BIRDING THE GRAND

by Edward Cheskey

The bird “breeding season” in southern Ontario lasts roughly from mid-May to August, and over 175 species breed within the Grand watershed. One of the best places to observe breeding birds along the Grand is Luther Marsh. This is a large Wildlife Management Area slightly north and east of Arthur that includes the Luther Lake and the surrounding woodlands, fields and wetlands. For the 1981-1985 Atlas of the Breeding Bird Ontario, 134 species were recorded with breeding evidence in or near Luther, one of the highest tallies in the province. My favourite part of the Luther complex is the Wylde Lake bog on the south side of this large property. While you cannot access the bog, walking the bordering road is great for observing many more typically ‘northern’ species, especially if you are familiar with their songs. These include Lincoln’s Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Nashville and Yellow-rumped Warblers among others. Osprey, a large colony of Great Blue Heron, the occasional pair of Great Egret, American and Least Bitterns, several species of waterfowl as well as Common Loon also breed at Luther. An early morning canoe trip (avoid the heron colony!!) is the best way to observe many of these species.

The concentrations of Least Bittern and migrating waterfowl have earned the Luther area recognition as a nationally significant Important Bird Area. It is also a popular hunting destination for waterfowl in the fall, so don’t plan a birding trip once the waterfowl hunt is underway. Another warning—the biting insects are big and ferocious, so take precautions during visits from late May to August!

About 120 bird species breed in the Grand River Forests between Cambridge and Paris. Pinehurst Lake Conservation Area, the Sudden Tract (an Agreement Forest, south of Cambridge on Sprague’s Road), and the Cambridge to Paris Rail Trail just south of Glen Morris are my

• See page 2
preferred spring birding locations. These Carolinian forests have a good variety of habitats including mature oak-hickory forests, silver maple swamp, hawthorn meadow, river edge, hemlock groves and cool cedar seepage slopes—each with its own unique bird community. The forested habitats harbour up to six species of woodpecker (Downy, Hairy, Northern Flicker, Pileated, Red-bellied and the rarest—Red-headed). Birds of the deep forest such as Ovenbird, Veery and Scarlet Tanager are not uncommon in mature forest, as are some more southerly species such as Blue Gray Gnatcatcher, Blue-winged Warbler and Eastern Towhee in edge or more open habitats.

Cliff Swallows build their nests on the underside of the bridge at Glen Morris. These are the least common of the five small swallow species living in the watershed. In May, they can be seen gathering mud from the river’s edge to use in nest construction. Here, Great Blue Herons and Belted Kingfishers often feed along the river.

Winter Wren, White-throated sparrow and Black and White Warbler, denizens of cool and damp northern forests, breed occasionally in the dense cedar seepage slopes, where cold water flows out of the moraine into the river. I particularly enjoy visiting these places (near Glen Morris) very early in the morning in June to hear the nostalgic song of the White-throat or the musical brilliance of a tiny Winter Wren. Even earlier in the season (April), an early evening or very early morning visit to this later habitat offers one of nature’s great spectacles—the courtship flight of the Woodcock.

Bird watching requires little equipment—good shoes, a bird book and a pair of binoculars. Everyone from complete beginners to serious bird listers can enjoy visiting some of the beautiful natural areas of our watershed, and watching and listening for the birds of spring.

Ted Cheskey has lived in the Grand River watershed for the last 25 years, most of them in Waterloo, and more recently in Eden Mills. For much of this time, he has worked for the Waterloo Region District School Board at the Wrigley Corners Outdoor Education Centre near Ayr. This article is the first of four seasonal articles on birding within the watershed.

A Rite of Spring
By Liz Leedham

In spring, the thoughts of all wild creatures turn to love—or rather, to a single-minded urge to propagate their particular species. A male bird, anxious to impress a suitable female, can attract her attention in several ways. He can dress up like the Mallard Drake. He can sing beautifully like the Meadowlark, or he can make a spectacle of himself like the Woodcock.

