



NEWSLETTER

SOUTH LAKE SIMCOE NATURALISTS

SLSN is an incorporated not-for-profit Member of Ontario Nature.

Post Office Box 1044 Sutton West, Ontario, L0E 1R0

Telephone 905-722-8021

www.slsnc.ca

Research Partner with The Zephyr Society of Lake Simcoe (www.zephyrsociety.ca)

Member: Rescue Lake Simcoe Coalition

Member: Greenbelt Alliance

Note: Please renew your membership to receive future Newsletters

E-NEWS BLAST

Outings: All regular outings – Note: Only paid-up members may participate (for insurance compliance).

2015

Saturday March 7

Deer Census in Rouge Park National Park: Call Paul Harpley to register 905-722-8021. Date to be announced later. Organized by Paul Harpley.

Meetings:

All Meetings start at 7:30 p.m. at the York Region Police Building Meeting Room (Baseline Road between McCowan and Civic Centre Road) unless noted otherwise. Paid up members events (for insurance compliance).

Tuesday, February 10 **Snowy Owls:** As the winter sets in some arctic birds arrive in our area. Snowy owls come down from the arctic some years. What do they do in their arctic homes, why, when and how do they come south. Member researched and presentation evening. **Annual Meeting: Election of Officers. Please consider taking a position on the club executive.**

Tuesday, March 10 **Sable Island:** Club members Hessel and Mary Pape will present an illustrated talk on this unique wild place, its history, natural heritage and future. Don't miss this presentation about this mysterious island off the east coast of Canada. The previously scheduled November 18 talk was shortened due to the snow storm.

Significant Winter Birds

Tuesday January 27, at 1:30 p.m. an American Kestrel was observed in a roadside 25 foot high White ash tree with a meadow vole in its talons. The Kestrel stayed in the tree and ate parts of the vole for about 3 minutes and flew off to a nearby hedge row about 150 feet away with the vole still in its talons. The observation was made on Ravenshoe Road, on the north side in the Town of Georgina, 0.8 kilometers east of the hamlet of Brown Hill.

Also, earlier in the day on January 27th at 8:45 and 10:00 a.m., I observed a Dark morph, juvenile Rough-legged hawk hunting the meadows and fields and alighting in large farm area trees east of the hamlet of Egypt. This may be the same bird I observed on January 16 on the Durham York Town line hunting and soaring for an hour (2-3 p.m.). On Wednesday January 28th I visited the site again, and found the Dark morph, juvenile Rough-legged hawk in the same place. Five minutes later, 1 kilometre south of the hamlet of Egypt I saw another Rough-legged hawk, this one a light morph, juvenile (first year) individual in an adjacent field siting in an old apple tree in a fencerow. This site area affords an excellent opportunity to see and compare Rough-legged hawk morphs in the same place.

Both these bird species seem to be staying in the area. Good close viewings of these birds are probable.

The other Winter bird we have in our area this year is the Snowy owl. Many of these arctic birds, as in past years, and as in our Sutton CBC (December 28, 2014) have frequented the southern

parts of our area at lower Cook's Bay, especially earlier in the winter. Recently, for example I and my wife Debra have observed Snowy owls on Smith Blvd. and Park Rd. near the hamlet of Egypt. For example, between January 2 and January 8, 2015, we have seen at least one bird every day at various times of the day. These birds have been all white to very brown-banded individuals.

Also, in the general Egypt area we have consistently observed a Northern shrike on Park Rd. and Frog St. hunting from telephone line and small tree perches. The bird is relatively approachable and can be seen at any time of day. It would seem this bird is staying the winter in our area as we have seen it off and on since mid-January to February 8, 2015.

Paul Harpley

Ecojustice Announcement of South Lake Simcoe Naturalists Comments on the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority Policy Review

World Wetlands Day: Monday February 2

SLSN Win Major Victory for Lake Simcoe Wetlands: This in the Announcement that has gone out on the internet relating to our Club comment we prepared and delivered in the fall of 2014.

The Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority (LSRCA) is mandated to provide leadership in the restoration and protection of the environmental health and quality of Lake Simcoe and its watershed. Environmental groups have long criticized the LSRCA's watershed development policy, which granted automatic approval for some developments in wetlands that the province has identified as Provincially Significant. Last year, the LSRCA proposed a new policy, but it included a new set of problems. The policy proposed last fall would have the LSRCA approve developments in wetlands without considering the full environmental impacts in cases where the development had official plan and zoning approvals. As a result of pressure from stakeholders in the environmental community, including Ecojustice and its client, the South Lake Simcoe Naturalists (SLSN), the LSRCA has now revised its proposed policy to provide strong protections for wetlands.

