



The Swallow



Volume 25, # 2
Spring/Summer 2008

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Kirtland's Warbler, male, photographed at the Canadian Forces Base Petawawa. Summer 1977.
photo: Jacques Bouvier

Membership in the Pembroke Area Field Naturalists is available by writing to: the PAFN, Box 1242, Pembroke, ON K8A 6Y6. 2007/2008 dues are: Student \$10, Senior \$10, Individual \$15, Family \$20, Individual Life \$150, Family Life \$200.

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a colour copy of the Swallow is available for download (.pdf) at:

PAFN web site: <http://www.renc.igs.net/~cmichener/pafn.index.html>



• E v e n t s & T r i p s •

Owling Night

When: 7:15 pm, Saturday, March 29th, 2008

Where: Wilberforce Twp Park. Go south on Hwy 41 past intersection of Hwy 41 and Lake Dore Rd., cross the bridge, turn right after bridge and go a short distance to park.

Trip Coordinator: Chris Michener, 625-2263 (cmichener@renc.igs.net)

A route will be followed by car parade (car-pooling encouraged!) passing through varied habitat. A tape of owl calls will be used to encourage owl response.

PAFN Annual Meeting

Wed., April 16, 2008, Room 201, Algonquin College, Pembroke.

Agenda: 6:00 pm to 7:00 pm - video and booksale. Benita is accepting any used nature books, videos, etc., which will be available for sale at the AGM for nominal cost.

7:00 pm to 7:30 pm - Annual General Meeting.

7:30 pm to 8:00 pm - social with refreshments.

8 pm. Tammy Richard, biologist on Base Petawawa, will offer a presentation on the species-at-risk surveys on the Base including the discovery of nesting Kirtland's Warblers in Summer 2007.

A Trip to Bellow's Bay

Date: Saturday, April 19, 2008.

Time: at 9 am.

Trip Leader: Manson Fleguel, 732-7703.

Meet at the marina in Pembroke, at the mouth of the Muskrat River. Car pooling will be offered. Bring rubber boots, as mud and water will be encountered on the walk (1.5 km total). Migrant songbirds, ducks and friendly people are highlights. Spotting scopes are useful, binoculars essential.

Shaw Woods: Mother's Day Weekend Wildflowers and Nature Walk

Date: Saturday May 10, 10:00 am

Place: Due to limited parking at Shaw Woods, we will first meet at Wilberforce Twp. Beach & Picnic Park. From the intersection of Hwy 41 / Lake Dore Rd., go south on Hwy 41 over the Snake River bridge and make the next right.

Trip Organizer: Grant Bickel, 687-4765 and photographer, Bernd Krueger, 625-2879.

The purpose of this outing will be to enjoy early spring in the beautiful Shaw Woods. The main focus will be to see woodland wildflowers. We should see Blue Cohosh, Trout Lily, Trilliums and several others species. This walk is for all ages and is an introduction to the Shaw Woods, an old-growth forest. The walk will be easy to moderate on well-maintained trails. The pace will be determined by the participants and will last about 2.5 hours. Photographers are welcome and we will split into groups depending on interests. A special bonus hand-out for participants is a CD containing professionally recorded forest sounds from the Shaw Woods. These were recorded in 6 locations and present a good variety of bird song.

A Walk in the Petawawa Terrace (Old Fish Hatchery)

Date: Sunday, May 18, 2008.

Time: 5 pm.

Trip Leader: Myron Loback 735-1278.

Meet in the upper parking lot of the Terrace, on Laurentian Drive. (go west of Pembroke on Pembroke St. towards Petawawa, turn north on Laurentian Dr., watch for sign and parking area). Some migrant songbirds and waterfowl can be expected. Good outing for children as Canada Geese will likely be present and, quite possibly, with young. This is an enjoyable, relaxed outing. Please bring rubber boots for some wet/muddy areas.

4th Annual Natural History Day - Free, but must pre-register! The MNR is handling the registration and will have a dedicated phone number after April 1st. Check our web site.

Where: Bonnechere Provincial Park, Davenport Centre.

Date: Saturday, May 24, 2008. 8:30 am to 4 pm.