The Woodcock belongs to the Sandpiper family. This short-necked, dumpy little shorebird has abandoned the shore and prefers damp, wooded areas and brushy field edges. His long bill is adapted to probe into the soft soil for worms and insects, which he grabs with the rubbery tip of his upper mandible. The song of the male Woodcock is unobtrusive and can best be described as a nasal “peent”, while his dress coat looks like a pile of dead leaves.

To attract his many mates, the Woodcock performs a spring dance. Early in April, he returns to a favourite singing field and there, each evening at dusk, he will repeat the ritual of his species to entice one of the hens lurking at the edge of the nearby woodlot. She will assess his performance and suitability as a father for her chicks.

Also watching from the field edge, humans stand patiently in the chill twilight. Ears strain for the tell-tale “peent”. There is sudden tension in the group as the first faint call is heard. And another, over there! If the night is clear and they are lucky, they will be rewarded by the sight of the Woodcock performing his complex ritual. They will hear him “peenting” steadily on the ground, and he may fly over their heads like a small ghost as he starts his heavenward climb. His stiffened wing feathers whistle as he rises in increasing circles to the sky.

At 300 feet or more he pauses, and onlookers hold their breath. Suddenly, his exuberant liquid chirping is heard as he darts wildly about the night sky, then returns to earth side slipping like a falling leaf.

If his performance impresses the hen, he will be allowed to mate with her. In not, or if another male has already been accepted, he will resume his strutting and repeat his display until his advances are favourably received. The results of this effort will be four cinnamon-coloured eggs, laid in a leafy ground nest. They will be protected and incubated by the female until the brown downy chicks emerge. The reward for human onlookers is a chance to observe a gentle mystery of nature, and to be reassured that our world still responds to the ancient rhythm of the seasons and the need for all life to make a future.

Safe Drinking Water in Our Parks
by Steve Gemmell, GRCA

Throughout the Grand River watershed the GRCA operates Conservation Areas and Nature Centres that are open to the public for recreation and education. These facilities are generally outside urban areas and the water supply is typically provided from groundwater wells. There may be
multiple wells at each facility, where additional wells were added as conservation areas grew. Four Nature Centres, one Wildlife Management Centre, and eight Conservation Areas fall into this category, with an additional three Conservation Areas supplied with water from nearby municipal systems.

The health and safety of park visitors has always been of prime importance in parks planning and operations. Historically, the GRCA carried out water testing for coliforms on a weekly basis, and experienced no major problems with this sampling. Where potential problems could occur, water supplies were disinfected with chlorine.

In June 2000, in light of the recent situation with groundwater contamination in Ontario, the GRCA implemented a program to evaluate all of its water supply systems to ensure that public safety is protected. Stantec Consulting Ltd. (Stantec) was retained by the GRCA to undertake this review. The site review included 51 well sites at 19 locations throughout the watershed.

In August 2000, the Ontario Ministry of the Environment (MOE) introduced a new Drinking Water Protection Regulation that outlines new monitoring and reporting procedures for all large supply systems in the province. As a result, the original GRCA work plan was modified to address the specific issues contained within the new regulation. A Draft report in December 2000 provided the results of the public water supply assessment and outlined recommended areas for upgrades to the water supply systems to meet the new regulation. Stantec and the GRCA are currently working to prepare engineering plans for upgrades with works to be completed by December of 2002.

In addition, the GRCA started a training program for all Conservation Area staff that operate water supply systems to become licenced operators, as required by the Drinking Water Protection Regulation. This included working with the Ontario Environmental Training Consortium (OETC) to complete certification. Stantec assisted the GRCA in making the training relevant to the GRCA facilities, and will be implementing field training for Conservation Area staff on the requirements for water monitoring.

Quarterly reports on all drinking water testing are submitted to the MOE and are also available to the public at the gatehouse and at the GRCA website at www.grandriver.ca.

Visitors are important to GRCA staff and, as always, they will be doing their best to make your stay as safe and enjoyable as possible.

