

# Nature Guelph News

November/December 2017

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# Nature Guelph Receives Watershed Award

By Brett Forsyth, President, Nature Guelph

On October 19, past-president Jenn Bock and I attended the GRCA's annual Watershed Awards to accept an award on behalf of the club. The Watershed Award is presented to individuals, families, organizations and businesses that have taken action to protect and enhance the natural environment and heritage of the Grand River watershed.

Also receiving a Watershed Award are two long-time Nature Guelph members and super volunteers Marilyn Swaby and Karen Bateman. The GRCA was recognizing their amazing contribution and dedication to the young naturalist program. Congratulations Karen and Marilyn!

I would like to thank you all for making this club what it is and applaud you for your years of service. This award came with a number of books that we will be auctioning off at our December meeting, with the proceeds going to the NITs and NATs program. ●



Dr. Robin Roth, Associate Professor, Department of Geography, University of Guelph

## Environmental Conservation: Hurtful and Hopeful Tales from Thailand, Burma and Canada

Nature Guelph Speaker Series

November 9, 2017 – 7:30 pm – *Everyone welcome*  
OAC Centennial Arboretum Centre, University of Guelph

We are beginning to see innovative and hopeful models of conservation that meet both environmental and social justice goals. Through a series of vignettes from her international research, Dr. Roth will discuss this evolution of conservation policy, outline some of the hopeful models and identify the challenges to changing how conservation is practiced.



[www.natureguelph.ca](http://www.natureguelph.ca)

# A Vision for Clair-Maltby

## Update on Clair-Maltby Secondary Plan and Master Environmental Servicing Plan

by Marnie Benson

On behalf of Nature Guelph, I attended the community visioning workshop for the Clair-Maltby neighbourhood on September 26, 2017 at City Hall. The session was a group-based, hands-on community planning and mapping exercise designed to help develop plans for a new Guelph neighbourhood.

The session included identifying the best locations for different land uses (residential, employment and commercial) and community focal points (schools, parks, community centres, shops and services). It also included discussions regarding the best locations for trails, roads and transit, parks and open space, as well as above-ground infrastructure (e.g. water tower).

Planning staff introduced the project and made firm restrictions on any development within the protected wetland area clear from the beginning.

Six tables of 6–10 people were set up with a large map of the area, markers and stickers. A facilitator from the City Planning Department guided groups through a process that involved marking out where they thought the best locations were for all the features noted above. Each group then presented their results to the overall gathering.

Approximately 50–60 people were in attendance and they ranged from concerned local residents, to developers, to community activists wanting to ensure

green spaces were protected and sustainable transportation was incorporated.

It seems that planners understand the importance of protecting the wetland area and it is definitely off limits. There are various questions that remain that Nature Guelph will want to keep an eye on, including how would the wetland be protected during construction and whether there is a sufficient buffer? Other issues include knowing more about water flow in the area and how to prevent contamination, as well as ensuring the connectivity of green spaces as wildlife corridors. It will also be important to ensure sustainable transportation plans for bike/walking trails and access to public transportation.

The next steps are:

- Fall 2017: A conceptual plan is presented to Council
- March 2018: A public design charrette
- Spring 2018: A preferred alternative is presented to Council

### For more information:

Stacey Laughlin, Senior Policy Planner  
Planning, Urban Design and Building Services  
Infrastructure, Development and Enterprise  
Tel. 519-822-1260, ext. 2327  
stacey.laughlin@guelph.ca

## Sunny Start

Our first session for the Young Naturalists was on a beautiful, sun-soaked Saturday on Sept. 30th. It looks like we are going to have a gregarious group with many enthusiastic new members this year.

We were all pleased to enjoy wonderful weather while we looked patiently for butterflies and played games in Kira's Forest. Though we did our best sleuthing, we found only colourful Painted Ladies but no Monarchs, unfortunately. We were happy to also stumble upon a huge, curious grasshopper who was kind enough to visit with us awhile. We ended the day by snacking on a little of Mother Nature's bounty as we nibbled some sweet red clover.



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# Code Breaker: The Sora

By Kyle Horner, [onewordbirds.com](http://onewordbirds.com)

If you're new to the world of birdwatching and beginning to hang around at some local hotspots, you may have noticed that birders love talking in code. Sometimes the jargon gets so intense that it scarcely resembles the English language. Consider the following sentences: "Aw man, we tried to twitch the marbit but we totally dipped on it. Hit a pretty sweet fallout of warbs though – picked up a wormer and pushed my lifer prothon!"