Schedule: 9 am - 12 noon: morning outdoor childrens' program, while inside will be talks about various nature topics. The theme this year is species-at-risk.

12 - 1:00 pm, lunch.

1:00 - 4 pm: Field trips in the park.

Breakfast at the Swamp: Birdwalk along Ross Rd and Drive to the Snake River Line

Date: Sunday, May 25, 2008.

Time: 7 am.

Trip Leader: Leo Boland with help from - 'the breakfast caterers' Benita Richardson and Sandra MacDonald.

This trip will start with a free breakfast (provided by the above volunteers and the PAFN) at the Ross Road wetlands on Ross Road between Stafford Rd. 3 and the Micksburg Road. We expect to see Virginia Rail, Sora, Green Heron, Black Tern, Marsh Wren and possibly a Least Bittern. Last year, a Red-headed Woodpecker flew over the group. We will then drive to the Snake River Line in hopes of seeing Sandhill Crane, Broad-winged Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, shorebirds and ducks.

After breakfast, a youth birdathon team (**the Mighty Ducklings**) will start a day long search for as many species as they can identify. Chris Michener will be their driver. The team members will be aged between 10 and 15 years old. Please help support their efforts and the PAFN by filling in the enclosed pledge sheet. The members of this youth team are enthusiastic, budding naturalists. The results of their 'Big Day' will be available on our website or by calling Chris Michener (625-2263). (email: cmichener@renc.igs.net)

PAFN - 9 and Dine - Fundraiser

Date: Friday, June 6th, 2008. (tentative)

Time: 5 pm. Tee-off time.

Island Brae Golf Course will be the site of dinner and 9-holes of golf. The cost is \$35.00 each (unconfirmed at press time). The format will be "best ball". If you don't golf, come for supper (reduced rate). To register a team or yourself and for more information, please call Benita Richardson at 735-5404.

4th Annual PAFN Tri-wing Challenge. This is a weekend long event where teams of one or more individuals are challenged to spend any amount of time from **4 pm Friday, June 20 to 4 pm Sunday, June 22** counting bird, butterfly and dragonfly species (or just one category if you want to concentrate your focus). At 4 PM Sunday, everyone is invited to

a PAFN **potluck picnic** at the Wilberforce Township Park to tabulate the results. The park has swings, outhouses, tables under a roof and an extensive sand beach for swimming. Bring your own plates and utensils as well as food items.

The 4 categories of the **Tri-wing Challenge** are:

- weekend totals for bird species; (last year 110 species were seen)
- weekend totals for butterfly species; (30 species last year)
- weekend totals for dragonfly species; (34 species last year)
- weekend for total of all three. (174 total species last year)

Each team member (give your team a name!) does not have to identify each species but does have to remain within earshot of each other. The Tri-wing Challenge is based on the honour system for the correct identification of all species. Species lists for birds, dragonflies and butterflies can be found on our web site or contact Chris to have paper copies mailed to you. Pre-registration is not necessary. For more information contact Chris at 625-2263 (email: cmichener@renc.igs.net). Four trophies are available to be won. Last year, the Dragonhunters (Christian and André Renault) won in the bird (94 spp.) and dragonfly (22 spp.) categories, the Lone Boghaunter (Ethan Anderman) won in the butterfly (28 spp.) category and the Solitary Buttchecker (Chris Michener) won the combination (127 spp.) category.

18th Lake Dore Butterfly Count

Date: Saturday, July 5th, 2008 (Rain/wind date, Sunday, July 6th).

Time: 9 am. Organizer: Chris Michener 625-2263.

Where: Wilberforce Twp Park. Go south on Hwy 41 past intersection of Hwy 41 and Lake Dore Rd., cross the bridge, turn right after bridge and go a short distance to park.

Bring butterfly field guide, binoculars, footwear (optional) for the bog after lunch, net (for catch & release) and lunch. A map of the Count circle and species list will be available. A participants' fee (under 12 free) of \$5 is asked to cover publishing costs of the North American results (North American Butterfly Association).

15th Hog Island Butterfly Count

Date: Sat., July 12th, 2008 (lousy weather day, Sun., July 13th).

Time: 9 am.