In September 2014, Ecojustice commented on a draft policy on behalf of South Lake Simcoe Naturalists. Ecojustice noted that the proposed policy was unlawful and allowed developments in wetlands even where there would be harm to the environment and other problems, like flooding. Ecojustice and SLSN are pleased that the LSRCA responded by conducting a legal review of the draft policy. In December 2014, the LSRCA revised the policy to address the majority of comments submitted by SLSN on wetland development approval. LSRCA staff have now proposed the removal of the provisions that allowed housing developments to be

automatically approved in Provincially Significant Wetlands. Under the new draft policy, proposed developments in or near wetlands will be very restricted.

If the new revised policy is approved by the LSRCA this spring, it will be a huge step forward for the protection of Provincially Significant Wetlands in the Lake Simcoe Watershed like the North Gwillimbury Forest. However, there is more work to be done by the LSRCA to protect headwaters and other natural features. Ecojustice will also continue to work with SLSN to ensure better public consultation and notice when the Conservation Authority considers wetland development permits so that we can make sure the policy is upheld in practice. Ecojustice is also monitoring the practices of other Conservation Authorities to ensure they comply with the law.

Rare Gray-cheeked Thrush Observations from Sutton CBC as submitted to regional editor by Paul Harpley

Documenting rare bird sightings for official consideration can often be a complicated, technical and onerous, but a necessary responsibility of the naturalists as the following narrative extracted from this report details. “At 11:30 a.m. I entered the field area and walked a small looped informal trail through the meadows and the central Cedar copse. Upon exiting the cedars and entering park-like 20-30 year even-aged birch trees in a lower wet area I kicked up a bird that gave an alarm call, and nervously landed in a birch tree only 10 feet from me. I was startled, but calm. I could see the bird clearly with my eyes that it was a spotted thrush. The bird nervously sat, remained on the branch as I brought up my binoculars (Bushnell-7x35) and saw that it was a fully grey back and tailed thrush without an eye ring. It had prominent dark spotting on its throat to chest. The upper chest and malar stripe area was a bit buffy in colour. The whole head and cheek area was decidedly grey. I watched the bird moving back to about 18 feet for 3-5 minutes, observing in great detail. I had my Peterson field guide in my pocket and quickly checked the spotted thrushes. It was like the Gray-cheeked thrush illustration. I quickly considered the similar Swainson’s thrush, but rejected it as there was no obvious eye ring and the bird did not have buffy cheeks. Realizing this was a rare bird I ran back to my car and got my camera and Bushnell-Spacemaster spotting scope. When I returned in 5 minutes the bird was found immediately foraging quietly on the ground in the leaves and grass. I set up the scope on the bird and followed it around for about 5 minutes from about 20 feet. The details were well seen as above. I then got out my camera and attempted some photos. Unfortunately my camera’s battery was dead.

“I left the site to continue my other count locations quickly and to meet others on the Count for a quick lunch in town (Sutton). Following this I took two of the other birders, Linda and Bill Hollinshead with me, and we quickly returned continuing the count, and dropped back at the site at 2:30 p.m. on the way to the rest of our area. We went to where I had seen the bird previously and immediately found the bird. It was on the ground then jumped up into the Buckthorns and was observed eating the black berries. It eventually moved toward the cedar trees. Linda and Bill confirmed my observations over about 15 minutes with binoculars. We decided to leave the bird

quietly and get back to the rest of the count as we were losing a lot of time for the rest of our area.”

Ontario Has Given Up on Endangered Species

HUFFPOST: Posted: 01/23/2015 1:20 pm EST Updated: 01/23/2015 1:59 pm EST

This is the only reasonable conclusion I can come up with after listening to Ontario's lawyers in court late last week defend a regulation (O Reg. 176/13) that exempts almost all industrial activities from the core protections of the *Endangered Species Act* (ESA).

After seven years this is what we know: not one of Ontario's more than 150 threatened and endangered species enjoys the full protections of the ESA as it was originally intended. Not one. Not the caribou. Not the eel. Not the dusky salamander. Not the flycatcher. Not the badger. Not the chubsucker (sucker!). Not the f. toad. Not the stinkpot. Not the warbler. Not the toothcup.



