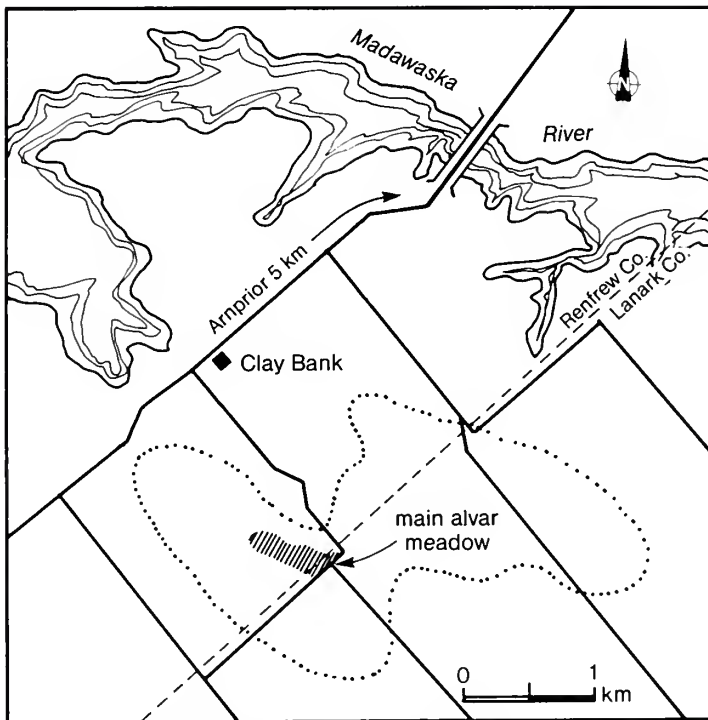
Figure 1.  
*The Early Buttercup is unknown elsewhere in the Ottawa Valley.*

All photographs by the author.

Most exciting was the fact that this specimen represented its first Ottawa Valley record (Partridge, Layberry and Brunton 1988). It has not been recorded in the Ottawa District. (The Clay Bank site is a few kilometres outside the 50 km radius of the Ottawa District.) Earlier, I had queried the absence of this species from areas of suitable and similar habitat in the District (Brunton 1986), since it is a frequent member of the distinctive association of plants found on spring-flooded, summer-droughted limestone flats elsewhere in southern Ontario (Catling *et al.* 1975). So, if Early Buttercup was in the vicinity after all, would some of its southern associates also be found with it? In late May and early August 1986, Karen McIntosh and I surveyed the flora of the Clay Bank site to find out.

### The Site

The Clay Bank Alvar is located about 5 km southwest of Arnprior (Figure 2) and straddling the line between Lanark and Renfrew Counties. The largest area (Figure 3) is situated north of the road (on the Renfrew County side) just west of the 9th Line Road, Pakenham Township (at 910264 of NTS map 31F/8).



..... limestone plateau containing alvar meadows

Figure 2. The Clay Bank Alvar and surrounding roads.





*Views of the Clay  
Bank Alvar.*

*Figure 3. (top)  
This open scrubby  
meadow has likely  
been kept open  
for decades or  
even centuries by  
fires.*

*Figure 4. (right)  
Bare limestone flats  
with no soil cover  
are found commonly  
across the alvar.*



Extensive areas of scrubby open meadow occupy a portion of a spruce- and cedar-dominated plateau of Ordovician limestone that rises about 15-20 m above the surrounding plain, bounded on two sides by geological faults (Freeman 1979). The soil is very thin and is completely absent in some places (Figure 4). What soil there is is composed primarily of poorly decayed organic material and rock fragments. The level nature of the landscape and the impermeability of the ground allow shallow pools to develop in springtime. Most, being without a constant supply of fresh water, evaporate by early summer under the intense heat of the sun that "cooks" the thin soil with temperatures exceeding 40°C (Stephenson and Herendeen 1986). These factors - plus a regular regime of fires to keep back the trees - combine to create an alvar.

### Alvars

Alvars are very uncommon in Ontario and throughout eastern North America (Catling *et al.* 1975; Baskin and Baskin 1985; Stephenson and Herendeen 1986). In Ontario, they are found within the area underlain by limestone in southern Ontario and are best expressed in the Manitoulin Island - Bruce Peninsula and Kingston areas (Catling *et al.* 1975). Only one large alvar is known east of the Frontenac Axis, that being The Burnt Lands near Almonte in the Ottawa District (White 1979, Brunton 1986). It has been designated an Area of Natural and Scientific Interest (ANSI) by the Ministry of Natural Resources and is considered worthy of evaluation as a possible provincial nature reserve park (OMNR 1982). Other small alvars in the Ottawa District are known in the Marlborough Forest (White 1985), in Stony Swamp (Brunton 1982) and at Shirleys Bay (Brunton 1980).

The flora and fauna that survive on alvars are found in distinctive associations and often include elements of unusual or rare habitats such as prairies, sand dunes, southern forest and subarctic shorelines. And there can be a surprisingly great diversity of species here too. Over 450 species of plants are reported from the Misery Bay alvar area on Manitoulin Island (Macdonald 1980) and over 440 species from The Burnt Lands area (Brunton 1986), for example.

### The Plants

As Table 1 indicates, many significant plant species were found at the Clay Bank Alvar during our survey in 1986. This list is not complete but gives some idea of the richness of the site. It is interesting to note how many significant species (determined with regard to Ottawa District status) at the Clay Bank Alvar are also found 20 km to the southeast at The Burnt Lands (indicated by an asterisk (\*)). The geographic affinity of the flora of this area can be assessed by reviewing the

TABLE 1

## Significant Vascular Plants of the Clay Bank Alvar\*\*

	<u>Rare in the Ottawa District</u>
Prairie Dropseed <sup>1</sup>	* <i>Sporobolus heterolepis</i>
Crawe's Sedge	* <i>Carex crawei</i>
Richardson's Sedge	* <i>Carex richardsonii</i>
Polycnemum <sup>1</sup>	* <i>Polycnemum arvensis</i>
Early Buttercup	<i>Ranunculus fascicularis</i>
Eastern Saskatoon	* <i>Amelanchier alnifolia</i> var. <i>compacta</i>
Azure Aster	<i>Aster oolentangiensis</i>

	<u>Sparse in the Ottawa District</u>
Rock Spikemoss <sup>2</sup>	* <i>Selaginella rupestris</i>
Wiry Panic Grass	* <i>Panicum flexile</i>
Philadelphia Witch Grass	* <i>Panicum philadelphicum</i>
Ensheathed Dropseed	* <i>Sporobolus vaginiflorus</i>
Western Canada Mayflower <sup>3</sup>	* <i>Maianthemum canadense</i> var. <i>interius</i>
Thyme-leaved Sandwort <sup>1</sup>	* <i>Arenaria serpyllifolia</i>
Rock Sandwort	* <i>Minuartia michauxii</i>
Hairy Rock-cress	* <i>Arabis pycnocarpa</i>
Hooked Violet	* <i>Viola adunca</i>
Northern Bog Violet	* <i>Viola nephrophylla</i>
Small Skullcap	* <i>Scutellaria parvula</i>
Dwarf Snapdragon <sup>1</sup>	* <i>Chaenorhinum minus</i>
Western Purslane Speedwell	* <i>Veronica peregrina</i> var. <i>xalapensis</i>
Snowberry	* <i>Symphoricarpos albus</i>
Upland White Goldenrod	* <i>Solidago ptarmicoides</i>

	<u>Uncommon in the Ottawa District</u>
Golden Sedge <sup>4</sup>	* <i>Carex aurea</i>
Ivory Sedge	* <i>Carex eburnea</i>
Yellow Lady-slipper	* <i>Cypripedium calceolus</i>
Bicknell's Cranesbill	* <i>Geranium bicknellii</i>
Prickly-ash	* <i>Xanthoxylum americanum</i>
Seneca Snakeroot	* <i>Polygala senega</i>
Cypress Spurge <sup>1</sup>	* <i>Euphorbia cyparissias</i>
Buffaloberry	* <i>Shepherdia canadensis</i>
False Pennyroyal	* <i>Isanthus brachiatus</i>
Hairy Beardtongue	* <i>Penstemon hirsutus</i>

\* also found at The Burnt Lands (see Brunton 1986)

\*\* significance ratings for the Ottawa District from Gillett and White (1978)

I introduced (non-native) species

1 rare in Canada (Reznicek 1984)

2 sparse in the Regional Municipality of Ottawa-Carleton

3 status from Brunton (1984)

4 uncommon in the Regional Municipality of Ottawa-Carleton

present, typical ranges of the significant species. The Clay Bank Alvar populations are frequently isolated from these ranges, occasionally by very great distances. Several broad types of affinity can be identified.

a) The Northern Group

This group of species is found over wide areas of the Boreal Forest Region of North America and in parts of the sub-arctic as well, but are rare and local south of there.