Now I may be using a little creative exaggeration here (not much), but I'll wager dollars to donuts that any serious birder can interpret the above without skipping a beat. But why do birdwatchers talk this way?

I have several theories, but chief among them is that serious birdwatchers tend to be the sort of people who weren't terribly popular in school (yes, I am begrudgingly including myself here). In finding birdwatching, many such folks find a community, or a sort of club to belong to. The use of a code language allows one member of the club to identify another, and to assess the seriousness with which he or she pursues the sport. Connections can be made, friendships can be formed. It's like a sort of birder mating ritual.

The code can serve nefarious purposes also. Some birders use their lingo – intentionally or otherwise – to express a certain superiority over those less-versed in it. Fluency in this secret language allows me to talk over your head, then explain patronizingly when you don't understand. As though my in-depth knowledge of abbreviations for bird names somehow confers a higher standing in society. You may be a neurosurgeon sir, but I know what an empid is. Check-mate.

Unfortunately, whatever its intended purpose, this confusing vernacular can make birdwatching daunting to the beginner. There's no dictionary to Birderese, and asking senior birders to define their terminology is intimidating. While there are many facets of this language to learn, one thing that really trips new birders up is alpha codes.

Alpha codes (sometimes called AOU codes or banding codes) are standardized, 4-letter codes that refer to North American birds. They are often used as shorthand in ornithological research, but many keen birdwatchers adopt them for their own field notes. Some also include them in public reports or even speeches, confusing any readers or listeners who are not familiar. I have actually known

more than one dog with an alpha code for a name.

In a nutshell, here is how alpha codes are created:

- For one-word names, use the first four letters: Ovenbird becomes OVEN.
- For two-word names, use the first two letters of each: Yellow Warbler becomes YEWA.
- For three-word names, use the first letter of the first two words, and the first two letters of the last: Yellow-rumped Warbler becomes YRWA.
- For four-word names, use the first letter of each: Black-and-white Warbler becomes BAWW.

Seems simple, right? Unfortunately a wrinkle appears when two birds would have the same code, and the rules on how to deal with these conflicts are not consistent. Consider the following two pairs:

- Trumpeter Swan and Tree Swallow should both be TRSW, so we use the third letter of the first name to differentiate: TRUS and TRES.
- Barn Owl and Barred Owl should both be BAOW, so we use the last letter of the first name to differentiate: BANO and BADO.

Because of the ambiguity, and the difficulty in reverse-engineering bird names from the codes, alpha codes are really just an exercise in memory, and we can pretty much leave it there. The reason for my lengthy dalliance down Lingo Lane, though, is that this week's one-word-bird possesses a rare, if trivial, distinction. It is one of only two North American birds whose alpha code is its name: the Sora (alpha code: SORA).

The Sora's name is so short that people can't seem to handle it, and many erroneously call this bird Sora Rail. As you can imagine, it rubs me very much the wrong way when people ruin a perfectly good one-word name with superfluous verbiage. Just Sora is fine, thank you very much.

The Sora is indeed a rail (or crake, depending which word you prefer), which basically means it's like a little, marsh-loving chicken. It has a plump body and small head, with stout legs and long toes for wading around in densely vegetated areas. It looks ridiculous, if we're being honest, but in a truly delightful way.

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Right now you may be thinking that you've never seen a bird like this before, so it may surprise you to learn that the Sora is fairly common all across North America. Imagine a wetland near you and chances are there's a Sora in it, at least during the warm months. But rails, as a rule, are extremely cryptic, and there are plenty of seasoned birders who have never seen one either.

Never fear though, for there is indeed a way to experience the secretive Sora: simply close your eyes and open your ears. The name "rail" comes from an Old French word meaning "to rattle," and it only just begins to describe the diverse vocalizations of this family. Start listening to the calls of the Sora, and you may begin to recognize some familiar sounds from springtime in your local marsh. Commit a few to memory, and you'll begin picking these birds out in more places than you'd expect!

