

Nature Guelph News

May/June 2018

Heading North

Expanding Range of the
Red-bellied Woodpecker *p. 5*

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Spring is... Here?!

By Brett Forsyth, President, Nature Guelph

I hope that this newsletter finds you enjoying these first true flickers of spring. I know I am. Bluebirds, flickers, swallows and more have returned to my neighbourhood to let me know spring should be here to stay this time (though I am still waiting for my first warbler). But this crazy spring weather hasn't deterred the hardy membership of Nature Guelph. We have seen great attendance at our outdoor programs and speaker series. My sincere thanks to all of the members for being so dedicated and active.

It's been a couple of weeks since the Nature in the City kick-off event. Over

100 people attended – the vast majority were new to the club! Past President Jenn Bock and her fabulous team from Wild Ontario did a spectacular job educating and entertaining the crowd with their raptors show. And our first event of the series, Feathers and Beaks, was well attended over the weekend. If you know someone who is into nature but not a member, please encourage them to check out the next three Nature in the City events in May.

I would also like to encourage all of you to mark June 2nd on your calendars. We will be hosting a BioBlitz of the

Hanlon Creek Park area from 1:00–4:00 pm as part of the 2Rivers Festival. We will be using the iNaturalist app (www.inaturalist.org) to document our sightings so remember to install it ahead of time.

We also have an iNaturalist project that you can join to help us organize our sightings (www.inaturalist.org/projects/nature-guelph). A big shout out to c-elliott for being the first member of the project and for submitting 11 observations so far. We are still looking for volunteers for the BioBlitz so if you can help out, please let us know. ●

Nature Guelph Speaker Series

May 10, 7:30 pm – *Everyone welcome*
OAC Centennial Arboretum Centre,
University of Guelph

David reports on the successful restoration of a 95-acre former tobacco farm. After 10 years, the site now hosts a rich diversity of over 185 plant species of the rare Oak Savanna/Tallgrass Prairie ecosystem. Species of breeding birds have increased from 48 to 59 and the number of breeding pairs has increased threefold.

David Agro, Architect, Conservationist, Founding Member of Jocotoco Foundation, Ecuador

From Tobacco to Tallgrass

Restoring Ecological Diversity in Norfolk County

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Clair-Maltby: Conservation Call-to-Action

Contact the mayor and councillors to let them know that members of Nature Guelph do not support the recommended land use plan with its negative ecological and hydrological impacts.

The City of Guelph is completing Phase 2 of the Clair-Maltby Secondary Plan Study. The Study's current recommendation currently puts 40% of the natural area – comprising wetlands, woodlands, wildlife habitat, and groundwater recharge – at risk of significant negative impact. The study was intended to help Guelph plan the last greenfield area remaining within the city by establishing an appropriate range and mix of land use designations to support future urban growth.

The study area is over 520 hectares and is located in the southeast corner of Guelph. It's bounded by Clair Road to the north, Victoria Road to the

east, Maltby Road to the south and the eastern limits of the Southgate Business Park to the west.