Organizer: Chris Michener 625-2263.

Meet at Mullen's Esso, Pembroke St. E., near the turn to Quebec. The Count Circle for this butterfly Count is half in Ontario and half in Quebec. In the past, some groups have gone to the Westmeath area; others have butterflyed on Allumette Island. You can choose the area you prefer. Maps of the circle and checklists will be available. A participants fee (under 12 free) of \$5 is asked to cover publishing costs.

The 9th Lake Dore Odonate (Dragonfly) Count

Date: Sat., August 2nd, 2008 (lousy weather day Sun., August 3)

Time: 9 am. Organizer: Chris Michener, 625-2263.

An excellent opportunity to appreciate this group of insects! We have had fun with nets and encountered a good variety of damselflies and dragonflies. The idea is to search for 'odes' within a 7.5 mile radius of Biederman Park, Lake Dore. Meet at the Wilberforce Twp Park. Go south on Hwy 41 past intersection of Hwy 41 and Lake Dore Rd., cross the bridge, turn right after bridge and go a short distance to park. Picture guides will be available as well as experienced 'odonaters'. A large insect net, optional rubber boots,

close focus binoculars, and lunch/drinks are suggested.

Marina/Waterfront Bird Walk

Date: Saturday, August 16, 2008

Time: 8 am.

Trip Leader: Ken Hooles 735-4430.

Meet at the Pembroke marina, by the mouth of the Muskrat River in Pembroke. Ken will introduce us to migrant birdlife along the Pembroke waterfront. There are usually gulls, terns, ducks, geese, cormorants and songbirds such as vireos, warblers, sparrows and finches. Surprises usually occur and it's a good social outing... a chance to meet some very nice people!

Westmeath Provincial Park - entrance from Westmeath Rd.

Date: Aug. 30th, 2008

Time: 9 am.

Where: At the entrance to the Park. This is on County Road 12, about 5 km SW of Westmeath. Leaders: Leo Boland, Rob Cunningham and Bernd Krueger will be trip leaders. This time of year is great for migrants in the Park. Species that have been seen at this time are Sandhill Cranes, Bald Eagles, Merlin, Indigo Bunting, Eastern Wood-Pewee as well as various vireos and warblers, and if we make it as far as the beach, some shorebirds, terns and gulls.

Renfrew County Woodlot Conference

Date: October 4, 2008.

Where: the property of Dr. Burwell, between Renfrew and Calabogie. Call Rob Cunningham for more information (613-732-8402).



The Marina Walk in August is always well attended. A high count of 55 species of birds has been seen on one day. This photo was taken on August 18, 2007. photo: Chris Michener

Trip Reports

Lake Dore, October 27, 2007

by Chris Michener

As well as lucky weather, we were lucky with some sightings. The weather forecast called for rain, we got some light drizzle, but also some calm, sunny moments. The lake was pretty calm and visibility improved from a light mist over the lake to a clear view to the middle.

Manson picked out the first uncommon duck with the sighting of a Ruddy Duck in with three Greater Scaup. Elsewhere, Greater Scaup were plentiful, as were Bufflehead, Common Loon, Horned Grebe, Mallard and Bonaparte's Gull. In lesser numbers were Pied-billed Grebe, Red-necked Grebe, Wood Duck, American Black Duck, White-winged Scoter, Common Goldeneye, Common Merganser and American Coot.

One Northern Flicker was the last of a species that leaves by the end of October. A Northern Pintail, American Bittern, Gadwall and a flock of Bohemian Waxwing were other good sightings.



Present were: Manson Fleguel, Walter Culina, Barbara and David Beimers, Ken Hooles, Leo Boland, Chris Michener and Logan and McKenna Boland (both playing behind camera).

Westmeath Provincial Park Trip, September 29, 2007

by Chris Michener

The day was sunny, a little chilly, but we dressed for it and also wore gloves thanks to Jean who always carries extras. It was a very enjoyable outing.

Highlights included 15 Sandhill Cranes soaring over the park, a Sharp-shinned Hawk, Bald Eagle, White-winged Scoter, Northern Pintail, American Wigeon, Sanderling,

Ruddy Turnstone and Lapland Longspur. One darter and a number of meadowhawks were seen as well as lots of Leopard Frogs, juncos, American Pipits, and hundreds of Canada Geese.