<i>Selaginella rupestris</i>	<i>Minuartia michauxii</i>
<i>Carex crawei</i>	<i>Arabis pycnocarpa</i>
<i>Carex richardsonii</i>	<i>Viola adunca</i>
<i>Maianthemum canadense</i>	<i>Viola nephrophylla</i>
var. <i>interius</i>	

As the Champlain Sea receded in depth and extent in this area and its waters freshened from the inflow of meltwaters from what was to be the Great Lakes, the limestone based lands of the lower Ottawa Valley began to emerge. The plateau areas at the Clay Bank Alvar, The Burnt Lands and the area near Panmure were amongst the first to emerge into this cold, raw subarctic sea-shore environment. These areas were likely islands, slowly enlarging over the centuries as the sea subsided from about 10,000 to 8,000 years ago (Brunton 1986). A number of plants survive today as rare disjuncts on the alvars of southern Ontario. At the Clay Bank Alvar, this includes Craue's Sedge (*Carex crawei*), Richardson's Sedge (*Carex richardsonii*) and Rock Sandwort (*Minuartia michauxii*). As the climate ameliorated and the vegetation developed during the following millenia into a boreal forest character, many subarctic species would have been replaced by species typical of this more southern region. The Hooked Violet (*Viola adunca*) and Rock Spikemoss (*Selaginella rupestris*) are found throughout the Boreal Forest Region today but are very uncommon off the Canadian Shield.

b) The Southern and Western Group

These species are found primarily in grassland and savannah habitats in southcentral North America (north into the southern Canadian prairie provinces) or are typical of open, rocky areas in territory well to the south of us. They are all species of dry, calcareous ground, usually in warmer-than-normal sites.

<i>Panicum flexile</i>	<i>Xanthoxylum americanum</i>
<i>Panicum philadelphicum</i>	<i>Polygala senega</i>
<i>Sporobolus heterolepis</i>	<i>Scutellaria parvula</i>
<i>Sporobolus vaginiflorus</i>	<i>Penstemon hirsutus</i>
<i>Ranunculus fascicularis</i>	<i>Veronica peregrina</i>
<i>Amelanchier alnifolia</i>	var. <i>xalopensis</i>
var. <i>compacta</i>	<i>Aster oolentangiensis</i>
<i>Ceanothus herbaceus</i>	<i>Solidago ptarmicoides</i>

A time of warmer, drier climate known as the hypsithermal period dominated Ontario about 5,000 - 6,000 years ago (Camfield 1969; Bjorck 1985). It was during this period that prairie vegetation may have migrated much further eastward and southern vegetation much further northward than their contemporary ranges. Some persist in hot, dry sites - such as summer alvar meadows - and at the Clay Bank alvar these include Early Buttercup, the nationally rare (Reznicek 1984; Dore and McNeill 1980) Prairie Dropseed (*Sporobolus heterolepis*), Azure Aster (*Aster oolentangiensis*) at the northeastern limit of its Ontario range here (Semple and Heard 1987), Small Skullcap (*Scutellaria parvula*), Wiry Witch-grass (*Panicum flexile*), Prickly-ash (*Xanthoxylum americanum*) and Eastern Saskatoon (*Amelanchier alnifolia* var. *compacta*). Some may have migrated here along the great river that connected this area to the western Great Lakes region; others might have come overland with the passage of years.

### c) The Aliens

A large percentage of the flora of the Ottawa Valley is non-native, having been brought here intentionally or otherwise by human activity over the last two or three centuries. Even in the demanding alvar habitats, this situation is evident.

<i>Epipactis helleborine</i>	<i>Euphorbia cyparissias</i>
<i>Polycnemum arvensis</i>	<i>Hypericum perforatum</i>
<i>Portulaca oleracea</i>	<i>Hieracium aurantiacum</i>
<i>Arenaria serpyllifolia</i>	<i>Matricaria matricarioides</i>

Some species, like the Spotted St. John's-wort (*Hypericum perforatum*), are well established and represent many years of occupation. Others, like Helleborine (*Epipactis helleborine*), are of more recent origin (Whiting and Catling 1986) and have not reached nuisance proportion. *Polycnemum arvensis* (*Polycnemum arvensis*) is a very unusual weed here (Figure 5); it was discovered for the first time in North America only a few kilometres away (Senn 1941) and is still known on this continent only from the Ottawa Valley (Brunton and Cuddy 1988).

These and other aliens have been introduced into a flora that is the result of thousands of years of development. Probable relicts of the distant past persist alongside species typical of the modern environment. The intense competition for growing space from some alien species with these native plants has reduced and even eliminated native flora here and elsewhere. In such a competition, the alien can be at an advantage since the natural controls that have evolved within its native range may not be present in this new territory.



*Figure 5. Polycnemum is a rare introduction that was first discovered in North America about three km from the Clay Bank Alvar in the 1940s. It is a member of the Goosefoot (Chenopodiaceae) Family.*



*Figure 6. The Chryxus Arctic is a very uncommon and locally distributed butterfly in this area, found elsewhere at The Burnt Lands (where this one was photographed in 1983) and at Constance Bay.*

## The Butterflies

Ross Layberry has found about 25 species of butterflies at the Clay Bank Alvar, several of which are unusual. The Chryxus Arctic (*Oeneis chryxus*), for example (Figure 6), is a northern species that is very uncommon in the Ottawa District (Layberry, Lafontaine and Hall 1982). Another, the Broad-winged Skipper (*Poanes viator*) is a very local southern species. There is potential for a number of other significant species, including elfins and the rare Mottled Dusky Wing. Some of these are already known from The Burnt Lands and should be expected at the Clay Bank Alvar (R. Layberry personal communication).

Surveys conducted for other lepidoptera on The Burnt Lands in 1985 by K. Mikkola and J.D. Lafontaine of Agriculture Canada uncovered an exceptionally rich insect fauna, including two new owl-moth species (genus *Anomagyna*) for science. A complex of species, including rare ones from the south, the maritimes and the northwest, were found (Brunton 1986), and there is every reason to expect comparably important findings at the Clay Bank Alvar.

## The Fossils

There are many fossils visible on the surface of the limestone bedrock where the soil has been eroded away. They vary considerably in size, some being over 40 cm long and others but a few centimetres. The most evident is the large Cephalopod (probably in the genus *Actinoceras*) that is pictured in Figure 7. Coral colonies (probably of the genus *Foerstephyllum*) are found across these flats too (Figure 8). Both types are quite common fossils in the Ordovician rock of the Ottawa Valley (M.J. Copeland personal communication). Nonetheless, this "population" of fossils is a rich one and a most dramatic display for the uninitiated such as me. And, if you do visit the site to see the fossils, PLEASE leave them there. Evidence of efforts to remove some can be found at Clay Bank, usually amidst the shattered remains of a fossil that had lain undisturbed for millions of years, only to be destroyed by a souvenir seeker.

## Conclusions

There are many interesting and unusual plant and animal species found at the Clay Bank Alvar, including at least one nationally rare plant (Prairie Dropseed) and several rare insects. The potential for other significant floral and faunal records at the site is very high as examinations to date have been incomplete. (Voucher specimens for significant species currently known from the alvar have been deposited in a number of herbaria: DAO, TRT, CAN, WO, OAC and DFB; Boivin 1980).

The Clay Bank Alvar has a rich and diverse flora, apparently second only to The Burnt Lands in richness for eastern Ontario alvars. It is also the only one in Renfrew County. This interesting and important landscape is certainly worthy of further examination; I'd be very interested to hear from anyone who does venture out to it.

NOTE: If you're going to visit the Clay Bank Alvar, be prepared for a hot, dry (and/or flooded!) rock flat with lots of deerflies (in season) and a sea of Poison-ivy. Although the Renfrew County portion of the main clearing is not posted or fenced, ownership is unknown. The Lanark County side is fenced and posted.

#### *Acknowledgements*

My thanks to Ross Layberry and Ruth Partridge for bringing the alvar to my attention; additional thanks are owed Ross for the butterfly information he provided for this article. I was ably accompanied in the field by Karen McIntosh, who also reviewed the manuscript.

My thanks, too, to Dr. M.J. Copeland of the Geological Survey of Canada for his identification of the fossils from photographs taken at the site, and for information on the status of such remains. The manuscript also benefitted significantly from the critiques of Clarence Frankton and Paul Catling.

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Figure 7. The fossil Cephalopods (cf. *Actinoceras* sp.) are commonly scattered across the rock flats at the Clay Bank Alvar.



Figure 8. Fossil coral (probably of the genus *Foerstephyllum*) are common in Ordovician rock in the Ottawa Valley and are well exhibited here.

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#### VOLUNTEER NEEDED FOR WILDLIFE RELEASE SITES

The Coalition for Wildlife is a volunteer organization formed in 1987 to save orphaned wildlife in Ottawa-Carleton. The 400 mammals taken in last year demonstrate the significant demand to provide direct wildlife care. In addition, over 160 telephone calls were received from the public desperately seeking information on behalf of wildlife in their care which further underscores the dire need for a public information resource in this community.

The Coalition is looking for a volunteer to join their small, hands-on, task-oriented committee to assume responsibility for assessing, securing and screening appropriate release sites for mammals.

Contact Donna Dubreuil at 832-1508, evenings, for further information.

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# Sucker Run

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A "run" of White Suckers (*Catostomus commersoni*) occurs every spring in Gatineau Park when mature adults swim up small streams from lakes to spawn. This concentration of fish can be so great as to make the water "boil", and individual fish can be caught by hand, to the delight of small children and some older ichthyologists. In the past, these suckers were so numerous in some parts of their Canadian range that farmers filled up wagon-loads using pitch-forks and their pigs thrived on this rich diet.