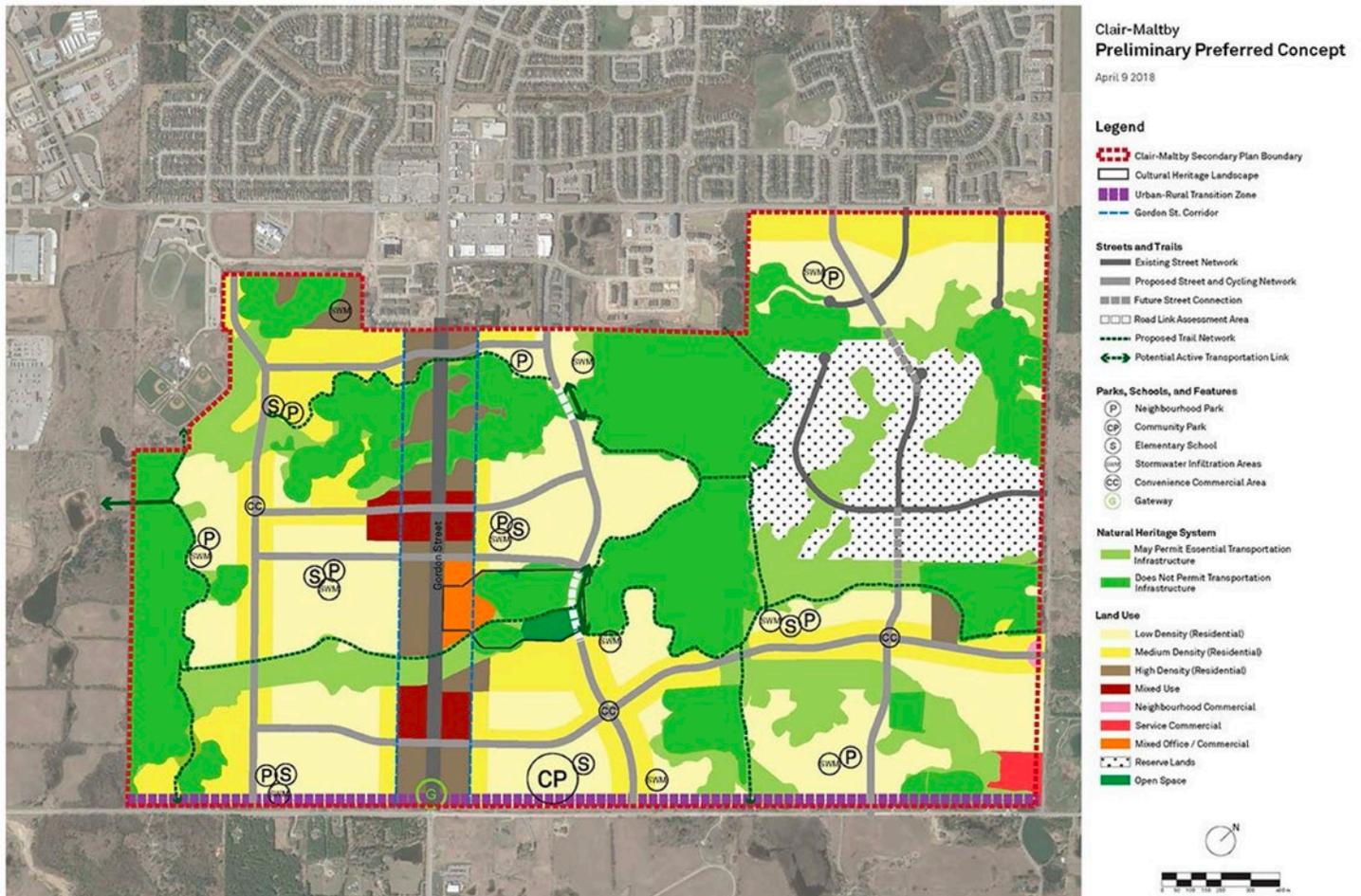
On Tuesday, April 3, City staff presented three varying land use alternatives to the public, ranging from Alternative 1, Featuring the Green (supporting approximately 10,000 new residents) through to Alternative 3, Connected and Urban (supporting approximately 21,000 new residents). The public's input was received through several hours of design charrette on April 3, 4 and 5. By Monday, April 9, City staff had finalized the recommended land use plan to represent the highest-

intensity Alternative 3, ignoring the priorities of Alternative 1 that were preferred and promoted by Nature Guelph in our comment letter.

This land use plan, once implemented, has the potential for very significant impact to the integrity of the wetlands, woodlands, wildlife habitat and groundwater recharge. The recommended land use plan is now under review by City Council, who will vote in late May whether to accept and move forward with it.

Contact the mayor and your Councillor (or all of them!) to let them know that members of Nature Guelph do not support the recommended land use plan with its very significant negative ecological and hydrological impacts! ●

For more information on the study: guelph.ca/plans-and-strategies/clair-maltby-secondary-plan/



Map Image: guelph.ca/plans-and-strategies/clair-maltby-secondary-plan/

Nature in the City: Beaks and Feathers Walk

By Judy Brisson

We had a very successful Beaks and Feathers Walk on April 29th. 26 people walked along the Eramosa River on a cool but sunny Sunday afternoon to learn about birding.

We spotted a Northern Harrier, Barn and Cliff Swallows, Mallards, a Cardinal, a Grackle, several Red-Winged Blackbirds, Canada Geese and an Osprey returning to its nest. The Osprey nest in a tree high above the river was the highlight of the walk. We also spotted a pike and water striders in the river shallows, and a derelict bird house.

Our guide Cameron talked about the lives of some of the birds, showing a Goldenrod gall used for food, and nesting sites along the river bank. ●



2018 GRCF Scholarships

The Grand River Conservation Foundation is offering two scholarships to help post-secondary students in the Grand River watershed region prepare for a career in an environmental field.

- The SC Johnson Environmental Scholarship (\$4,000) helps a university or college student continue studies in a conservation or environmental field.
- The McEwen Clean Water Prize (\$3,000) is for an undergrad or graduate student with a strong interest in protecting, developing and restoring clean water resources.

Details and applications can be downloaded from the Foundation website.