Sharp-tailed Sparrows are regular on migration in the beach vegetation in Westmeath Provincial Park in late Sept. and early Oct. photo: Oct 10, 2007 Chris Michener

The 2007 Pembroke Christmas Bird Count

by Manson Fleguel

This year, December 15, 2007, was one of the coldest Christmas Bird Counts we have held. Temperatures started out at dawn at about -30C and only rose to -16C as the day wore on. Most birds were concentrated at feeders. There was at least 14 inches of snow on the ground, making foot travel very difficult unless on skis or snowshoes. Nice to see was the return of Evening Grosbeaks in substantial numbers as well as Pine Grosbeaks and Common Redpolls. I suppose the food crop further north is scarce. It was difficult to find open water anywhere except in the rapids areas of the Ottawa River.

This year we had 26 field birders while 51 feeders were watched. We tallied 47 species of birds with a total of 5,448 individual birds.

As usual, the circle was divided into 6 sectors, each with a coordinator and other birders. The following is a review of the statistics by sector.

Sector 1W, on the Quebec side Bert Cain, Teresa Frechette, David Beimers and Manson Fleguel were in the field. Jean Montgomery and Howard and Doris McLean watched the 2 feeders. This sector had most of the reported Evening Grosbeaks, all in the Chapeau area. There were 20 species found in this sector.

Sector 1E, also on the Quebec side, had Bruce DiLabio, Laurie Brown and Susan Ellis in the field and 2 feeder watchers, Einar Lund and Lynn Jones. This sector had the only Canada Goose, Barrows Goldeneye, Bufflehead and Common Merganser on the count. They tallied 27 species.

Sector 2N had Robin Cunningham, Elizabeth Link and Christian and Andre Renault in the field, while the 12 feeders were watched by Jim and Ann Clarke, Keith

Curry, Patricia Harmer, Eric Leskie, Ivy Levoy, Myra Lovisa, Viola Nitschke, Bruce Schoof and Sherry Soltysiak, Art and Shirley VanWinckle, Todd Gauthier, Sherry Crone and Jill Renault. They had the only on the count of a Great-horned Owl in their sector. A total of 20 species was found.

Sector 2S had Chris Michener, Jean Brereton and Ole Hendrickson as well as John Macgillivray and Dan Lariviere as field participants. Feeder watchers were Sheila and Gary Bucholtz, Barb Beimers, Dwight and Lucy Dickerson, Erna and Victor Maves and Jack Schreader. A Mallard, Bohemian Waxwings and Purple Finch were found only in this sector. They ended the count with 28 species.

Sector 3E had Ken Hooles, Pat Wolfe, Ron Bertrand, Vic Harmer and Merv Fediuk in the field. This sector had the most feeder watchers by far: Nancy Armstrong, Marg and Jim Anderson, Lorraine Bertrand, Ray Brazeau, Merv and Jane Dougherty, Lorna Fediuk, Moe Guimond, Mike and Marilyn Kruschenske, Carolyn Lance, Karin Maree, Wendell McLaughlin, John Payne, Bob and Julie Pick, Mac and Dianne Thrasher, Floyd and Attie Milton, George Young, Lauren Trute, Ray Virtue and Gary and Sue Walton. A White-throated Sparrow was a real surprise found in this sector and House Finch, Hoary Redpoll and Pine Siskin were also “found only here” species. This sector had the highest species count with 35 species.

Sector 3W had Myron and Evan Loback and Mark, Michaela and Levi Dojczman in the field. The feeder watchers were Howard and Francis Doelle, The Hooles feeder, Judy Fleguel, Mary Lou Hansen and Mac Nussey, Daryl Coulson, Marvail Macgillivray, Jeremy Inglis and family, Beth Loback, Wes Loback, Kathleen Moss, A.J. Recoskie and Harold and Shirley Wirth. Sharp-shinned Hawk, Golden-crowned Kinglet and Red Crossbill were found only in this sector. There were 28 species reported for this sector.