Not much information exists on the origin of the Sora's unique name. There's just a vague suggestion that it likely comes from a First Nations language. I'm not entirely sure why it hangs on either, as the Sora is not that different from the other small, North American rails. Whatever the logic, the Sora is a little gift to new birdwatchers across this continent – a secretive bird that refuses to hide behind secret codes. ●

## Zig Zag Goldenrod



Goldenrods are often blamed for fall allergies as their yellow blooms are ubiquitous in the landscape. The real culprit is Ragweed (*Ambrosia artemisiifolia*) an inconspicuous, low-growing plant with small green flowers that blooms at the same time as the Goldenrods. Goldenrods – with their showy flowers and heavy pollen – rely upon insects for pollination. The heavy pollen does not travel far from the plant and is unlikely to land on an allergy sufferer's nasal mucous membrane. Ragweed, on the other hand, relies upon the wind to carry its light pollen so does not have showy flowers to attract insects. Ragweed pollen does travel easily to those sensitive noses and triggers allergies.

Zig Zag Goldenrod (*Solidago flexicaulis*) is one of the few Goldenrods that grows in shade. It brightens the last summer and early fall woodland with its yellow blooms. Zig Zag Goldenrod also has unique leaves compared to other goldenrods, being broad instead of narrow, making it easy to identify. The leaves are dark green with coarse teeth, smooth above and slightly hairy below. The stem zig zags between the alternate leaves, giving rise to the common name. The small yellow flowers are in racemes at the top of the stems, with a few smaller racemes from the axils of the upper leaves.

Zig Zag Goldenrod is a food source for many woodland creatures. The flowers provide late season nectar and pollen for native bees, moths and butterflies, while a variety of aphids, stink bugs, beetles and bugs feed upon the leaves, flowers, stems and roots. Goldenrod seeds are eaten by songbirds, finches, upland game birds and meadow mice. Deer also browse on the plants.

Zig Zag Goldenrod grows in moist-to-dry wood on limestone-based soils. It makes a fine, easy care woodland garden plant, spreading slowly in clumps. Propagation is by division of the rhizomes or softwood cuttings in the spring or by seed. Seed germination is easy after a few months of cold stratification. ●

Photo: Fritz Flohr Reynolds

## Join Nature Guelph! Sept. 2017 – Aug. 2018 Annual Membership

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Online at [natureguelph.ca/membership](http://natureguelph.ca/membership)

As a registered charitable organization, Nature Guelph is required to disclose its financial information to its members and the general public following each fiscal year ending June 30. This table provides a summary up to June 30, 2017.

## Statement of Operations

For the year ended June 30	2017	2016	
<b>INCOME</b>			
Membership and Donations	\$ 4,462.00	\$ 3,483.00	
Donations (at Speaker Series meeting)	490.65	274.37	
Advertising	300.00	300.00	
NATs and NITs	4,245.55	7,914.11	<i>Fees for Ripley's Aquarium camp</i>
The Arboretum Bird-Friendly Windows	–	6,703.68	<i>Special project 2015–16</i>
Fundraising	1,195.50	843.60	<i>Bucket raffle, Bird Studies Canada, Joan Budd</i>
Transfer from GIC (Stewardship Fund)	4,000.00	–	<i>\$3,000 to GRCA; \$1,000 to 50th Anniversary</i>
Miscellaneous	35.00	–	
	\$ 16,380.95	\$ 19,518.76	
Investment Income	160.60	–	<i>See GIC interest. Moved stewardship fund from ING to TD</i>
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$ 16,541.55</b>	<b>\$ 19,518.76</b>	

<b>EXPENSES</b>			
Administration	\$ 886.40	\$ 707.17	<i>P.O. Box, domain name, website</i>
Newsletter	355.28	422.43	<i>More newsletters distributed electronically</i>
NATs and NITs	3,638.60	7,121.30	<i>GRCA, Ripley's Aquarium camp</i>
Indoor Program	880.15	1,213.05	<i>Speaker honoraria, new digital projector</i>
Rent: The Arboretum for Speaker Series	958.20	946.90	
Outdoor Program	–	–	
Ontario Nature Membership, Insurance	912.60	1,059.24	
Publicity	242.30	–	<i>Social media, Meet Up costs</i>
Miscellaneous	821.86	220.35	<i>Ont. Nature regional mtg., Holiday cards, button supplies</i>
Reinder Westerhoff Education Fund	700.00	600.00	<i>Ontario Nature Youth Camp (2 people)</i>
The Arboretum Bird-Friendly Windows	–	6,893.00	<i>Special project</i>
Donation	–	1,000.00	<i>Hawk Cliff Woods purchase donation</i>
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$ 14,734.80</b>	<b>\$ 20,777.04</b>	