The timing of the run is temperature-dependent, starting when the stream water is approaching 10°C. In 1986, the water temperature in a Lac Philippe stream was 8.5°C on 14 April and no fish were seen but, by 18 April, in this unusually warm spring, the water temperature was 13°C (at the same time of day) and the run was on. 1987 also had a warm spring, and the run peaked around the Easter weekend. In previous years, fish have concentrated in pools at precisely 10°C. Luckily for the suckers, this is after the cross-country ski season and before the camping, swimming and fishing season. The run takes place with little disturbance except for some local people who take fish to eat. Suckers are reputed to be rather tasty when in spawning condition, but their flesh is full of small bones.

One Lac Philippe stream has a barrier to the fish migration. This is formed by a 7.7 m long, rock and concrete slope passing to a smooth, 6.5 m long and 3.2 m wide concrete spillway leading from a culvert under a road. The water flow through the culvert is 2 metres/second. Remarkably, some suckers can negotiate this barrier, swimming over the concrete slope with their backs out of the water, occasionally becoming stranded on the dry concrete margin. Most fish spawn in a concentration below the culvert in fast-flowing water over a gravel bottom.

Males outnumber females on this spawning ground and this relates to behaviour during the spawning act. Two to four males will press against one female, presumably to help extrude the eggs which are fertilized by milt from the males. The males arch their backs, splay their pectoral fins, and with the female vibrate rapidly, stirring up a cloud of sand and small gravel. Females will spawn a number of times before all their eggs are shed. Spawning acts last 1.5 to 4 seconds and may occur up to 40 times an hour, particularly at dusk and dawn. One large

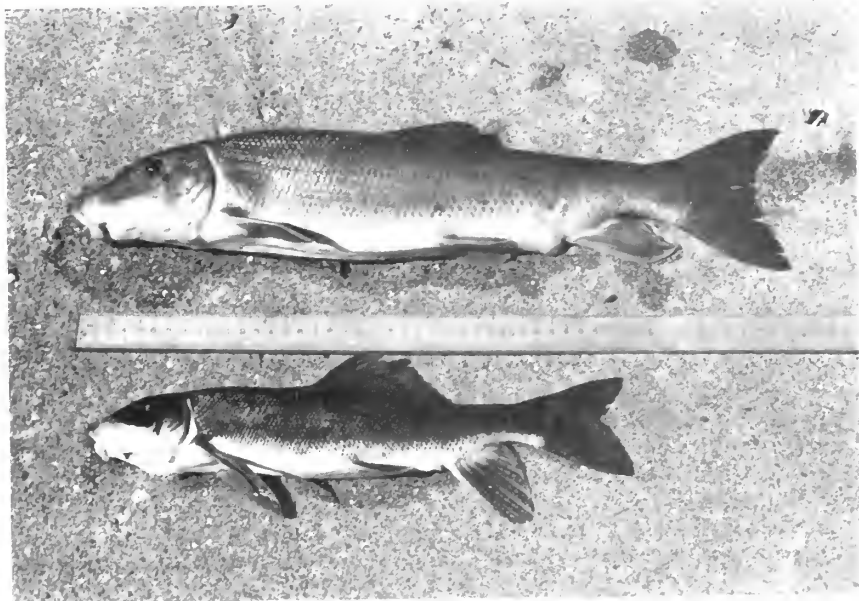


Figure 1. Spent and dying White Suckers from a Lac Phillippe stream, 20 April 1987. Female (above) 500 mm total length, male (below) 306 mm total length.

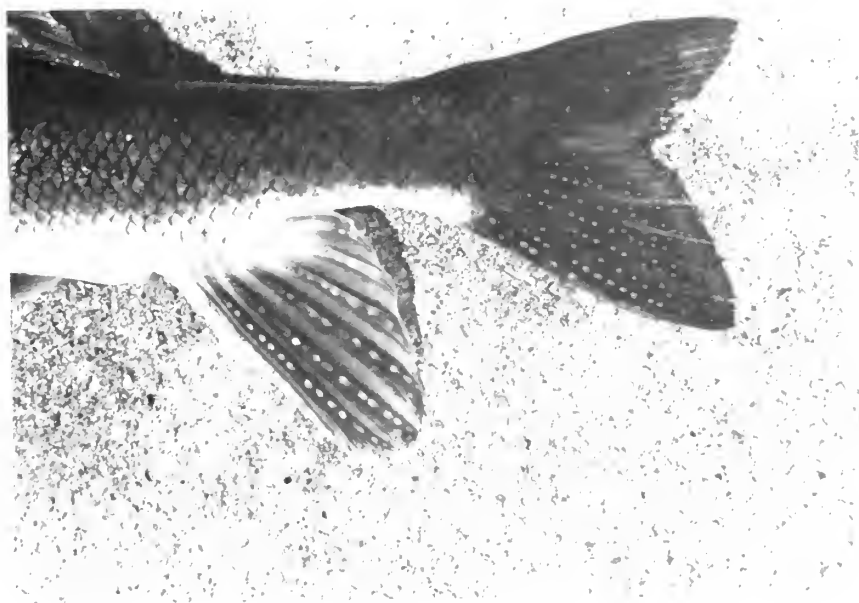


Figure 2. Tail region of male sucker to show tubercles.

female, about half a metre long, has been recorded as containing 139,000 eggs. The eggs are bright yellow and drift downstream to adhere to gravel or other objects. There is no care by the exhausted adults, which drift back downstream to the lake. Some die, but no mass mortality has been observed locally. In 1986, the spawning season in one stream lasted seven to ten days. Eggs hatch in one to two weeks, depending on temperature, and the fry migrate to the lake after one to two weeks of hiding in the gravel. Suckers may spawn several times after reaching maturity at an age of four to five years.

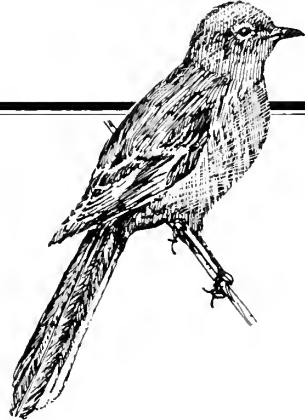
The male sucker is easily spotted in the stream by a dark reddish stripe along the flank. Out of the water, this stripe appears more bronze, and both sexes are bronze above and white below. Females from a Lac Philippe stream sample ranged in length from 328 - 425 mm (mean 385 mm total length based on 15 fish returned alive), while males were somewhat smaller, 300 - 415 mm (mean 364 mm based on 25 fish), but one female in 1987 was over 500 mm long. Males can press effectively against females despite their mucus covering and the stream flow because they develop tubercles at this time of the year. Minute tubercles are found scattered over the top of the head, number 1-3 on the posterior margin of the dorsal and upper flank scales, and line the rays of the dorsal and pelvic fins. But the largest tubercles are found on the anal fin and the lower lobe of the caudal fin. There they lie in rows following each fin ray and branching into four rows on some caudal rays. A grasp on the slippery tail is easy to maintain because of these large tubercles.

If you want to see the suckers run, patience and stamina are prime requisites as you tramp from stream to stream - not all streams have a run! A close reading of this article will tell you where to go. Remember, no collecting on National Capital Commission lands is permitted unless a research permit has been obtained. A thermometer will prove invaluable. The run usually starts just after the ice leaves the lakes in the Gatineau Park, but stream temperature is the only sure clue as to when the suckers will swim upstream. Stream temperature depends on the amount of rain, sun, snow cover and runoff, and on air temperature. 1986 and 1987 were "early" years; in previous years, runs have occurred at the beginning of May.

Good luck! ☐

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# Fall Bird Sightings



V. Bernard Ladouceur

*August 1 - November 30 Period*

The fall of 1987 had its frustrations and pleasant surprises. Unique features included extremely low (virtually unprecedented) water levels, low numbers of shorebirds and the beginnings of a small wave of western rarities. Before we get into "all that", we shall first tie up some loose ends.

## **The Breeding Season**

This was the year of the Loggerhead Shrike Survey. This concerted effort produced more birds than was expected, but the fact is that fewer and fewer are being encountered on regular birding trips, and, therefore, there is still great cause for concern.

Two Sandhill Cranes were present near Navan from early August to mid-November. Although they were first reported in early August, they may have been there all summer when you consider that two were found in the same area in early July a year earlier. One has to ask whether they are breeding somewhere east of the city.

## **August to Mid-October**

As mentioned in the introduction, water levels were the lowest in recent memory. The extremely low levels of 1971 didn't compare to the levels of 1987. Ottawa birders braced themselves for "mega-fall" and checked the Ottawa River for shorebirds, faithfully, week after week ... after week ... after week. To say the results were disappointing is putting it mildly. In all seriousness, high-water years produce more shorebirds than we saw this fall. Normal years have "peeps" (especially Semipalmated Sandpipers) by the hundreds. This year, it was difficult to find large concentrations of any shorebirds. Numbers of Lesser Yellow-legs were particularly low.

The situation never changed throughout the fall. One could find most of the species, including some of the scarce but regular migrants (Whimbrel during unsettled weather, Red-necked

Phalarope, Baird's Sandpiper), but where were the numbers? There were no large flocks of Hudsonian Godwits seen, as was the case for the two previous years.