The beach at GRCA’s Pinchurst Conservation Area near Cambridge is a favourite summer playground for campers and day visitors.

It’s Simply Grand

The Grand River features prominently in the simple but effective design for a new logo adopted by the County of Brant.

A swash element represents the Grand River and the County’s ideal location for business and quality of lifestyle, with small friendly communities, unique nature trails and Grand River adventures.

Sherri Simpson of Paris designed the logo, which was chosen from fifty submissions in a contest sponsored by the Planning, Building and Economic Development Committee.

Getting Rid of Urban Pesticides

By Susan Koswan

Our dependence on synthetic chemical pesticides (which includes herbicides, insecticides and fungicides) and fertilizers for lawn maintenance is finally starting to show signs of weakening. People, concerned about the health and environmental risks of these chemicals, are seeking more natural ways to care for their lawns and gardens. It’s exciting to look around and see more native plants, interesting groundcovers and soaring grasses that look great even in the winter. They require less maintenance.

See page 4
PESTICIDES
from page three

in many ways, are more interesting to look at, and can provide food and shelter for wildlife.

Even if you are not replacing your lawn with alternative plantings, there are a few simple steps you can take to create a healthy and vital lawn without using pesticides:

1. Mow high—the importance of this simple step cannot be overemphasized! Cutting your grass at three inches (roughly the length of an average index finger) encourages longer, stronger roots and helps shade weed seeds and prevent their germination. Make sure your lawn mower blades are sharp, cut when your lawn is 1/3 past the desired height (4¼” cut to 3”) and only cut when the lawn is dry.

2. Do not water your lawn when there is a drought (two or more weeks with no rain) but allow your lawn to rest or go dormant. It will green up again the next time it rains.

3. Leave grass clippings on the lawn. This is free, nutritionally balanced fertilizer and will reduce your need for store-bought fertilizer.

4. Over-seed and top-dress in spring if grass is thin and again in late September. The soil must be 15 degrees Celsius for grass seed to germinate. Use perennial rye and/or fescues as they naturally repel chinch bugs and sod webworms. Top-dressing, by gently raking a thin layer of compost, (any combination of composted vegetable matter/kitchen/yard waste, manure, top-soil) adds organic material and nutrients to your soil. The thicker and stronger your grass is, the better it will out-compete the weeds and survive stresses such as droughts or infestations.

If you have been using pesticides as part of your regular lawn care practices, you will ALSO need to:

- Aerate your lawn in mid-June, late August and late September to break up thatch and help bring in oxygen and nutrients. Over-seed and top-dress bare patches and keep moist until grass is established.
- Apply an organic fertilizer in late June and late October - READ THE LABEL to ensure it is organic and from natural sources.
- Be prepared for setbacks as pesticide residues can remain in the soil for up to five years. Grubs seem to be on many people’s minds and prevention is your best defence. Using the above steps will go a long way to stop grubs from destroying your lawn. If you have grub damage, you can: over-seed and topdress damaged areas; plant something else as grubs usually only eat overly fertilized grass roots or use beneficial nematodes in early August as a last resort.

Do NOT use pesticides or synthetic fertilizers. They are unnecessary and they are harmful. Your lawn is not a carpet but a living breathing part of a larger eco-system. The ideal lawn and garden is a mini natural habitat—an environment that is welcoming to wildlife such as birds and bees; provides healthy organic food for you and space to play and relax; and is safe for all living things to find their own “ecological balance”.

Susan Koswan is founder of GROUP (Get Rid Of Urban Pesticides) and the Eco-Lawn Project; a founder of The Dandelion Festival in Waterloo and occasionally a Raging Granny.

Toyota Shade’s Mills Nature Centre

With generous support from Toyota, the Cambridge and North Dumfries Community Foundation, and the Ventin Group Ltd., a new outdoor education facility was officially opened at Shade’s Mills Conservation Area on April 22, 2001.