## Statement of Financial Position

For the year ended June 30	2017	2016	
Balance Forward	\$ 4,784.42	\$ 6,042.60	
Total Income	16,380.95	19,518.76	
Total Expenses	14,734.80	20,777.04	
Transfer to Petty Cash	–	100.00	
TD Bank Chequing Account – Balance	6,430.57	4,784.42	
TD GIC Investment Account			<i>For land acquisition, stewardship</i>
Balance Forward	\$ 24,348.72	\$ 24,258.04	
Transfer to Chequing	(4,000.00)	–	<i>\$3,000 to GRCA; \$1,000 to 50th Anniversary</i>
Interest	160.60	90.68	
GIC	20,509.32	24,348.72	
TD Business Account	18.32	18.32	
Petty Cash	74.30	127.55	<i>Membership; Treasurer</i>
<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>\$ 27,032.51</b>	<b>\$ 29,279.01</b>	

# Upcoming Events

## NATURE GUELPH MEETINGS & SPEAKER SERIES

Meetings occur on the second Thursday of each month. We begin with a brief business meeting, followed by a short break, then the speaker's presentation.

### November 9, 7:30–9:00 pm Environmental Conservation: Hurtful and Helpful

*Dr. Robin Roth, Associate Professor,  
Department of Geography, U of G*

Non-members are very welcome.  
Goodwill donations gratefully accepted.  
Snacks and coffee available for a nominal fee. Please bring your own coffee mug.

### December 14, 6:00–9:00 pm Members Night: Holiday Potluck Dinner and Member Presentations

Calling all Nature Guelph members and their families! Join us for an evening of nature trivia, great presentations, nature-inspired art, awesome food and wonderful friends.

Share a short 5–15 minute presentation on anything nature-related. Email Peter Kelly at [indoorprogs@natureguelph.ca](mailto:indoorprogs@natureguelph.ca) by December 6 to book your spot. Include specifics on topic, presentation length, and any audio-visual needs.

If you can, please bring your favourite dish (should feed about six people) from the food category based on the first letter of your last name: dessert (A–F), main dish (G–M), salad (N–Z).

Don't forget a plate, cutlery, cup and something to drink. Coffee, tea and hot chocolate will be provided.

*OAC Centennial Arboretum Centre,  
University of Guelph  
270 Arboretum Road, Guelph*

Visit [www.natureguelph.ca](http://www.natureguelph.ca) for updates.

*We ask that you do not wear perfumes out of respect for people who are allergic to them.*

## NATURE GUELPH OUTDOOR EVENTS

### November 12, 10:00 am–4:00 pm Crawford Lake Conservation Area: Group Outing

*Carpool from The Arboretum  
Centre parking lot at 10:00 am OR  
meet at Crawford Lake Conservation  
Area parking lot at 10:45 am.*

*Bring your own picnic lunch.  
Conservation Area fees apply:  
\$7.50 per person. Contact Jenn Bock  
at [outdoorprogs@natureguelph.ca](mailto:outdoorprogs@natureguelph.ca).*

### December 3, 8:00 am–4:00 pm Gulling the Niagara River David Brewer, Gull Expert

*Carpool from Wild Birds Unlimited  
(951 Gordon St., Guelph) at 8:00 am  
OR meet at Queen's Royal Park,  
Niagara-on-the-Lake (the locked  
washrooms) at about 10:00 am.*

## NATURE GUELPH WILDFLOWER SOCIETY

**November 15, 7:30–9:00 pm  
Goldenrods of the World:  
So Many Species, So Confusing**  
*Dr. John Semple, Professor Emeritus,  
University of Waterloo*

**December 20, 7:30–9:00 pm  
Members' Night**  
Members will share their pictures and seasonal treats

*John McCrae Public School Library,  
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Fx [519] 638-1124  
[info@grandmorainegrowers.ca](mailto:info@grandmorainegrowers.ca)

# Christmas Bird Count Almost Here



## Nature Guelph joins *rare*sites initiative

Funded by The Gosling Foundation, *rare*sites is developing a land securement strategy for the *rare* Charitable Research Reserve to identify, acquire or otherwise protect as conservation lands ecologically important areas in the region. Once the land securement strategy is in place, *rare*sites will advise on potential land acquisitions and assist in the process.