Where were the shorebirds? One explanation offered was the presence of a number of Peregrine Falcons. However, we've had this situation before and it didn't seem to affect shorebird numbers then. Perhaps it was because the weather was fine, or because water levels were low along Lake Ontario and in other places, that the birds simply bypassed Ottawa. This would make sense since some other areas did have exceptional numbers of shorebirds.

I mentioned that there were several Peregrine Falcons. These included two unbanded birds, a very pale adult probably of the arctic race, *tundrius*, and a sub-adult bird, in addition to the released birds. The adult may be the same bird that appears to be wintering this year and can be seen roosting on the Coats Building. The Peregrines didn't confine themselves to the river as they could also be seen at the Experimental Farm and at sewage lagoons.

We say it every year, but Double-crested Cormorants were again seen in unprecedented numbers. Once rare, this species is now easy to find.

On September 4th an adult male Connecticut Warbler was banded and photographed south of the airport. Yet another Connecticut Warbler, this time an immature, was seen on the fall count on September 6th. Almost all sightings of Connecticut Warblers in the Ottawa District have occurred during late August and early September.

The rare sighting of a Willet was made at Shirleys Bay on September 5th. This is only the second fall record.

The fall count held on September 6th produced an Orchard Oriole, the sixth record and the latest date for this species, and an immature Bald Eagle in addition to the Connecticut Warbler. The day of the count was actually a very poor day for birds in general, but it takes just one bird to make the outing worthwhile. And that one bird may show up anywhere and at any time.

The first Stilt Sandpiper didn't appear until September 4th, a late date for this species. These birds are usually seen in late July and August.

Dreadful weather on September 13th brought down a Long-billed Dowitcher at the Richmond sewage lagoons and three Hudsonian Godwits at the Munster sewage lagoons. There was a single Short-billed Dowitcher at Richmond as well, and this was an excellent opportunity to compare the two dowitchers. (Both



were juveniles.) The Long-billed was the second earliest ever for Ottawa, and it, as well as the godwits, lingered for a few days. Other species observed at the two locations during that week included Red-necked Phalarope, Ruddy Turnstone, and Baird's and White-rumped Sandpipers.

Two more Long-billed Dowitchers were at Richmond on September 23rd. A male Eurasian Wigeon first found on September 26th at Mud Lake in Britannia was present until at least October 24th.

Northern Shoveler numbers at Shirleys Bay were down from the last few years.

Two adult Lesser Black-backed Gulls were found in the last week of September and were also seen in the first week of October.

Great Black-backed Gulls continue to arrive earlier, leave later, and occur in greater numbers as each year passes.

### Mid-October to November

Late October to mid-November has to be, in many ways, the most interesting and exciting time to bird in Ottawa. If you've shunned birding this time of year because it's starting to get cold, the warblers have been gone for several weeks, and you feel you have until March to see all the winter species, I think you should reconsider.

But first, dress warmly. Pretend it's -30°F or C (it doesn't matter which). Anybody who has stood for hours at Stillwater Park or Shirleys Bay or Nepean Dump knows what I mean. If the wind is coming out of the northwest, it is bitterly cold.

Fortunately, all days don't have winds out of the northwest. The best days are usually days with unsettled conditions - either very warm or very cold or both. The really, really cold days with clear blue skies and northwest winds generally produce little, so you can leave the pain to the crazies.

What might you see? It is the time to see Brant, scoters and Oldsquaws, and you may see large flocks of male Oldsquaws and Black Scoter as well as Brant. King Eider is a possibility. In the second week of November, there is a chance of seeing flocks of Red-throated Loons high overhead (they move in bunches not in duck- or geese-like formations or lines), and single Red-throated Loons can be located on or near Lac Deschênes throughout the period. Red-tailed and Rough-legged Hawks are generally on the move, and this is the time to see Golden Eagles and Bald

Eagles. Check for Purple Sandpipers along the shores, particularly on clear, cold days. It is the best time of year for gulls - particularly in November - with Herring, Great Black-backed, Glaucous, Iceland, Thayer's, lingering Ring-billed, and possibly Lesser Black-backed, as well as who knows what else. Warm breezes from the south may bring up rare flycatchers such as Gray Kingbird (don't count on this one), Scissor-tailed, Ash-throated and so forth. It has happened. It is an interesting time of year. There are still more possibilities, especially along the river, but I'll refrain and tell you what happened this year.

After a lull in mid-month, a Parasitic Jaeger was seen on October 20th. The next day 2,500 adult male Black Scoters were observed at Lac Deschênes. Thirty-five Red-tailed Hawks were seen from Britannia migrating over Deschênes Rapids the same day. This is a good hawk-watching point in the fall if you have patience.

There were two Red Phalaropes on October 22nd off Grandview Road, and the next day there were 120 Black Scoters. Five hundred Brant were seen on October 24th. The same day, two Lesser Black-backed Gulls were seen, one an adult and the other a second-winter bird. The second-winter plumage is quite similar to the first-winter with the most noticeable difference being the dark gray colour of the back.

Three more Red Phalaropes were seen on October 31st. A King Eider and a Hudsonian Godwit were at Constance Bay on November 1st.

November 8th was the big day for Red-throated Loons with flocks of 92 and 29. Two Golden Eagles were reported in late October and early November. Bald Eagles are on the increase. Sightings of a single bird began in November and others were seen at least into January. Another bird on the increase is Barrow's Goldeneye. In the winter of 1986-87, there were three immature males, and this winter we have three (probably - at least two) adult males in addition to an immature male and at least two females.

On November 28th, the rare Harlequin Duck was spotted at Lemieux Island and later at Parc Brébeuf in Hull. (It was joined by a second bird on the December 20th Christmas Bird Count.)

### Owls

The first two weeks of November is an excellent time to see Snowy Owls along the Ottawa River west of the city. This year, as many as four could be seen at one time on the docks at Stillwater Park.

Two Boreal Owls have been sighted so far this fall. One was found on September 29th near the Sarsaparilla Trail in Stony Swamp, and another west of Stittsville on November 15th.

A Northern Hawk-Owl appeared at Baseline and Cedarview Roads the last week of November and others were to follow.

### Western Fall-out

On November 8th, a Townsend's Solitaire was found in the neighbourhood of Irving Place in Ottawa. This is only the second record for this species. A Varied Thrush appeared in Rockcliffe later in November. It appears to be evident that Varied Thrushes regularly winter in eastern Canada and the northeastern United States, albeit in very small numbers.

Had I written this article on December 1st, the above paragraph would have sufficed. However, having written this article at a later date (I won't admit how much later), I am compelled by new information to put the above sightings into proper context.

For whatever reason, we seem to have experienced a mini-invasion of western species. As it turns out, another Varied Thrush was reported in late December from Aylmer, where it had been observed since early November. Two Varied Thrushes in one year. This has happened once before. Another Townsend's Solitaire was found in Pontiac just outside the Ottawa District in January, and who knows how long it had been there.

A Harris' Sparrow showed up in Pembroke, an Audubon's (the western race of Yellow-rumped) Warbler was found on the Ottawa-Hull Christmas Bird Count, and three Townsend's Warblers were found in Halifax. With the exception of the Townsend's Warblers, none of these sightings is that unusual by itself, but together they appear to indicate a pattern. Is it coincidence, or did something happen this year to produce so many western strays?

As you can see, this article touched on the high and low points of this period. *A Birder's Checklist of Ottawa* will give you an idea of the approximate status of each species. It is available at the Nature Canada Bookshop, 453 Sussex Drive, in Ottawa. Also, remember to dial the Ottawa Bird Status Line (596-4888) for up-to-date news on bird sightings.

*Acknowledgement:* I would like to thank Bruce Di Labio for having compiled much of the data used in this article. ▢

The **Seventh Annual Christmas Bird Count Roundup**  
will appear in issue number 4.



COMMON BARN-OWL

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## An Introduction to Owling in the Ottawa District

Bruce M. Di Labio & Christopher Traynor

During the past several years, there has been an increasing interest in owling. The Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club owl excursions during the springtime have been very well attended. However, owling with large groups presents some problems. Keeping track of 30 people in the dark isn't easy, and the opening and closing of 20 car doors naturally sets off every dog within earshot to barking. One night picked months in advance often leads to "Well, usually this is a good spot; they just don't seem to be calling tonight ...".

Owling is generally the least productive phase of birding, requiring time far out of proportion with the number of birds seen or heard. Gruelling as it is, owling also offers the opportunity for memorable and exciting moments with a most interesting group of birds. Although often a game of chance, there are tricks to use to better your chances. In this article, we give the novice owler an introduction to owls and proven owling techniques.

### Weather Conditions

It is often assumed that a clear moonlit night is the best time for owling. Some owls undoubtedly do prefer such nights; however, we have been out on many such "perfect" nights and had poor results. On the other hand, success has been had in  $-20^{\circ}$  C weather, on overcast nights, and in a steady drizzle. The one condition to avoid is wind. Owls just do not seem to call regularly on windy nights, and the few that do are unlikely to be heard.

A call to the weather office (998-3439) will give you an indication of what weather to expect. If you're set to go owling and the weather changes or appears poor, go anyway as it could be an "owl night".

### Equipment

The following equipment, while not necessary, can enhance any owl outing and make it more enjoyable. Fortunately, most birders have some or all of these: binoculars, spotting scope, flashlight, portable tape recorder, pre-recorded owl calls.