APPLY NOW!

Deadline for submissions is **May 31, 2018.**

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Branching out

Range Expansion of the Red-bellied Woodpecker

By W. D. McIlveen

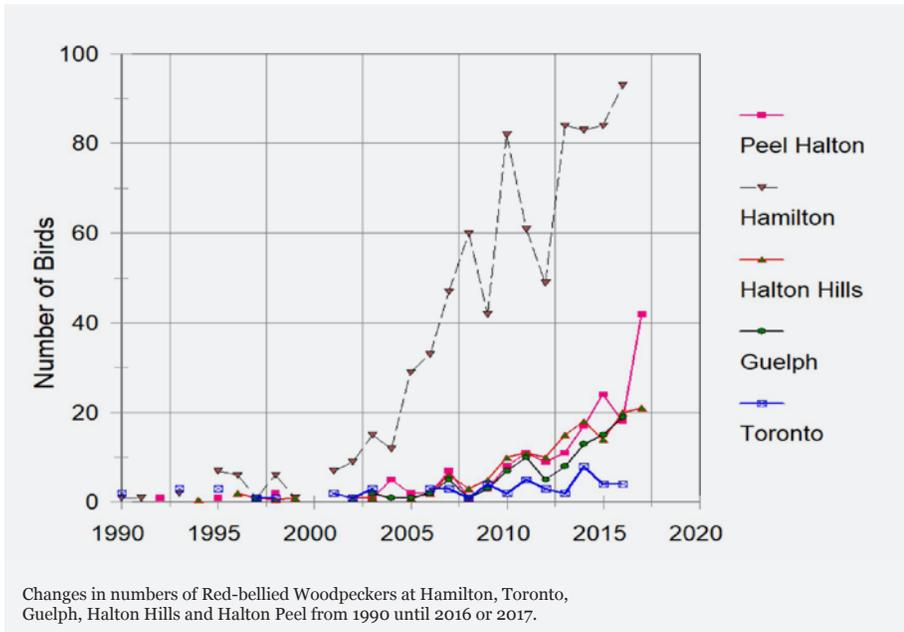
Most local birders are well-aware of the Red-bellied Woodpecker as a species they can find with some regularity in both urban and rural woodlots. The species is charismatic in physical appearance, is easy to detect due to its call, and is a regular visitor to feeding stations where it can be observed often without even having to step outside. Birders are also very aware that the encounters with this species have greatly increased over the past 20 years.

The species was reported at Hamilton by McIlwraith as early as 1860 [Curry] where it was listed as 'rare.' The Red-bellied Woodpecker was listed as 'tolerably common' in the London area prior to 1894 by McIlwraith [1894]. He also stated that stragglers have been reported as far north as Toronto and Hamilton but not at points further north.

Similarly, Farley [1891] also reported the species as 'tolerably common' in Elgin County in 1891. Baillie and Harrington [1937] considered the species to have been more widespread with nesting as far as Halton and Wellington. It is absent from the many bird records compiled for Peel County prior to 1936 [Bull]. George North apparently never encountered the

species at Hamilton during the 1930s or 1940s [Curry, 2006]. It was not noted again there until 1957. After 1964, the species was encountered annually in Hamilton. It was first recorded in Rattray Marsh in 1987 [McIlveen, 2018] but was missing from the list of bird species compiled for that conservation area by Newell [1990] in 1990.

The Ontario Nest Records Scheme [Peck and James] only had nine records with nest contents for four nests in Ontario up to 1983. Those records were from Essex, Lambton, Middlesex, Elgin, and Niagara. They described the Red-bellied Woodpecker as a "rare, local, permanent resident of extreme southwest Ontario." This same assessment was used by James *et al.* [1976] but they acknowledged that the range may have extended



as far as Halton. Spiers [1985] listed the Red-bellied Woodpecker as “rare in Ontario except in the extreme southwestern portion” but did cite miscellaneous observations of the species at various parts of Ontario. The first breeding record for Niagara comes from Beardslee and Mitchell [1965].

A comparison of the breeding records for the Red-bellied Woodpecker in the first and second breeding bird atlases [Cadman *et al.*] clearly illustrates a tremendous increase in the numbers of breeding birds over the 20-year interval between the atlas projects. The greatest density of breeding remains south of a line from Goderich to Toronto.