Some of the highlights:



Evening Grosbeaks are always a favourite for birders on the CBC. A total of 341 were counted during the Pembroke Count. photo: Chris Michener

- 1) The bitter cold of the day.
- 2) The good blanket of snow, making off-road travels difficult.
- 3) Having a number of new CBC field participants; Mark, Michaela and Levi Dojczman, Evan Loback, John Macgillivray and Dan Lariviere.
- 4) The return of substantial Evening Grosbeaks.

I want to thank all those who helped out again this year, especially the coordinators of the individual sectors. I always am anxious as the day approaches, that weather will hamper our efforts. This year we were one day ahead of that storm.

Cuba

by Mike MacDonald

When my wife and I first discussed the idea of a vacation in Cuba, I'm sorry to say my first thoughts were not sun, sand or the logistics of the trip but how could I maximize the birding potential within the scope of the holiday. I'm not proud of this, but it's a common ailment amongst birders I think, when others discuss the tropical beaches and cultural sights, visions of seabirds and warblers dance in our heads.

Cuba is the most populous nation in the Caribbean. Its people, culture and customs draw from a mix of sources including the aboriginal peoples, the period of Spanish colonialism, the introduction of African slaves, and its proximity to the United States. In Cuba, Fidel Castro rules a Communist government where the people are extremely friendly and talented but the economy is in shambles partly due to a trade embargo by the USA.

Cuba is a beautiful tropical island in the northern Caribbean Sea about 200 km off the coast of Florida. The island has a tropical climate that is moderated by the surrounding waters. Cuba's main island, at 1233 km long, is the world's 17th largest.

There are several areas that harbour some beautiful endemic species in Cuba. One of these areas, and the most well-known, is Zapata swamp, where the diminutive Bee Hummingbird, the smallest hummingbird in the world, occurs. Our plan was to stay in Varadero which, although beautiful, is probably one of the least bird-friendly spots on the island of Cuba. I had originally intended to take a sidetrip to Zapata but that plan had to be cancelled so Varadero became the hub of my birdfinding efforts.

We left Toronto on the worst snowstorm (Dec. 16/'07) of the year so our flight was delayed several hours but, thankfully, was not cancelled. So after a four hour flight we left snow and ice for sand and palm trees. Since we arrived late, the next morning was the first chance to see what new fauna would present itself. A walk through the grounds of the hotel yielded none other than an American Kestrel. Undaunted we continued the day and before it was done I had added Magnificent Frigatebird, Great lizard-Cuckoo, Cuban Pewee and La Sagra's Flycatcher to my list. Three of the most common birds by the shore were Brown Pelican, Laughing Gull and Royal Tern. In the winter these are the only gulls and terns you're likely to see. Also very common were Palm Warblers, which are the most common wintering North American warbler, Turkey Vultures and Cattle Egrets.

Varadero is a peninsula on the north shore of Cuba about 2 hours drive east of Havana. It's a tourist area with many great resorts but because it's so built-up the native wildlife has declined in the area. However, as I normally do, I tried to squeeze what sightings I could out of the available area and there were more than birds. Cuba has a fantastic variety of lizards and snakes, almost none of which are poisonous. The most common are the small anoles, little lizards which you can find on palm trees and sunning themselves on rocks. I found most people passed them by without noticing



but once you started looking, they were quite prevalent. I saw only one snake and that was in the jungle at a Reserve I discovered on the peninsula.

This Ecological Reserve, which I visited twice, is towards the tip of the peninsula of Varadero. I was the only one on the trail both times as most tourists stay on the beaches. It was a three hour jaunt through a path in the jungle and around some caves. Aside from the snake, which was gray and about 3-4 feet long, I saw several



small lizards and was dive-bombed by a large bat in a cave, which was my fault as I intruded into its habitat and was in the way of its escape route. There were several butterfly species, one of which was a beautiful green swallowtail species, and a large moth which I believe was a Black Witch.

I also saw birds such as Antillean Palm-Swift, the other local hummingbird-Cuban Emerald, the beautiful Cuban Green Woodpecker, Cuban Vireo, and the endemic Yellow-headed Warbler. Also present were migrants like White-eyed Vireo, Yellow-throated Warbler, Northern Parula and Black-and-white Warbler.