The Shade’s Mills Toyota Nature Centre will house local students taking part in curriculum-related outdoor education programs during the school year, and YWCA environmental day camp programs will occupy the site during summer months. The development of family-based weekend and evening interpretive programs will also provide community benefits.

Along with local business and community leaders, over 160 Toyota employees were on hand for the event, and they chipped in to give Shade’s Mills a thorough “spring cleaning”; litter was collected from the area as part of the company’s Earth Day festivities.

The renovation and expansion project, partnered by The Grand River Foundation, converted an old change room and snack bar into a large classroom area overlooking Shade’s Mills Reservoir. The new Nature Centre will contribute to local children’s understanding and appreciation of the environment.
Guidebook to Woolwich Trails

The Woolwich Trails Group has published a new booklet, *A Guidebook to Woolwich Trails*. This features eight trails in the Township, and includes a short history, map, and access points for each trail. The 58-page guidebook and a free list of the 2001 season organized hikes are available at several locations in the township and at the Woolwich Township office in Elmira. The Woolwich Trails Group was formed in 1992 as part of Woolwich Healthy Communities, a community initiative sponsored by the World Health Organization.

The Trails Group promotes hiking and biking on trails for health, recreation and as a low-impact transportation alternative. They maintain existing trails and also create new trails. The group organizes monthly Sunday afternoon hikes, and all are welcome to attend. See the Calendar on page 8 for information on the May hike. For more information, call Inge Rinne at (519) 742-8750.

Grand River Naval Depot

The Dunnville District Heritage Association has published a new book about an important part of Dunnville’s history. John Docker’s *Grand River Naval Depot* documents the history of the British naval base at Port Maitland. Following the War of 1812, the base was established at the mouth of the Grand River to protect the north shore of Lake Erie from the threat of an American invasion.

The 66-page book contains maps, illustrations and an appendix with the names of men who served at the depot. The book may be ordered from the Dunnville District Heritage Association, P. O. Box 41, Dunnville, Ontario N1A 2X1. The cost is $15.00 plus postage. For further information, contact John Docker at (905) 774-3997, (email: jgdocker@kwic.com), or Estelle Pringle at (905) 774-6148.

Gone Canoeing

Canoeists will enjoy a new book by Kevin Callan. The book, *Gone Canoeing: Weekend Wilderness Adventures in Southern Ontario*, covers interesting areas within a reasonable drive and includes a section on the Grand River. Route maps and photographs are available.
included and the cost is $19.95.

Kevin has written several well-known outdoor books including Brook Trout and Blackflies and Up the Creek. These and other Kevin Callan books are available at Two Rivers, 79 Willow Street, Paris, as well as many local book and outdoor adventure stores.

Floraview Farms

When the sweet smell of spring drifts over Floraview Farms, passers-by know that Darcy Weber is not only spreading manure on his fields but he is implementing an important part of his total nutrient management program. Floraview Farms in Woolwich Township has been in the Weber family since 1932 and worked as a father-son partnership for many of them. The Webers have practiced environmentally friendly agriculture for many years, and Floraview was one of the first farms in the area to have an Environmental Farm Plan. Soil and water conservation is an integral part of Floraview operations.

Major environmental improvements included fencing cattle out of the creek in the 1980s, and installing nose pumps to water the livestock. Windbreaks were planted to protect the crops and soil. The Webers practice crop and manure rotation. No-till plantings are used for winter wheat and soybeans, and minimum till is used for corn, alfalfa and spring grain. Red clover is planted in wheat for a cover crop. No-till planting keeps crop residue on the soil surface to prevent soil erosion. Fuel and time is saved as only one pass over the field is needed.

Manure management has been significantly improved over the past twenty years. Before 1980 the manure was spread year round, with the potential for runoff from the frozen fields entering local ditches and waterways. In 1980, a wall was built around the manure yard and the runoff directed to a lagoon. This provided enough storage for manure to be spread up to late December and again in early spring, after the ground had thawed. Limited space in the lagoon, however, meant that this was often overflowing by the early spring. In 2000, a 12-foot by 86-foot manure pit was built, and the lagoon was decommissioned. Now solid manure is spread in the spring and fall and worked in. Liquid manure is spread and worked in during the fall.