The species did not appear on the Christmas Count at Hamilton until 1979 [Curry]. Christmas Count records from 1990 until the present for the Red-bellied Woodpecker in Hamilton, Toronto, Guelph, Halton Hills and Halton Peel were obtained and compiled. The graph above clearly shows an increase in numbers at four of the sites over that period of time. The number of birds at Hamilton is the highest, reaching a total of 93 birds in 2016. The patterns for Guelph, Halton Hills and Halton Peel are quite similar. The 2017 counts for Halton Hills and Halton Peel are included with new high numbers of 21 and 42 respectively. The counts at Toronto have produced low numbers each year but it’s difficult to conclude that the populations there

have increased. Suitable habitat is likely limited in such an urban area. The data suggests a decreasing gradient in populations from south to north.

The reason for the observed range expansion is unclear. In part, the population increase shows the species to be reclaiming part of its former range in Ontario. The expansion, however, is not extending far beyond its former range. Prior to the 1940s, the species appeared to follow Bergmann’s Rule (i.e. larger bodied individuals in the northern part of the range) [Kirchman and Schneider]. Body size relationships do not follow that rule after the range expansion

continued. Slightly milder winters starting in the 1950s may have released some of the temperature constraints for the species. With even milder climates in more recent decades, the expansion could continue. It’s possible that climate warming may have had some role. It has been suggested that increased competition on the more traditional home range has forced some birds to move further afield. Red-bellied Woodpeckers are eager to visit suet feeders and, with the advent of suet cakes for feeders, this has encouraged wintering over larger areas. Declines in the populations of Red-headed Woodpeckers may have provided additional habitat opportunities for the Red-bellied Woodpecker. The deaths of certain tree species, such as the American elm through the late 1960s and 1970s may have provided more nesting and feeding opportunities. More-recent pest infestations (e.g., Emerald Ash Borer) may have provided additional opportunities for the Red-bellied Woodpecker though this is a relatively recent phenomenon. The woodpecker range expansion appears to be occurring prior to, and at a rate faster than, the spread of the insect pest on ashes or diseases and other insect pests on other tree species.

In time, the cause or causes of the range expansion may become clearer, but for now naturalists can enjoy the company of this species at home or on walks in the woods. ●

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Upcoming Events

NATURE GUELPH MEETINGS & SPEAKER SERIES

May 10, 7:30–9:00 pm
**From Tobacco to Tallgrass:
Restoring Ecological Diversity
in Norfolk County**

*David Agro, Architect and
Conservationist, Founding Member of
the Jocotoco Foundation in Ecuador*

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.

Non-members are welcome at this free event. Goodwill donations gratefully accepted. Snacks and coffee available for a nominal fee.

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

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

June 14, 6:30–9:00 pm
**Outdoor Spring Picnic with
Sciensational Sssnakes!**

All are invited to picnic together at St. Brigid's Villa on the beautiful grounds of the Ignatius Jesuit Centre. Sciensational Sssnakes will be providing hands-on education about reptiles and amphibians.

This is a family-friendly event. Bring your own food, dishes and cutlery. Full kitchen on site. Please note the Ignatius Jesuit Centre is a bottled-water free area.

*St. Brigid's Villa, Ignatius Jesuit Centre
of Guelph, 5420 Hwy. 6 North*

NATURE GUELPH OUTDOOR EVENTS

May 26, 1:00 pm
**Walk the Land:
The Marcolongo Farm**

Join Tullia Macrolongo for an on-site perspective of the Clair-Maltby Secondary Plan proposals, with a focus on the importance of preserving our natural and cultural heritage.

2162 Gordon St. Meet at the white barn.

NATURE GUELPH WILDFLOWER SOCIETY

May 16, 6:30 pm
Spring Wildflower Walk

Meet at The Arboretum Centre parking lot for a walk through Victoria Woods.

May 26, 9:00 am–2:00 pm
Annual Native Plant Sale

In partnership with Guelph Enabling Garden and Guelph Wellington Master Gardeners

Drop off your labelled donated plants between 3:00–8:00 pm Friday, May 25 or bring them to the sale on Saturday.

*Guelph Water Works,
20 Water Works Place (off York Rd.)*

June 16, 2:00 pm
Potting On: Seed Workshop Part 2
10 Hartwood Court, Guelph

June 20, 6:30 pm
Guelph Great Trees Walk
To carpool, meet at Brisson, Leis and Associates parking lot, 21 College Ave. W.

NATURE GUELPH NATURE IN THE CITY

May 12, 1:00–2:00 pm
Roots and Shoots – Talk
Wildflowers with Curious Names

Guelph Public Library, 100 Norfolk St.

May 13, 1:00 pm
Roots and Shoots – Walk
Wildflower Hike at Starkey Hill

*Meet at Starkey Hill parking lot,
735 Arkeil Road.*

May 26, 1:00–2:00 pm
Fur and Claws – Talk
Mysterious Mammals in our Backyards

Guelph Public Library, 100 Norfolk St.