While it may seem strange to use binoculars when owling at

night, they can be very useful. Often on moonlit nights or in the beam of a flashlight, owls can be observed through binoculars for several minutes. You may even spot prey in the bird's talons which you might have missed. The spotting scope is useful only for diurnal owling. That white blob two fields over looks far more impressive through a scope.

A flashlight is essential if you want a good view. Most owls are easily recognized at night by silhouette and flight style, and your flashlight will bring out the details. A red phase Eastern Screech-Owl may not be distinguished from a gray phase bird without that light.

A tape recorder and pre-recorded owl calls will greatly increase your chances of success. By playing tapes of the various owl calls, it is possible to lure birds to these sounds. Some owls respond immediately and will reply, while others will approach silently to investigate. Interesting observations can arise from the use of tapes. Eastern Screech-Owls have two calls, a whinny and a trill. They usually respond with the same call as the one played. If trills are what you play, trills are what you will hear back, and likely the whinny as well. Barred Owls can have amorous adventures when tape recorders are around!

The most important thing to remember when using tapes is not to overdo it. The playing of a tape before breeding season has begun is not likely to cause any harm if done on one or two nights only. However, repeatedly visiting a spot where birds are known to nest is harmful and foolish. Recently, a man was hospitalized from injuries sustained when attacked by a Barred Owl in a Florida park. He was playing Barred Owl calls in the immediate vicinity of a known nest. Park officials subsequently banned further use of tape recorders. Use good judgement, be responsible, and put the birds' interests first.

### Owling Techniques

Owling is usually done in one of three manners: nocturnal owling (looking and listening for owls at night), diurnal owling (searching for those species that are about in the daytime, some of which are nocturnal on their breeding grounds but observed in Ottawa in the daytime, e.g. Great Gray) and the most difficult form, searching for roosting owls.

#### Nocturnal Owling

If you are unfamiliar with the Ottawa District, drive the back roads during the daylight hours and check for suitable habitat. Return to these areas at night to listen for owls. It is important to be away from houses, farms and busy roadways. It is also a good idea, after turning off your car, to move away from it. Cars make a lot of noise even when off and have fooled

many owlers into thinking they may have heard an Eastern Screech-Owl, Northern Saw-whet or other owl species. Spend several minutes at each stop. Often owls call sporadically, and it may be necessary to remain at one spot until an owl does call. Cupping your hand around your ear brings in sounds you might otherwise not hear, in much the same manner as owls use their facial discs. Owls may be enticed for closer views by making squeaking noises, which to an owl sound like the distress cries of an injured rodent (if done reasonably well).

Using tape recorders is a proven method of inducing owls to call. Whether their interest is in finding a mate or answering a perceived challenge, owls usually respond if around. It's generally a good idea to start with the calls of the smaller owls and then work up to the larger species. Long-eared Owls have been known to eat Northern Saw-whets, so any saw-whet in the vicinity might be reluctant to call if it has just heard a Long-eared's hoot. Also, give the tape a chance to work. Eastern Screech-Owls, in particular, will call immediately, but others will wait until you head back to your car before they call. Most importantly, don't linger in any area too long, especially at known breeding sites, and visit a spot no more than once or twice.

Common sense should be used when owling at night. Always remember to have a full tank of gas, know where you are going, and have extra batteries for your tape recorder and flashlight. It is a good idea not to go owling alone, particularly while owling in the spring. The back roads can be very soft, and the road shoulder should not be trusted. Carry your Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club membership card to help identify yourself to police and conservation officers.

### Diurnal Owling

Generally, diurnal owling is restricted to searching suitable habitat in wintertime for the Short-eared Owl (dusk and dawn), Snowy Owl, and the rarer northern owls which show up on occasion, Great Gray and Northern Hawk-Owls. Done usually from the comfort of a car, daytime owling usually means plenty of kilometres per owl and a tankful of gas. On those occasions when we are invaded by winter owls, this pastime can be very rewarding. Refer to the individual species accounts for the fine points of finding the diurnal owls.

### Roosting Owls

Searching for roosting owls is always a challenge. By piecing together your knowledge of owls along with a little luck, you can get rare glimpses of owls as they while away their day in hidden seclusion. First, try to select a woodlot that can be well covered in a reasonable time. A large wooded area like the Jack Pine Trail will more likely contain an owl, but

your chances of finding it are slim. A smaller woodlot may not have an owl, but if it does, you are much more likely to find it. It is very important to be thorough. You should check all suitable trees; the tree you decide to skip may be the one with the owl. Also, investigate any bird ruckus you hear. Many small birds, particularly chickadees, will mob Eastern Screech-Owls, Boreal and Northern Saw-whet Owls. Blue Jays love to harass Long-eared Owls, and crows can make things miserable for Great Horned Owls.

There are signs you should learn to read in order to discover roosting owls. Whitewash (bird excrement) is one such sign. It is distinguished from most other types by being very white and quite chalky. Usually located splattered at the base of a tree, on the trunk or occasionally farther out. The problem is that one bird in a woodlot produces very little whitewash in one day, so you have to be aware of even tiny amounts which are easily overlooked by the untrained eye. The wetter it is, the better the chance of the owl's still being in the vicinity.

Owls also regurgitate the indigestible portions of their meals in the form of pellets, small tightly packed wads of fur and bone. A dark gray, moist pellet is a sign that an owl has been there recently. If it is faded gray and dry, the owl is probably long gone. Sometimes, you may find a large number of pellets under several trees. This is a good indication that an owl has found the hunting good here. A search of all the trees in the vicinity should produce the culprit.

Start by searching the trunk from top to bottom as most owls roost tightly against it, then check the outer branches. Circle the tree completely; a different perspective may reveal a hidden bird. When searching tall trees, if you see anything resembling an owl, use your binoculars to double check. Saw-whets, often found lower than 3 m, also roost high, especially in the sparser cedars and may be very difficult to see.

If this sounds like a lot of work, it is. However, you can probably get away with quick glances of trees with no sign and save the thorough checks for trees with whitewash or pellets below. While "sign" is often found with no owl present, an owl is rarely found without some evidence below. It is important not to give up on a locale if no owls are found. If the habitat is good and some sign is visible, it is usually just a matter of frequent visits before you are successful.

It is important to realize that roosting owls are not just resting, they are hiding. For this reason, when you discover one, try to make your visit short and remain quiet at all times. When photographing owls, learn to read quickly each owl's temperament. Some birds will remain calm amid a barrage of flashes, while others will be gone before you think of your camera. It is easy to tell from an owl's eyes and posture



*A cavity nester, the Eastern Screech-Owl is easily overlooked.*  
Photographs by Bruce Di Labio, except as noted.



whether it is nervous. If the eyes bug out, or if it stands and shifts position, back off and leave quietly. The owl's well-being is always more important than the photograph.

## **The Owls of the Ottawa District**

### **COMMON BARN-OWL**

A misnomer if there ever was one. This medium-sized, pale owl with a heart-shaped face and dark eyes is by far the rarest owl occurring in the Ottawa District. Its status has remained unchanged throughout its history in our area. It may well go unnoticed in the agricultural land south of Ottawa due to its nocturnal activities. The last reported observation was of a nesting pair in Winchester in August 1980. The southern portion of the Ottawa District contains an abundance of suitable habitat for the Common Barn-Owl. If one has the time and energy to check the barns, silos and farm buildings, well, you never know. Be sure to ask farmers if they have seen any. Good luck in finding one, and if you do, give us a call.

### **EASTERN SCREECH-OWL**

This is the only small, "tufted" owl occurring in our area. Although this bird comes in both red and gray phases, the red is rarely seen in the District. The Eastern Screech-Owl has two calls, a whinny and a trill. With practice, they can be imitated. Both calls are of a low frequency, and often it seems that the owl is farther away than it is. They are often drowned out by the spring frog chorus, so it's best to get out in late March and early April. Good results can also be had in the fall when the racket has died down.

The Eastern Screech-Owl's habitat is variable. It seems to prefer woodlands and parks which are near streams. It requires suitable cavities in which to roost and nest. Historically, both the Rockcliffe Park and Billings Bridge areas have been good, although the bulldozers have claimed a favourite roost site at Billings Bridge. Recently, birds have been located at the Nepean Dump, the Arboretum, Cambrian Road west of Moodie Drive, and the 4th Line and Riddell Drive junction near South March. They were found to have nested this past summer in Winchester.

The Eastern Screech-Owl is a permanent resident in small numbers in the District.

## GREAT HORNED OWL

This large, formidable owl has prominent ear tufts or "horns". It is our most familiar owl, although it is more often heard than seen. The call is variable, usually consisting of four or five low hoots. Unlike other owls, the Great Horned Owl becomes vocal early in the breeding season and can be heard calling in January. Nesting has been recorded in late February and early March. A mob of calling crows often betrays the presence of a nesting pair.

Great Horned Owls can be found in most large woodlands. They prefer deciduous, coniferous and mixed woodlots which border on farmland. During the fall and winter, they turn up quite often in isolated woodlots within the city limits. Great Horned Owls are often seen at wood edges waiting for the approaching darkness. A few still linger out at dawn. They can be encountered easily along Moodie Drive, Dwyer Hill Road, the 4th Line in Kanata, and at Constance Lake.

The Great Horned Owl is a common permanent resident.



*A young Great Horned Owl.*

*The Great Horned Owl is the most widespread nesting owl in our area.*

## SNOWY OWL

The Snowy is unmistakable. Older males can be immaculately white. Females and immatures are more heavily barred and spotted with brown and have a distinctive white face. An occasional "arctic" Great Horned Owl is almost as pale as some Snowies but has ear tufts and prefers to stay among the trees.

The Snowy Owl is an erratic winter visitor, sometimes invading the Ottawa area in large numbers. The first migrants are usually noted in late October or early November. At this time, they are very visible against the autumn colours. Some early arrivals occur along the Ottawa River at Stillwater Park and Shirleys Bay. They usually increase in numbers during late November and early December. By early January, many have settled into favoured locations such as the airport (Armstrong and Leitrim Roads), Richmond and the Greenbank - Fallowfield areas. Snowy Owls prefer the wide open spaces, so any open farmland could be productive. Snowies are sometimes difficult to locate on bright, sunny days, especially at mid-day when they often perch low. They are more likely to be seen hunting before 9 a.m. and after 3 p.m. At these times, they are more conspicuous because they tend to take higher perches. To see a Snowy, use your binoculars to scan the ground, fence posts, trees and other lookouts.

The Snowy Owl is the provincial bird of Quebec.

## NORTHERN HAWK-OWL

At first glance, this bird shows characteristics of being both hawk and owl. A medium-sized bird with heavily barred underparts and a long, slender tail, it is most often seen perched high atop a prominent lookout. As a winter visitor, the Northern Hawk-Owl inhabits open farmland, bogs and mixed woodland. Any open areas on the outskirts of Ottawa should be checked. The northwest section of the Ottawa District has been productive in the past. During eruption years, Northern Hawk-Owls have been found to arrive in mid-November, and periodically a few settle in for the winter, leaving usually in March. In the winter of 1981-82, up to 10 birds were sighted in the District, and at least six were observed regularly. Hawk-Owls rarely call in winter.

## BARRED OWL

The Barred Owl is a large, brown, earless, woodland owl. The streaked belly, barred breast and dark brown eyes are distinctive features. The call is the familiar "Who cooks for you, Who cooks for you all", at a distance sounding like the barking of a dog. It also has a variety of grunts and laughing sounds.



*Snowy Owl (left) This arctic visitor can often be observed hunting over open fields in wintertime. The Northern Hawk-Owl (right) is the only northern owl known to have nested in the Ottawa District. Photograph by Brian Morin.*



*The Barred Owl (left) can be encountered regularly in the northern haunts of the Ottawa District. The Great Gray Owl (right) is the largest North American owl.*

During the breeding season, Barred Owls inhabit deep, dark, mature forests. In winter, they move sporadically south out of their haunts and often occur inside the city limits in the unlikeliest spots. One bird even spent the day studying the bureaucracy at the Place du Portage complex from a small courtyard. The area in the vicinity of Richmond and Munster (ConLee Road, formerly Sandelee) has been a hot spot. The northern extreme of Gatineau Park, St.-Pierre-de-Wakefield, Poltimore, and Lac de l'Agile are other good spots. Attracted by abundant prey, the Barred Owl is a frequent guest of The Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club at its Jack Pine Trail and Pink Road feeders.

The Barred Owl is an uncommon permanent resident, more frequent on the Quebec side of the Ottawa River.

### GREAT GRAY OWL

The largest North American owl, the Great Gray is huge with a very large round head and yellow eyes. A distinctive white throat patch is usually evident, even at a distance, and in low light the patch is almost luminous.

In winters when we are lucky to have this rare visitor, the Great Gray is often found hunting during the daylight hours, especially early morning and late afternoon. At these times, it usually takes conspicuous perches. Its preferred habitat is abandoned or overgrown fields bordered by large trees. Perched atop a broken snag of an old elm, the Great Gray almost becomes part of the tree. It usually avoids the wide-open places preferred by the Snowy.

The Great Gray Owl is the provincial bird of Manitoba.

### LONG-EARED OWL

A medium-sized owl with long ear tufts positioned close to the centre of the head. An orangey facial disc and streaked breast separate it from the larger Great Horned Owl and the much smaller Eastern Screech-Owl. Although it has a wide variety of hisses, screeches and other calls, the one heard most often in the Ottawa District is a single low hoot.

During the breeding season, Long-eared Owls frequent both coniferous and mixed forests and pine plantations. During migration it can be found in any dense coniferous woodlot. Some good areas for Long-eareds are Clyde Woods, the Arboretum, and Merivale Gardens behind the Sportsplex.

The Long-eared Owl is a scarce breeder. It is a regular spring and fall migrant and sometimes overwinters.



The *Long-eared Owl* (left) is most often encountered in dense cedar groves during spring and fall migration. The *Short-eared Owl* (right) is an erratic breeder in the Ottawa District. Photograph by Peter M. Dunn.



The *Boreal Owl* (left) is frequently confused with the smaller *Northern Saw-whet Owl*. The *Northern Saw-whet Owl* (right) is the smallest owl occurring in the Ottawa District.

## SHORT-EARED OWL

A medium-sized, buffy-coloured owl, the Short-eared has a distinctive moth-like style of flight similar to that of the Long-eared Owl. The Short-eared has ear tufts, but they are hardly noticeable. Although usually silent, they do on occasion give a number of short raspy yips. They are more vocal during the breeding season.

The Short-eared's preferred habitats are grasslands, wet meadows and fallow fields. Traditionally, Short-eareds have been found in all seasons behind the Ottawa International Airport, near Carlsbad Springs and Cobb Lake Creek. Driving at dusk in suitable habitat, one can encounter the Short-eared as it begins its rounds, and occasionally your headlights may catch a bird flushing from a fence post. It is also gregarious, often encountered in groups of ten or more.

In the Ottawa District, the Short-eared Owl is an erratic breeding bird and a scarce migrant. It winters occasionally.

## BOREAL OWL

Small and tame, the Boreal is one of the most eagerly sought after of all the owls. It differs from the similar Northern Saw-whet by being larger, having a yellowish bill and spotted forehead, and a black border around the facial disc. It also has more of a chocolate tone than the reddish-brown of the Northern Saw-whet.

In the Ottawa District, it is a rare winter visitor, difficult to locate because of its nocturnal habits. It has rarely been heard calling in our area. Feeder operators sometimes discover a Boreal frequenting their yard in search of small mammals and birds attracted to the bird feeder. Cedar woodlots seem to be the preferred roosting spots. On occasion, the agitated behaviour of the local chickadee gang gives one away. The recipe for finding a Boreal is quite simple. Look up as many trees as possible until persistence and sheer luck finally pay off.

## NORTHERN SAW-WHET OWL

The smallest of our local owls, the Northern Saw-whet Owl can be mistaken only for the larger Boreal Owl. It is distinguished by its streaked forehead, dark bill, and reddish streaks on the breast. Of all the owls, the Northern Saw-whet Owl has the easiest voice to imitate, a monotonous series of whistled notes. Occasionally during mild spells in late winter, the Northern Saw-whet Owl can be heard. It calls more readily in late March and early April.

The Northern Saw-whet Owl is one of the most difficult owls to find. It prefers mixed woodlands for breeding. Cedar woodlots are preferred during migration and in winter. Roosting in dense cedars, it can be easily overlooked. The best time to observe the Northern Saw-whet Owl is during spring and fall migration when it is a regular migrant. As a breeding bird, it is locally scarce.

### Summary

Owling is a rewarding and educational pastime, but we have a few concerns: over-using tape recorders in breeding season, "rescuing" owlets, trespassing on private property, and disturbing owls for photographic purposes.

The use of the tape recorder must be kept to a minimum. Using one near a known nesting area will only disturb the owls and may prevent successful nesting.

In the spring, many people find owlets, usually Great Horned Owls. Because of the owlets' bedraggled appearance, they believe them to be injured. Rescue attempts are made and birds are needlessly removed from the wild. It is normal for most young owls to leave their nests before they can fly. When coming upon owlets, it is best to leave them alone.

Trespassing is another concern. It is always best to seek permission before you enter any private property.

Please do not disturb owls for photographic purposes. Photographing owls is fine, but you must draw a line. Recent incidents in our area have shown that some cross the line. There is no justification for breaking branches or climbing trees to obtain better photographs. The bottom line is common sense. Keep the well-being of the owls your prime concern.

Happy owling!

### *Acknowledgements*

We would like to thank Chris Ellingwood and Joyce Reddoch for reviewing the manuscript, and Peter M. Dunn and Brian Morin for their photographs.

Special thanks go to Ron Pittaway for his constructive comments on earlier drafts of the manuscript. ▢



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# Cornwall – Beauharnois Field Trip

Bruce M. Di Labio and Christopher Traynor

On Saturday, November 7, 1987, 21 participants gathered at the Victoria Memorial Museum for a day of gull-watching along the St. Lawrence River. We left Ottawa at 8 a.m. on a clear, cold morning after having awakened to the winter's first real snowfall. We followed Highway 417 to Highway 138 and made our way to the Cornwall Power Dam. Numerous Rough-legged Hawks were seen, as well as a Northern Shrike.

We arrived at the dam at 9:30 a.m. (Note: Those who wish to visit the dam must phone ahead for permission at 1-932-3072.) Our enthusiasm upon arrival was short-lived when one of the party discovered she had locked her keys in her car. A swift rescue was undertaken. Thanks go to Tim Brophy, who used a screwdriver to pry the door while the trip leader manipulated a coat-hanger.