Other improvements included installing catch basins to divert runoff from the manure yard; directing rainwater from roofs and away from the yard with eavestroughs; and diverting milk house wastes into the lagoon.

Manure is treated as an important resource and a means of cutting some of the costs of farming. A computer nutrient management program is used to calculate all nutrients and fertilizer is bought only as necessary.

At a time when many farmers are working under enormous economic difficulties, often with little public or governmental support, Darcy Weber is a valuable role model for the agricultural industry. He continues to look for ways to improve the environmental sustainability of his farming operations and ultimately the health of the Grand River watershed.

Traces Screen Printing

Since its inception in 1985, Traces Screen Printing Ltd., in Waterloo has been a trailblazer in promoting environmental sustainability. All staff are committed to helping the environment in every facet of the textile printing operation. Materials are recycled wherever possible within the building. Boxes, newspapers, ruined garments are reused for various processes within the company. Efficient ink mixing systems allow exact amounts of ink to be used, thus reducing waste. All
chemicals used are drain-safe, non-carcinogenic, air and water safe. Traces has worked with manufacturers to develop safer chemicals in Canada, so that these are now available to everyone in the industry.

To reduce energy consumption, all computers are turned off each night, and the heat turned down when the building is empty. New environmentally friendly products are researched and developed including temporary tattoos, using an organic glue that breaks down safely and easily in water.

Each year, an environmental reassessment of all processes ensures that Traces operates in the most environmentally mindful way. Production Committees work as a team to re-evaluate monthly to make the workplace more efficient, safer and environmentally friendly.

The Ontario government recognized the company’s efforts when Traces was featured in a video to teach small businesses that good business sense and environmental responsibility can work in tandem. The CEO, Tracey Johnston-Aldworth, works tirelessly to convince others to follow Traces’ lead. She offers free public speaking to community groups, schools and companies on simple ways to make environmental improvements. As a business operator and environmentalist, she is a role model for the grade seven and eight students she has influenced through participation in school workshops and career conferences.

**Acclaim for Grand River Dinner Cruises**

An evening cruise on the Grand River, accompanied by a good dinner, is a very pleasant way of learning more about our Heritage River. The Albin family of Caledonia has been running Grand River Dinner Cruises from the Big Creek Boat Farm for 22 years, and has increased their fleet to three boats since the first dinner cruise in 1978. Visitors can now enjoy the Loft dinner theatre, a bake shop and gift shop. In February, 2001, the Caledonia Regional Chamber of Commerce recognized the Albin family with a business achievement award.

The popular tourist destination not only raises awareness of the Grand River, but is credited with boosting tourism in Caledonia and area. For information on the dinner cruises, phone 1-800-847-3321 or visit www.boatfarm.on.ca

---

**DID YOU KNOW?**

- Bird watching is North America’s fastest growing hobby, enjoyed by millions of Canadians and Americans, half of whom are considered serious birders.
- Since 1900, birdwatchers all over North America take part each year in the Christmas Bird Count. Local naturalists organize the activity and send the data to the Audubon Society in the U.S. This provides an efficient way to monitor long term changes in bird populations and distribution.
- In 1979, in Texas, a birdwatcher was charged with attempting to kill his son-in-law with a dining room chair after being jokingly told that the Christmas goose he had just enjoyed was a whooping crane.
- About nine tenths of all bird species practice monogamy, for periods ranging from a single season to life.
- Woodcock chicks are precocial, that is, they hatch with their eyes open, have downy feathers, leave the nest within a few hours, and are able to feed themselves.
- Woodcocks can fly while carrying a chick between the legs and body, an action the hen may take if the chicks are threatened.
- Many bird species, such as thrushes, warblers, and vireos require the special habitat of a forest interior. Cutting into woodlots reduces this habitat, creating more edge habitat with its attendant disturbance and predation from domestic animals.
- Of 9,808 species of birds in the world, only 82 species have names that are “tautonyms”, that is, birds for which the two parts of the scientific name are the same. Of these 82 species, only 25 are found...
THE GRAND STRATEGY CALENDAR