Many of Cuba's endemic species are vulnerable and face an uncertain future with their ranges becoming more and more restricted. These include the Bee Hummingbird, two species of crow, two species of parrots, the Zapata rail and Zapata spar-



This Malachite is well camouflaged in the green foliage.
photo: Mike MacDonald

row, none of which occur around Varadero. The Gundlach's Hawk is also uncommon but I was lucky enough to actually see that one morning.

We also went on a bus tour of Havana and revelled in the culture and centuries-old architecture of this grand old city. The drive to Havana revealed a beautiful natural landscape of rolling hills, valleys and rivers. Although some areas of Havana were obviously crumbling, on the whole Havana has a unique flavour with the combination of friendly people, bustling atmosphere and vintage autos to delight the car enthusiast. Even though it was a typical "on the bus/off the bus" tourist day, I managed to find Red-Legged Thrush, Cuban Blackbird and Shiny Cowbird to make the day even better.

Although we spent the majority of our time at the resort there are always birds to be had and we managed to find a few such as Tri-colored Heron, Little Blue Heron, Common Ground Dove and Smooth-Billed Ani right on the grounds of the hotel. One of the highlights was, one night as we were sitting watching an outdoor show by the pool, a Barn Owl flew by right overhead.

Cuba in December was warm enough for long days at the beach enjoying both the sun and the water. The temperature however was not too hot for the nature enthusiast to trek through the tropical foliage, especially if you venture out in the morning hours. Even a vacation that was designed to be a family vacation consisting of three women and one male birder, trading the Canadian winter for fun in the sun has the potential for new nature-related experiences. By the end of the seventh day I had seen a total of 48 bird species, 27 of them being lifers. There is much more to discover of the culture and wildlife of Cuba so I hope to go back some day.



Dead birds, You and the Law

by Ted Hiscock

So you found a dead bird and you want to know what to do with it. First of all, only handle a dead bird with latex or rubber gloves and transport them in a plastic bag. If it's a crow or jay, take it to the nearest health unit to be tested for West Nile virus.

If it's a hawk, owl or other raptor, you will need a permit from MNR to keep it for mounting. Within two days after finding it, take the dead bird (in plastic) to the nearest MNR office for identification. If you are able to keep it, MNR will issue a permit free of charge. In some cases, such as eagles, MNR may keep the dead bird.

For songbirds and other species, collection and possession is administered by the Canadian Wildlife Service. The CWS usually does not issue permits for collection and/or possession of bird carcasses other than for education or scientific studies, so it is best to bury it where you found it. For more information, see the excellent article on the Ontario Federation of Ornithologists website by Ron Pittaway at <http://www.ofo.ca/reportsandarticles/birdlaws.php>



Species in Focus – Weasels

Who says you shouldn't wear white after Labour Day?! If you're a Short or Long-tailed Weasel, it's all the rage! Changing colours for the winter is just one of the many interesting aspects of these little critters.

Weasels, also called "ermine" and sometimes "stoat" are members of the Mustelidae (weasel) family, along with Mink, Pine Marten, and Fisher, to name just a few. Both the Long-tailed Weasel (*Mustela frenata*) and the Short-tailed Weasel (*Mustela erminea*) are found throughout Renfrew County. How do you tell them apart? By the length of their tails of course! Check out the table below and compare the measurements of the two:

	Long-tailed weasel	Short-tailed weasel
Total Length (mm)	290-440	235-330
Tail Length (mm)	85-150	50-95
Weight (grams)	85-270	50-155
(from Kurta, A. 1995. Weasels and their allies in Mammals of the Great Lakes Region. Fitzhenry & Whiteside: Ottawa. 376 pp.)		

Apart from their size differences, both species of weasel are fairly alike in appearance, biology and habits. As is typical in Mustelids (the weasel family), the body shape is long and slender, with short legs, a narrow head and pointy nose....think



Summer look of the Long-tailed Weasel.

photo credited to Clipart.com on www.nhptv.org/

torpedo shaped! During the summer, the pelage (fur) is chestnut or cinnamon brown colour on the back with a creamy yellow or beige colour on the belly. The tail is tipped with black.

Weasels shed their fur twice a year. In our neck of the woods, the winter coat is white, with only the tip of the tail remaining black. In the southern portion of their range the fur remains brown all year. This winter camouflage is brought on by changes in both temperature and the length of the photoperiod (fancy speak for the amount of daylight hours in a day) that causes a change in hormones resulting in different coloured fur. Why does the tip of the tail remain black? This is thought to be an adaptation to avoid being eaten – the predator will likely focus on and attack the black spot on the tail, leaving the remainder of the well-camouflaged weasel to escape. They are preyed upon by hawks, owls, foxes, fishers, wolves, coyotes, and domestic cats, among others.

Both the Long-tailed and Short-tailed Weasel are very efficient hunters, with excellent sight, hearing and sense of smell. They are extremely fast, and are excellent climbers and swimmers as well. The main prey species are mice, rats and voles, however they will take whatever they can catch, including rabbits, small birds, eggs, and reptiles, as well as fruits and berries. They hunt day and night, launching their attack by pouncing on their prey and delivering a fatal bite to the base of the skull. Weasels are very opportunistic, and will kill everything they catch and store it for later. This is called surplus killing or surplus caching. Weasels that find their way into chicken coops will often kill all the chickens and neatly stack them for later...a midnight snack perhaps?

Other than during the mating season, weasels are solitary animals. They make their homes in dens under tree roots, rocks crevices, hollow logs, and the burrows of other rodents. Dens usually have more than one chamber – the main living area, a food storage area and a latrine. Weasel habitat is varied, including open areas next to forests or shrubby areas, wetland edges and old fence rows.

In both species, mating occurs in the early summer, and the young are born in April or May of the following year. This time lapse from conception to birth is called delayed implantation. Essentially the fertilized egg lays dormant for about eight months while the female raises her current year's young and prepares for winter. If after the eight months the female's body condition is good (lots of fat, etc.), then the fertilized egg will



This Ermine visited a suet ball this winter near Golden Lake. Measurements using the tree bark background indicate this may be a male Short-tailed Weasel. (tail <95 mm [3.75"]; total body length of about 280 mm [11"]).

pick up where it left off 8 months ago and continue to develop for the next three to four months. The average litter size is four to nine blind and helpless young. The young reach adult size in about six weeks, and the young females are capable of reproducing at that time. Young males do not generally breed or reach full adult size until their second season.

Weasels are very curious creatures, and are constantly surveying their surroundings, checking all the nooks and crannies, looking for potential prey. They can often be seen standing up on their hind legs in order to get a better look.

The average weasel life span is about two years, but they can live up to six or seven years. A common cause of death is from a parasitic worm (*Skrjabingylus nasicola*) which infects the nasal passages. The parasite eventually causes perforations in the skull, which results in pressure on the brain and then death. This parasite is common in several of the Mustelids.

Points to ponder...

What effect will the changing climate have on species that have winter camouflage? A stark white weasel will surely stand out in December if the ground is free from snow? Will they be able to adapt in time, or are the temperatures and weather patterns changing too rapidly?



Pembroke waterfront tree planting/naturalization project

Robin Cunningham

The Pembroke Area Field Naturalists have an opportunity to contribute to the landscape of the City of Pembroke. Mr. Fred Blackstein has invited local area groups to come up with projects for the waterfront. Space and funding are available.

The PAFN proposes to create a “Trees of Ontario” arboretum and naturalization



Project coordinator, Rob Cunningham is flanked by Leo Boland and Fred Blackstein at the Arboretum Project site along the Kiwanas Walkway. photo: Chris Michener

project. We will make a collection of native tree species and shrubs to demonstrate ecological landscaping and provide an educational resource. As well, we can create nature projects such as a pond, a wildflower/butterfly garden, and other activities to

enhance wildlife.

The proposed site of about 2 acres is set back from the Ottawa River, with the Kiwanis walkway at the north end and railway tracks at the south end. It is currently a level old field with a small area of shrubby wet lowland.