Meanwhile, back at the dam, thousands of birds were feeding. Amongst the 3,500 Common Mergansers, six Oldsquaw could be picked out. Bonaparte's and Ring-billed made up the bulk of the gulls.

We then proceeded to MacDonald's for a quick coffee. We headed next to Beauharnois. On the outskirts of St. Timothy, the lead car spotted an eagle overhead. Within seconds, the convoy had pulled onto the shoulder. Scopes and binoculars were quickly focussed on a sub-adult Golden Eagle as it drifted slowly south.

We arrived at Beauharnois at 12:15 p.m. The gull numbers were unimpressive. However, two Iceland Gulls were seen by all present. A Snowy Owl was also seen as it tried to make a meal of any unwary gull.

We left Beauharnois at 1:45 and headed back to Cornwall to make a last check of the dam. Unfortunately, nothing had changed, so we headed home.

*Acknowledgements:* Bruce would like to thank Chris Traynor, Richard Brouillet and Tim Brophy for their assistance on this outing. ▣

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# Late Fall and Early Winter Birding

Tony Beck

Winter birding can prove to be uncomfortable, uncolourful and, worst of all, uneventful. So, as The Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club "Late Fall and Early Winter Birds" field trip assembled, my own expectations were cautiously conservative.

It was a cool and cloudy morning on December 5th, 1987. A small mass of bodies huddled together in the parking lot of Carlingwood Shopping Centre when an American Kestrel perched atop a bare tree outside the lot. It's amazing how one bird can change your whole attitude for the rest of the day. With confidence built up and new expectations high, we set out in a convoy of cars toward the west end of Ottawa.

Our strategy was simple. We would check traditional winter birding grounds, and, in addition, we would attempt to find recently discovered yet predictable birds spending the season in our area.

The first stop was the corner of Cedarview and Baseline Roads. A Hawk Owl was expected here, and we found the bird perched high on a tree at a considerable distance from the road. With the aid of telescopes, everyone was able to get adequate views.

We continued our journey down Knoxdale to Greenbank Road, where we stopped to scan across the Experimental Farm. A small flock of Snow Buntings bubbled through the air as Club members set their scopes onto a young Snowy Owl. On the other side of the road, we noticed a dark phase Rough-legged Hawk. The group then shuffled down Greenbank Road to get a better look at the hawk. Unfortunately, at best the hawk remained far from the road, but we did manage to get a glimpse of a barely identifiable Northern Shrike. This bird would have gone completely unnoticed without the help of a telescope.

The Jack Pine Trail was the next stop in our birding adventure. This popular birding spot has a winter feeder maintained by The Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club, so it was well worth checking out. Much to my disappointment, the trail did not live up to its reputation, although there were a few highlights. The feeder had attracted many Evening Grosbeaks and Black-capped Chickadees, and a lone Red-breasted Nuthatch. Along the trail, we saw Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers, American Goldfinches, a single Blue Jay, a Snowshoe Rabbit, and a pair of Ruffed Grouse, one of which displayed its ruff as it strutted across the path.



*A small group of Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club members gaze at a Northern Hawk-Owl perched on the utility wire. Spectacular views of this great northern raptor were obtained merely by walking underneath the bird. All photographs by the author.*

We decided to look for some raptors down the Richmond Road way and came up with some Rough-legged Hawks and two Snowy Owls. Like the previous raptors of the day, they stayed clear of the road, and good looks were obtained only through telescopes.

It wasn't until Twin Elm Road that we managed to get excellent views of a light phase Rough-legged Hawk perched near the road. The bird then flew, offering everyone an experience in the majesty of a raptor's flight. Further down the road, four Mourning Doves were filling their gizzards with gravel.

Driving by the Nepean Dump, we found it fitting to stop and check out the early winter gulls known to feed there. We tallied four species, of which the Herring Gulls were the most abundant, followed by Great Black-backed Gulls. The bright Glaucous and Iceland Gulls were sporadically mixed throughout the flocks.

From the dump, we were travelling northward along Cedarview Road when a pair of flying hawks caught our attention. The convoy came to a halt along a narrow stretch of highway, but this precarious feat was rewarded with superb views of more Rough-legged Hawks. One of the birds observed was an extremely pale version of the light phase.

A couple of kilometres down the road, we stopped for our first Red-tailed Hawk of the day. The immature bird was perched right beside the road but decided to fly farther out when we got out of our cars. Comparing the flight pattern of the Red-tailed Hawk to the Rough-legged Hawk was of special interest.

As were driving by the first stop of the trip, we couldn't help stopping a second time especially since the Hawk Owl was resting on a utility wire right over Cedarview Road. All party members grouped together directly under the bird to get spectacular looks at this rare but tame visitor. The owl was totally unconcerned with our close scrutiny, but traffic almost came to a standstill as passing motorists wondered what all the commotion was about.

The afternoon was upon us, and much of the original group had called it a day, so the enthusiastic members who were left headed for the final destination of Parc Brébeuf in Hull. A female Harlequin Duck had been seen there regularly for a week, and we quickly found it. The little duck was drab in colour, but it displayed much charm through its frantic feeding habits of paddling against the Ottawa River rapids. We could not have ended this productive and exciting day on a higher note. The entire trip is proof positive that winter birding can be a great deal of fun.

*Acknowledgment:* Special thanks to Colin Gaskell for helping us find some good birds.



*A highlight of the day was the female Harlequin Duck at the last stop, Parc Brébeuf. ▢*

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## University of Ottawa Spring Course

### AMONG THE WILDFLOWERS

Lecture: Friday, May 13, 7:30-9:30 p.m.

Field Trips: Sunday, May 15, and Sunday, May 29, 10 a.m. -  
4 p.m. (Total course time: 14 hours).

Instructor: Catherine J. Keddy, M.Sc., an ecological consultant.

Fee: \$65.

Spring is the perfect time to learn about the flowers that bloom in the National Capital Region.

Continuing Education at the University of Ottawa presents an evening lecture followed by two field trips to various wayside habitats. Learn to identify the colourful spring flowers and enjoy their variety and beauty.

Handouts will provide identification information and references to wildflower guides.

For additional information, contact the Continuing Education Office, 5 Osgoode Street at Nicholas, telephone 564-4263. Register early to avoid disappointment.

# Coming Events

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arranged by the Excursions and Lectures Committee  
for further information, call the Club number (722-3050)

*Times stated for excursions are departure times. Please arrive earlier; leaders start promptly. If you need a ride, don't hesitate to ask the leader. Restricted trips will be open to non-members only after the indicated deadlines.*

**Registered Bus Trips:** Make your reservation for Club bus excursions by sending a cheque or money order (payable to The Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club) to Ellaine Dickson, 2037 Honeywell Avenue, Ottawa K2A 0P7, at least ten days in advance. Include your name, address, telephone number and the name of the outing.

**All Outings:** Please bring a lunch on full-day trips and dress according to the weather forecast and the activity. Binoculars and/or spotting scopes are essential on all birding trips. Unless otherwise stated, transportation will be by car pool.

Sunday      BUS EXCURSION: BIRDING AT PRESQU'ILE  
10 April      Leaders: Bob Bracken and Colin Gaskell  
6:30 a.m.      Meet: Sears, Carlingwood Shopping Centre,  
                to                      Carling Avenue at Woodroffe Avenue.  
6:30 p.m.      Cost: \$20.00 (See Registered Bus Trips details.)  
                    The popular spring tradition will focus on the large  
                    flocks of waterfowl gathered at the provincial park  
                    prior to continuing their northward migration.

Tuesday	OFNC MONTHLY MEETING
12 April	UNDERSTANDING THE NATURAL WORLD: PAST, PRESENT AND
8:00 p.m.	FUTURE AT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF NATURAL SCIENCES
	Speaker: Dr. Alan Emery, Director of the NMNS
	Meet: Auditorium, National Museum of Natural
	Sciences, Metcalfe and McLeod Streets
	The National Museum of Natural Sciences reaches out
	to all Canadians to create a better understanding of
	the natural world. Born of the Geological Survey of
	Canada 140 years ago, the Museum looks at its history
	and the needs of the nation in defining its future
	role. Dr. Emery will explain the challenge of in-
	volving everyone in this task, not just those who
	visit museums.

Saturday EARLY MORNING OWLING  
 16 April Leader: Ray Holland (225-9655)  
 2:00 a.m. Meet: Sears, Carlingwood Shopping Centre,  
 to Carling Avenue at Woodroffe Avenue.  
 8:00 a.m. Participants may expect to hear the diagnostic calls  
 of several owl species as well as the distinctive  
 sounds of American Woodcock, Common Snipe and Ruffed  
 Grouse. Telephone Ray if you intend to participate.  
 If for some reason the trip is postponed, he will be  
 able to notify you.

Sunday BUS EXCURSION: HAWK MIGRATION AT DERBY HILL, N.Y.  
 24 April Leaders: Bob Bracken and Bernie Ladouceur  
 6:30 a.m. Meet: Sears, Carlingwood Shopping Centre,  
 to Carling Avenue at Woodroffe Avenue.  
 6:30 p.m. Cost: \$20.00 (See Registered Bus Trips details.)  
 When weather conditions and timing are favourable,  
 the spectacle of thousands of hawks migrating through  
 Derby Hill is well worth the bus ride. Canadians  
 should bring proof of citizenship and non-Canadians  
 should carry passports. Optical equipment in "new"  
 condition should be registered with Canada Customs in  
 advance of the trip. The trip will be cancelled on  
 the day before if the weather forecast for the east-  
 ern end of Lake Ontario on Sunday is particularly  
 unfavourable. You will be notified of any change of  
 plan.