One Lump or Two? A Celebration of Tea, at the Bell Homestead, Brantford, on Thursday, May 24th at 7 p.m. Frances Hoffman will delight guests with the customs and history of tea taking as she discovered when writing her book, Steeped in Tradition. Refreshments and tea served. Frances will also have copies of her book for sale. Tickets are $8 for members, $10 for non-members, and may be purchased at the Homestead at 94 Tutela Heights Road or by phoning (519) 756-6220.

Waterloo-Wellington Canoe Club 7th Annual River Cleanup, May 26 at 9 a.m. From Kaufman Flats, Kitchener, to the Victoria Street bridge. For information on participating, contact Peter Milroy at (519) 585-0605.

20th Annual Lion’s Club Pike Derby, May 26 and 27, at Belwood Lake. This is a catch and release family event. Lion members will be ready to help contestants at 5 a.m., on Saturday and the Derby will end at 4 p.m., on Sunday. For information contact Gerry Ellen or Bob Lacombe (519) 843-8347. Email: Lacombe@golden.net


Woolwich Trail Group Hike/Mountain Bike Ride, Sunday May 27, 2001, at 2 p.m., at the Sandy Hills Pinery Trail. For more information call Brad Fisher at (519) 669-9067, or Murray Beacom at (519) 669-5680.

Nature Conservancy Workday. June 1, Turkey Point Nature Preserve. Meet 9.30 a.m. The project is monitoring the effects of the recent prescribed burn. Learn about savannah habitat and fire as a management tool. For more information contact Lisa McLaughlin, Nature Conservancy of Canada, at (519) 826-0068.

The Grand Jewel Open House/Community Picnic at Cruickston Park on Sunday, June 3, 2001, from 1 to 5 p.m. Explore this special place and learn about its historical and environmental significance. Events include a community picnic, hot air balloon rides, wagon rides, walking tours, wildlife and historic displays, children’s games, and a variety of entertainment. For information, visit the website at www.cruickston.com

The Old Boat House 4th Annual Kids Fishing Derby, Saturday July 7, 2001. Free catch and release Derby for kids aged 3-13 years, at the Grand Island Bar-B-Q, Dunnville. Registration from 8 to 10 a.m. Fishing 10 a.m. to noon. Prizes, food and fun for the whole family. For more information call (905) 774-4875.

DID YOU KNOW?

from page seven

in North America. One example is the Bank Swallow, whose genus name Riparia, is the same as the species name riparia, except for capitalization.

• The collective noun for owls is a parliament; the collective noun for ravens is an unkindness; and the collective noun for woodpeckers is a descent.

• White-throated Sparrows in Canada are reputed to sing “Oh, sweet Canada, Canada, Canada”. American birds sing “Oh, Sam Peabody, Peabody, Peabody”.

ABOUT THIS NEWSLETTER

This newsletter is produced as a communications tool by the Grand River Conservation Authority on behalf of the partners in The Grand Strategy.

This newsletter can be seen on the Internet at www.grandriver.ca

For information on The Grand Strategy
Contact Barbara Veale, GRCA, 400 Clyde Road, Box 729, Cambridge ON N1R 5W6.
Phone: (519) 621-2761 or 621-2763, ext. 274.
Fax: (519) 621-4844
Email: bveale@grandriver.ca
Website: www.grandriver.ca

For newsletter submissions
Contact the Editor, Liz Leedham, c/o Barbara Veale at the above address. Newsletter submissions must be made by the 15th of the month prior to publication, and may be subject to editorial change. Tax deductible donations and sponsorships toward the cost of producing this newsletter are always welcome.

Publications Mail
Agreement #1448471