Ontario has fallen far from the heady days of 2007 when the *Endangered Species Act* was first enacted. Back then, the Act was intended to be guided by a "presumption of protection." It was celebrated as the gold standard. Today it is guided by a "presumption of permission," meaning industrial activities go forward as a matter of course and, as long as certain conditions are met, proponents can violate the core protection provisions of the ESA (to not kill species or destroy their habitats).

Ontario might as well change the name of the Act to *The Endangered Isn't Enough Act* because as we saw in court only when species are critically imperiled, reduced to a few occurrences and its habitat thoroughly decimated -- uber-endangered -- then that's when they'll maybe consider

giving protections as per the Act's original intentions but only in specific cases and not as a general rule.

A more accurate title for the Act now might also be *The We Kill Them Less Act*. Ontario argued that it doesn't always have to protect and restore species as per the purpose of the Act. The regulation is fine because among other things it does not jeopardize the survival of the species in Ontario. That might be an okay standard for weedy species that are not at risk like dandelions and deer but when we are already talking about imperiled wildlife it falls woefully short. The lofty purposes of the Act around protecting and restoring species have been stealthily replaced in practice with 'kill them less'.



Boreal caribou one of more than 150 at risk species in Ontario not getting full protections under the Endangered Species Act as it was originally intended.

It seems the province has written off recovering at-risk wildlife in Ontario and abdicated its responsibilities. The heart of this whole mess is a regulation that has inverted the protections intended for species. It has created a sweeping parallel exemptions regime where a presumption of permission has taken hold. It has a different purpose than the Act's purpose and has far reaching negative implications. In our view, it is unlawful.

With the help of Ecojustice, Canada's legal champions, Wildlands League and Ontario Nature mounted a challenge last week. We are small conservation charities with biologists, forest

experts, and lots of passionate, committed people representing thousands of volunteers and other folks who care deeply about wildlife and the planet. Last week we were the last line of defence for vulnerable wildlife. We knew it was going to be an uphill battle but we did it. We stood in front of the metaphorical bulldozer and spoke for the at-risk trees and all the critters that hang precariously in the balance. Our Ecojustice lawyers did a helluva job. Now we wait as the Justices deliberate.



Anna Baggio

Director Conservation Planning, CPAWS Wildlands League 2015-02

Greenbelt Review

After nine years, support for Ontario's Greenbelt remains strong. Ontarians want to see more land included in the land protection policy according to a recent poll conducted by Environics Research Group.

According to the survey, three-quarters of Ontarians (74%) feel it is very important to continue to grow Ontario's Greenbelt. Polling results align with Mississauga, Oakville, and Toronto taking the necessary steps to grow the Greenbelt. These cities have begun work to include areas along Fourteen Mile Creek, Credit River and Etobicoke Creek river valleys, and the Don, Humber and Etobicoke Creeks as part of Ontario's Greenbelt. This is in addition to the recent inclusion of Glenora Conservation Area to Greenbelt protected land.

"Growing the Greenbelt ranks up there with developing public transit and increasing access to local food," says Burkhard Mausberg, CEO of the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation. "This overwhelming response is a most encouraging sign."

Support for the Greenbelt is at an all time high with 93% of Ontarians supporting the 1.8 million acres of protected land.

"Knowing that we are going into the review of Ontario's Greenbelt Plan in 2015, we are delighted that the Greenbelt remains an important contribution to the quality of life in Ontario," said Mausberg.

Other findings of note: nearly all respondents (99%) said protecting the natural water system is an important benefit of the Greenbelt and 97% said preserving agricultural lands and green spaces that support clean air are important benefits to them.

Visit greenbelt.ca to see details of the Environics polling.

The Greenbelt Foundation survey was conducted by Environics Research Group from September 12 to October 20, 2013 among a sample of 825 residents of the Greater Golden Horseshoe. A sample of this size has a margin of error of +/-3.4 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. A disproportionate sample was employed, with Toronto being under sampled and other regions over sampled.