Friday OFNC SOIREE - WINE AND CHEESE PARTY  
 29 April Meet: Unitarian Church Hall, 30 Cleary Street  
 7:30 p.m. See the centrefold of the last issue.

Saturday GENERAL BOTANY OUTING  
 30 April Leaders: Philip Martin and Ellaine Dickson  
 9:00 a.m. Meet: Sears, Carlingwood Shopping Centre,  
 Carling Avenue at Woodroffe Avenue.  
 This half-day outing will visit a local area to  
 discover spring wildflowers, hopefully in bloom.

#### BIRD WALKS FOR BEGINNERS

The following series of walks (of three or four hours  
 duration) is offered for novice birders.

<u>Saturday</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Place</u>	<u>Leader</u>	
7 May	7:30 a.m.	Britannia*	Ray Holland	(225-9655)
14 May	7:30 a.m.	Britannia*	Tony Beck	(224-1683)
21 May	7:30 a.m.	V. Massey Park**	Jeff Harrison	(230-5968)
28 May	7:30 a.m.	Britannia*	Wright Smith	(225-1811)

- \* Entrance to the Britannia Filtration Plant; Bus #18 stops here  
 \*\* Northwest corner of the parking lot near the Heron Road Bridge.

#### MAY EVENING STROLLS

These four informal walks are offered to expand members' general knowledge of local natural history. Children are most welcome on these outings. Waterproof footwear is advisable.

#### Wednesday SOUTH MARCH HIGHLANDS

4 May Leader: Ellaine Dickson (722-3050 after 10 a.m.)  
 6:30 p.m. Meet: Lincoln Heights Galleria, northeast corner by the garden centre, Richmond Road and Assaly Road.

#### Thursday STONY SWAMP

12 May Leader: Catherine O'Keefe (745-4441)  
 6:30 p.m. Meet: Lincoln Heights Galleria (as aforementioned).

#### Tuesday STONY SWAMP (TRAIL #5)

17 May Leader: Bill Gummer (596-1148)  
 6:30 p.m. Meet: Lincoln Heights Galleria (as aforementioned)

#### Thursday VINCENT MASSEY PARK

26 May Leader: Joe Reiss (728-3603)  
 6:30 p.m. Meet: Vincent Massey Park, parking lot near the Heron Road Bridge.

\* \* \*

Tuesday OFNC MONTHLY MEETING  
 10 May SPRING WILDFLOWERS  
 8:00 p.m. Speaker: Erich Haber  
 Meet: Auditorium, National Museum of Natural Sciences, Metcalfe and McLeod Streets  
 Erich is Assistant Curator, Vascular Plants Section, at the National Museum of Natural Sciences, and was instrumental in the creation of the Plant Life Hall at the Museum. His illustrated talk will feature many of the botanical delights that may be encountered on a spring walk through the Ottawa Valley.

#### Wednesday MIDWEEK TRIP TO MARY STUART'S PROPERTY

11 May Leader: Mary Stuart (820-5220)  
 9:00 a.m. Meet: Lincoln Heights Galleria, northeast corner by the garden centre, Richmond Road and Assaly Road.  
 The route to Mary's property leads past rock outcrops



of limestone, marble and granite. At the old farm near Pakenham, wildflowers and birds await those free to ramble on a spring day. A picnic lunch, water-proof footwear and insect repellent are recommended. Call Mary the day before for any last minute instructions.

- Saturday & Sunday  
14 & 15 May      **SPRING WEEKEND IN THE MADAWASKA HILLS**  
Leaders: Harry and Sheila Thomson (234-0845)  
This weekend tent-out on the Thomson's property on Mount St. Patrick will provide participants with an opportunity to experience the sounds of nature at dawn. Contact the leaders by May 11 for directions and briefings or to arrange the loan of a tent. Motel information is available for non-campers.
- Wednesday  
18 May      **BIRDING WITH GEORGE**  
Leader: George McGee (733-1739)  
8:00 a.m. Meet: entrance gate to the Britannia Filtration Plant.  
Midweek birding for anyone lucky enough to have the morning free.
- Sunday  
29 May      **SPRING BIRD COUNT**  
Compiler: Tony Beck (224-1683)  
Participate in the annual count of the spring bird population within the 50-km radius circle of the Ottawa District. For details, telephone the compiler. (See Trail & Landscape 21(4): 218-223 (1987) for the results of last year's count.)
- Sunday  
5 June      **MOTORCADE TOUR OF A BLUEBIRD TRAIL**  
Leader: Carson Thompson (1-267-5721)  
7:30 a.m. Meet: Sears, Carlingwood Shopping Centre, Carling Avenue at Woodroffe Avenue.  
After car pools have been organized, participants will set out for the parking lot at the Perth Wildlife Reserve. The signs for the Reserve can be picked up on the Rideau Ferry Road off Highway 43 between Perth and Smiths Falls. The car caravan will proceed by country roads to the abandoned Mica Mines area for lunch. (Bring your own.) Carson is the manager of the Perth Wildlife Reserve.

Sunday DAWN CHORUS AT SHIRLEYS BAY  
12 June Leader: Monty Brigham  
5:00 a.m. Meet: Shirleys Bay Beach parking lot at the north  
end of Range Road.  
Monty is an expert on bird songs and calls with  
several excellent recordings to his credit. Partici-  
pants will receive a crash course on the art of  
"squeaking in" birds, a valuable asset in the bird-  
er's repertoire. The trip will last several hours.

Tuesday	OFNC MONTHLY MEETING
14 June	<i>BIRDING ON THE NORTH SHORE</i>
8:00 p.m.	Meet: Auditorium, National Museum of Natural Sciences, Metcalfe and McLeod Streets This nature film classic and others from the National Film Archives will be presented with a dash of his- tory by members of the Club. <i>Birding on the North Shore</i> is from the Wolford Collection.

Thursday OUTING TO BILL'S FARMLAND AT BURRITTS RAPIDS  
16 June Leader: Bill Gummer (596-1148)  
8:30 a.m. Meet: Sears, Carlingwood Shopping Centre, Carling  
Avenue at Woodroffe Avenue.  
This will be a general interest walk for those for-  
tunate enough to have the day free. Various species  
of breeding birds and wildflowers, such as Yellow  
Lady's-slipper and Fringed Polygala, are anticipated  
highlights. Don't forget to pack a picnic lunch for  
this leisurely trip.

Saturday ALFRED BOG  
18 June Leader: Don Cuddy  
8:30 a.m. Meet: front entrance, National Museum of Natural  
Sciences, Metcalfe and McLeod Streets.  
This exceptional wetland is one of the most signifi-  
cant bogs in southern Ontario, harbouring a number of  
both nationally and provincially rare species of  
plants and animals. This will be a strenuous all-day  
trip involving a long, wet hike into the bog. The  
outing will be limited to the first 15 people to  
register by telephoning Colin Gaskell (728-7217) at  
**least ten days in advance.** A lunch, rubber boots and  
insect repellent are essential.



Sunday BUTTERFLIES AND WILDFLOWERS  
26 June Leaders: Ross Layberry and Ruth Partridge (526-0001)  
9:30 a.m. Meet: Sears, Carlingwood Shopping Centre, Carling  
Avenue and Woodroffe Avenue.

An all-day trip to a local area to observe the visual display provided by the combination of butterflies and wildflowers. Bring a butterfly net if you have one.

Sunday FERN IDENTIFICATION TRIP  
10 July Leader: Bill Arthurs (225-6941)  
1:00 p.m. Meet: Elmvale Shopping Centre, northeast corner of  
the parking lot.

This will be a general interest botanical walk along the New York Central right-of-way with a special emphasis on some of the local species of ferns.

Saturday GENERAL BOTANY OUTING TO THE MARLBOROUGH FOREST  
16 July Leader: David White  
9:00 a.m. Meet: front door of the Neatby Building, Central  
Experimental Farm, one block west of the  
Irving Place - Maple Drive stoplight on Car-  
ling Avenue.

David will lead a full-day outing into the southern sector of the Marlborough Forest to seek out various specialized plants. A dry habitat very similar to an alvar (i.e. an open limestone plain) should contain some interesting finds.

Sunday FAMILY OUTING DAY  
24 July Leader: Ellaine Dickson (722-3050 after 10 a.m.)  
9:30 a.m. Meet: Lincoln Heights Galleria, northeast corner by  
the garden centre, Richmond Road and Assaly  
Road.

This outing is designed specifically for parents and their young children of any age. The group will travel to the South March Highlands, just west of the city, for a fun-filled day of nature exploration. Pack a picnic lunch and lots of enthusiasm.

#### PEREGRINE FALCON RELEASE PROGRAM

We are hoping that there will be another Peregrine Falcon release program in Ottawa this summer. Anyone interested in being a volunteer please contact Marg Benson for information at 744-6045, evenings until 10 p.m.

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*DEADLINE: Material intended for the July - September issue must be in the Editor's hands before April 1 at the latest.*

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