One idea about such acquisition is crowd-based funding as exemplified by *rare*'s effort to finish paying for their Cambridge lands: [www.turnthemapgreen.ca](http://www.turnthemapgreen.ca).

*rare*sites is an initiative of the *rare* Charitable Research Reserve to promote community-driven land securement in the Grand River watershed. John Prescott has agreed to be Nature Guelph's representative to *rare*sites, which is already assessing various properties in the region.

Every December, people all over the world participate in a citizen science project called the Christmas Bird Count (CBC). The Guelph count takes place in a 24 km diameter circle around the city, and is divided into sections. Birders go out in teams to identify and count as many birds as possible in a single day in their section, and results are compiled at a "tally rally" at the end of the day. The data is an important contribution to the knowledge of wintering bird populations and how they are changing over time.

Guelph's 51st count will take place on **Sunday, December 17, 2017**. People of all levels of experience are welcome to

participate. The CBC is a great way to participate in avian science, enjoy some team birding, and learn a little about the birds that spend their winters here in Guelph!

The CBC section of Nature Guelph's website ([www.natureguelph.ca/programs/guelph-christmas-bird-count/](http://www.natureguelph.ca/programs/guelph-christmas-bird-count/)) will be updated prior to December 1 to include contact information for the 2017 section leaders. If you are interested in joining a specific team, contact the leader of that section. If you'd like to participate but don't have a specific team in mind, contact the count coordinator Mike Cadman at [Mike.Cadman@Canada.ca](mailto:Mike.Cadman@Canada.ca). ●

## NATURE GUELPH EXECUTIVE TEAM

### President

Brett Forsyth  
[president@natureguelph.ca](mailto:president@natureguelph.ca)

### Past President

Jenn Bock  
[pastpresident@natureguelph.ca](mailto:pastpresident@natureguelph.ca)

### Vice President

Judy Brisson  
[vicepresident@natureguelph.ca](mailto:vicepresident@natureguelph.ca)

### Secretary

Christine Bowen  
[secretary@natureguelph.ca](mailto:secretary@natureguelph.ca)

### Treasurer

Laura Rundle  
[treasurer@natureguelph.ca](mailto:treasurer@natureguelph.ca)

### Membership

Valerie Wyatt  
[membership@natureguelph.ca](mailto:membership@natureguelph.ca)

### Indoor Programs

Peter Kelly  
[indoorprogs@natureguelph.ca](mailto:indoorprogs@natureguelph.ca)

### Outdoor Programs

Jenn Bock  
[outdoorprogs@natureguelph.ca](mailto:outdoorprogs@natureguelph.ca)

### Youth Programs Coordinator

Allie Mayberry  
[youthprograms@natureguelph.ca](mailto:youthprograms@natureguelph.ca)

### Young Naturalists (NATs)

Ann Schletz  
[nats@natureguelph.ca](mailto:nats@natureguelph.ca)

### Communications

Randy Van Gerwen  
[communications@natureguelph.ca](mailto:communications@natureguelph.ca)

### Newsletter Editor

Sandra MacGregor  
[newsletter@natureguelph.ca](mailto:newsletter@natureguelph.ca)

### Publicity & Social Media

Denise Fell  
[publicity@natureguelph.ca](mailto:publicity@natureguelph.ca)

### Website

Kelley Jones  
[webmaster@natureguelph.ca](mailto:webmaster@natureguelph.ca)

### Conservation Coordinator

Marnie Benson  
[conservation@natureguelph.ca](mailto:conservation@natureguelph.ca)

### Volunteer Coordinator

Christine Bowen  
[volunteer@natureguelph.ca](mailto:volunteer@natureguelph.ca)

### Ontario Nature Rep

Calvin Dowling  
[onrep@natureguelph.ca](mailto:onrep@natureguelph.ca)

### University Community Liaison

Abigail Wiesner  
[uogliaison@natureguelph.ca](mailto:uogliaison@natureguelph.ca)

### Wildflower Society

Judy Brisson  
[judybrisson@rogers.com](mailto:judybrisson@rogers.com)



Nature Guelph  
P.O. Box 1401  
Guelph, Ontario N1H 6N8  
[www.natureguelph.ca](http://www.natureguelph.ca)

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### Nature Guelph News

Please submit all contributions for the next issue to Sandra MacGregor by email on or before Dec. 1, 2017.

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