Serious rehabilitation of this site will be needed, as it is currently a difficult site for many trees to grow. The area has relatively shallow topsoil over compacted landfill. Tree roots will have difficulty in penetrating this soil, and there would be spring drainage and summer drought problems. As well, the site is currently used by City of Pembroke for dumping snow from town roads; road salt from this will be toxic to trees. The City of Pembroke will be asked to find an alternative site for snow dumping in winters.

Site preparation of the field is required, a major soil improvement process. A ripper or sub-soiler is needed to break up the compacted subsoil (ie to a depth of 90 cm.), but leave topsoil on the surface. We would hire a heavy farm tractor or construction company bulldozer. This would be followed by disking, and adding topsoil in places.

Most of the planting area will then be covered with bark mulch, obtained from area sawmills. This will facilitate weed control allowing trees to grow free of competition and allowing smaller trees to be planted. Trees and shrubs can be planted after initial mulching, and gradually added as collected.

We will have two strategies for tree planting:

- a-A collection of specimen trees of native species, given space to grow, in groups of three trees of each species;
- b-A forest ecosystem planting.

The arboretum of native trees will be arranged in a geographic theme, with northern Ontario species (the Boreal Forest) at the north end of the site, species of the Great Lakes St. Lawrence forest (trees of Renfrew County) in the middle, and a trial of trees of southern Ontario (the Deciduous Forest Region) at the south end. Tree species will be labeled, at first with wooden stakes. Native shrub species can be added, planted in clumps among the trees.

The forest planting will be an area of more densely planted trees, primarily of pioneer native species, notably white birch. In a few years after establishment, we will be able to underplant this area with those tree species that require shelter in youth--trees such as Eastern Hemlock and American Beech, that are very difficult to establish in open field planting situations. As this new stand grows, conditions will gradually improve so that wildflowers and other forest plants can be added.

With our goal of planting all trees native to Renfrew County, and since many species are not available commercially, club members will be collecting seed, growing trees, and transplanting them to the site. Although we should not be raiding natural areas to dig up plants, there are opportunities for collecting plants from disturbed sites such as fence lines or places that are going to be built upon on our properties. Our strategy for mulching will allow us to plant smaller specimens, and we won't have to pay high prices for large commercial stock.

It will be most important to completely exclude non-native species (for example European and Asian garden and shade trees, western North American conifers, etc.) to keep to the theme and purpose of this project, even if these species are offered.

Additional projects can occur, including digging a pond in the low area and designing and planting a butterfly garden using native wildflowers. Wildlife enhancement projects

such as bird feeders and bird houses can be incorporated. We will want to mark the project with a sign, and label plant materials. Landscaping may include a fence of sorts—perhaps an attractive cedar rail fence—to define the project and give some protection. The PAFN will provide on-going maintenance: weeding, watering, pruning, protection from pests, and record-keeping.

Upon approval by the City of Pembroke, we hope to start this season. Given some ground to work with and a budget, the members of the club can volunteer their energy and their green thumbs

to create a section of parkland that will showcase our natural heritage and benefit people and wildlife in the future.



Most of the planting area will be covered with bark mulch, such as this planting at the water treatment plant.

photo: Rob Cunningham



Protecting Canada's Boreal Forest For Birds: Be a Part of the Save Our Boreal Birds Campaign

by Jen Baker, Ontario Nature Conservation Campaign Coordinator

Ontario Nature and the Boreal Songbird Initiative have developed a nation-wide petition to protect the most significant bird nursery in North America, the Boreal Forest.

Our goal is to have thousands of signatures on a petition asking for the protection of Canada's Boreal Forest by May 10th, which is International Migratory Bird Day. The petition will then be publicly submitted to federal and provincial leaders to demonstrate that citizens expect the Boreal Forest to be protected and that the bird declines that we've been experiencing are not acceptable. We're confident that this idea will raise political awareness of the issue and are hopeful that conservation announcements will follow.

We need your help to make this a big success! You can help us by:

- signing the petition at www.saveourborealbirds.org
- encouraging your members, friends and family to sign the petition and to pass it on to people they know.

Thank you for your help. Together we can protect the Boreal Forest for birds.

If you have any questions please contact Jen Baker at <jenniferb@ontarionature.org> or 1-800-440-2366, ext. 224.