Some Key Greenbelt Review Ideas to promote as Naturalists in 2015 (OGA 2015-02-07)

Growing the Greenbelt:

- 1) Urban river valleys*
- 2) Where there is local municipal and community support and leadership*
- 3) Greenbelt does not affect the price of housing*

Refer to RBC/Pembina Institute Reports:

Priced Out, <http://www.pembina.org/reports/priced-out.pdf>

4) People prefer...walkable, transit friendly, accessible housing over size, see -Home Location Survey

<http://www.pembina.org/pub/2014-home-location-preference-survey>

Rouge National Park Update

A park in name only: New legislation to establish Canada's first urban national park misses the mark

Recently released comments on the Rouge National Urban Park Act

Ottawa, ON — Today's passage of the Rouge National Urban Park Act is no cause for celebration. The new law fails to establish nature conservation as the priority in park management, ignoring provincial, national and international standards for protected areas.

Opposition MPs (107) voted against the bill (Bill C-40), acknowledging its critical flaws.

The new law jeopardizes the government's own initiative: to establish and manage a Rouge National Urban Park that will protect its natural values for generations. Furthermore, it sets a bad precedent for future national urban parks.

Ontario has already informed the federal government that Canada should uphold the agreement dated January 23, 2013 and "meet or exceed" the environmental policies of existing Greenbelt, Oak Ridge's Moraine and Rouge Park Plans. The new law and draft management plan clearly fail to meet these tests.

As a result, Ontario's substantial Rouge Park lands (approximately 25 km²) may not be transferred to Parks Canada. The new Rouge National Urban Park may be less than half the park's announced size, will not include the beautiful Rouge Valley system and will not be connected to Lake Ontario.

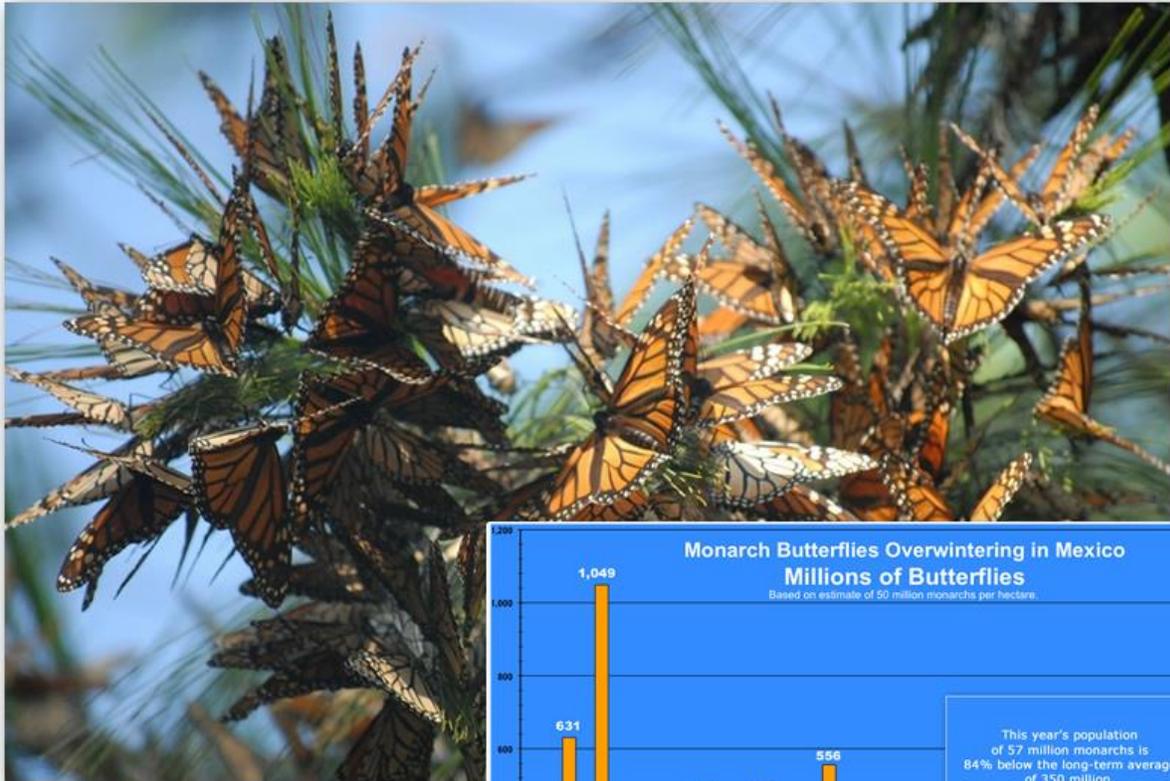
Within our nation, and around the world, Canada's parks are renowned for their outstanding natural beauty and environmental standards. Unfortunately, our newest national urban park will be a park in name only. The flawed Rouge National Urban Park Act represents a missed opportunity to protect this ecological treasure for Canadians today and into the future.