May 27, 1:00 pm
Fur and Claws – Walk
Mammal Search at The Arboretum

Meet at The Arboretum Centre.

Visit natureguelph.ca for event updates.



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Cherry Birch *Betula lenta*



One of the rare trees we identified on the February 4 Outdoor Program was *Betula lenta*, Cherry Birch. Cherry Birch is a unique birch in that it has smooth bark without curling edges. The bark is dark brownish red with lenticels, resembling the bark of Sweet Cherry, which gives it its common name. Leaves are oval with a pointed tip and fine teeth. The tree grows to 20 metres and can live up to 200 years.

Known from only two sites in Canada, both near St Catherine's, Cherry Birch is

endangered in Ontario and facing extirpation due to habitat loss from residential development and shoreline erosion. There were 50 individual mature trees in 1967, with only four trees remaining today in a forested area on private land. A number of saplings grown from seed collected on site have been planted nearby but their numbers have been reduced by herbivore predation. Cherry Birch is at the northern extent of its range in Ontario and is a widespread tree in the eastern United States, ranging from Maine to Alabama. The closest population to the Ontario trees is about 70 km away in eastern New York state.

The existing wild population is not reproducing naturally; the reasons for this are not understood. Seed collected from the wild trees is readily germinated under nursery conditions. The Arboretum often has the plant for sale at its annual sale and there are, no doubt, a number of garden grown specimens in Guelph. There is a Recovery Plan for the tree which may involve planting nursery grown saplings from wild collected seed into historical habitat.

Cherry Birch closely resembles Yellow Birch, *Betula alleghaniensis*.

2018 Plant Watch

Spring arrived late so you still have time to record first flowering dates for Plant Watch. Species on the watch list for Guelph include Lilac, Dandelion, Trillium, Red Maple, Chokecherry and Larch.

The Plant Watch program enables citizen scientists to get involved by recording flowering times for selected plant species and reporting these dates to researchers, who work to identify ecological changes that may be affecting our environment. When you submit your data it is added to a Web map showing bloom dates across Canada.

www.naturewatch.ca/plantwatch/ontario/

Both species have reddish brown bark when young, with yellow birch bark maturing to a golden yellow with age. Both species have twigs that smell of wintergreen when broken, with Cherry Birch having a stronger fragrance. Cherry birch buds are hairless and diverge out from the twig, Yellow birch buds are hairy and pressed up close to the twig. ●

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Nature Guelph News

Please submit all contributions for the next issue to Sandra MacGregor by email on or before June 15, 2018.

Thank you to all our contributors.

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Please email Randy Van Gerwen at communications@natureguelph.ca if you wish to publish nature-related ads in this newsletter.

2018

Nature in the City

A series of family-friendly talks and walks

FREE indoor talks at the **Guelph Public Library** followed by **FREE** guided outdoor walks. Join us inside, outside or BOTH!

KICK-OFF – Sun. April 22, 1:00 pm

Opening presentation followed by **Wild Ontario** raptor demonstration at The Arboretum Centre

Feathers and Beaks

Identifying, understanding and attracting some of our favourite local feathered friends!

TALK: Sat. April 28, 1:00 pm (Main Library)

WALK: Sun. April 29, 1:00 pm

Birdwatching along the Eramosa River Trail
Meet at Wooden Covered Bridge near The Boathouse

Slime and Scales

What lives under rocks, in the mud or in the water? Discover our reptiles and amphibians!

TALK: Sat. May 5, 1:00 pm (Westminster Library)

WALK: Sun. May 6, 7:00 pm

Evening Frog Walk at The Arboretum
Meet at west entrance info kiosk on Arboretum Road

Roots and Shoots

Learn about Jack-in-the-Pulpit, Bloodroot and Squirrel Corn – wildflowers with curious names.

TALK: Sat. May 12, 1:00 pm (Main Library)

WALK: Sun. May 13, 1:00 pm

Wildflower Hike at Starkey Hill
Meet at Starkey Hill parking lot, 735 Arkeil Road

Fur and Claws

What mysterious mammals are hiding in our backyards?

TALK: Sat. May 26, 1:00 pm (Main Library)

WALK: Sun. May 27, 1:00 pm

Mammal Search at The Arboretum
Meet at The Arboretum Centre

BIOBLITZ – Sat. June 2, 1:00 pm

Hanlon Creek Park and Preservation Park
Meet at Hanlon Creek Park parking lot, 505 Kortright Road W., Guelph

For full program details:
natureguelph.ca or info@natureguelph.ca



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