It is our hope that the Senate will amend the draft park law to prioritize nature conservation and meet international standards for a protected area.

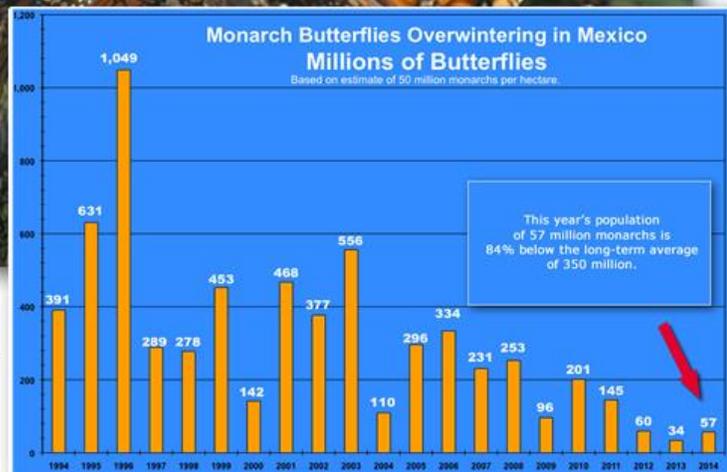
The groups issuing this statement are: Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society–Wild lands League, David Suzuki Foundation, Environmental Defence, Friends of the Rouge Watershed, Ontario Nature, Save The Oak Ridge's Moraine, and Sierra Club Canada Foundation.

Monarch Butterflies: Current Science Information

Monarch Population Remains Low Still 80% Below Historic Levels



Data released January 27, 2015
World Wildlife Fund-Mexico
Comisionado Nacional de Areas Naturales Protegidas



Monarchs from across the continent are now clustered by the millions in a small region of Mexico. This year, half of the monarchs are concentrated in only one of the 12 overwintering sites. How does this year compare to previous years?

Journey North News: January 27, 2015

By Elizabeth Howard

The number of monarchs overwintering in Mexico has increased from last year's record low but the population remains 80% below the historic average.

This year's population contains 57 million monarchs compared to a long-term average of 300 million and a peak of 1 billion. The clustering butterflies cover less than 3 acres of forest compared to a peak of 51 acres in 1996 and an average of 15 acres.

Half of this year's butterflies are residing in only one of the 12 traditional sites, the El Rosario sanctuary.

Still Dangerously Small

"The increase to 1.13 hectares is dangerously small, and lower than predicted," says Dr. Lincoln Brower.

When compared to populations over the past 21 years, monarch numbers continue to concern scientists as they watch for population recovery.

"Population levels are at their second lowest ever," notes monarch biologist Dr. Karen Oberhauser.

Upcoming Breeding Season Critical

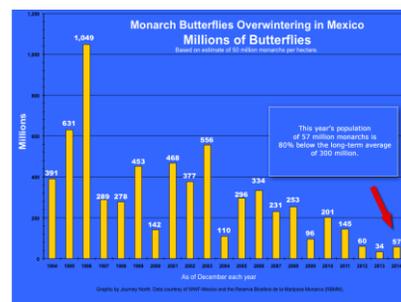
Following two unfavorable summers that were partially responsible for the population crash in 2012, weather conditions during last summer's breeding season were ideal. If the population had encountered poor breeding conditions in summer 2014, scientists were concerned that the migration would reach its extinction threshold.

What does the target population size need to be to preserve the migration? Scientists simply don't know but a small population has added risks.

"With the population this small, chance events can have a huge impact," says Brower. For example, the winter storm in 2002 killed 85% of the population. With half of the population in one sanctuary the risks in Mexico are especially high this winter.



Wintering Sites



Population Size

FAMILY FUN DAY



Friends of
**Scanlon
Creek**

Monday, February 16th, 2015
Nature Centre - 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

kicksled outings * Arrive early to reserve your kicksled.
guided nature hikes
scavenger hunt | **games**
bonfire | **indoor crafts**

- No pre-registration is required. • \$10 per vehicle; no charge with annual pass
- For more information please contact Wanda Black at: 905-895-1281x222

Scanlon Creek – A Destination for Natural Inspiration



Scanlon Creek Conservation Area
2450 9th Line,
Bradford West Gwillimbury

Scanlon Creek Conservation Area
is owned and operated by:

