

# Nature Guelph News

March/April 2019

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# Ready for Spring

By Brett Forsyth, President, Nature Guelph

What a winter! More cloudy days than Vancouver, extreme cold warnings, extreme wind warnings... it seems to be the new normal. As I write this under cold, clear skies and the promise of a 20°C temperature swing, I can feel spring just around the corner. My desire to take the kids to go find emerging salamanders, hear that first spring peeper and spot that first migrating warbler, grows by the second.

Your executive has also been hard at work preparing the Club's big spring events. March's seed workshop is just a few short weeks away and a nice way to start getting your hands in the soil again. Nature in the City events have been set (see details in this issue). We are excited to have *Sciensational Ssnakes!* kicking things off this year – and we will return to Preservation Park and Hanlon Creek for a species scavenger hunt (and maybe watch me “noodle” catfish out of the creek). I hope to see you out there. ●



## Annual General Meeting Saturday, June 2, 3:30 p.m.

Join us for a weekend reunion in Hamilton to celebrate 88 incredible years of protecting wild species and wild spaces in Ontario. We will also be celebrating the Hamilton Naturalists' Club's 100th anniversary! [ontarionature.org/events/annual-gathering/](http://ontarionature.org/events/annual-gathering/)

Dr. Martyn Obbard, Emeritus Research Scientist, Adjunct Professor

# Climate Change, Ice and Polar Bears

## Nature Guelph Speaker Series

March 14, 7:30 pm – *Everyone welcome*  
OAC Centennial Arboretum Centre,  
University of Guelph

Dr. Obbard will explore the evidence for effects of climate change on polar bears and address the question “Is there a tipping point for polar bears?”



Photos: (Cover) Nancy Schmidt; Courtesy: Martyn Obbard



# The Great Sandhill Crane Migration

by Nancy Schmidt

Every year from mid-February to the end of March 600,000 sandhill cranes – 80% of the world’s sandhill cranes – migrate through the central flyway zone near Kearney, Nebraska. Coming from their wintering grounds in Mexico, New Mexico and Texas, they stop along an 80 mile stretch of the central Platte River for four to six weeks fattening up on spent corn from the nearby fields and supplementing their omnivorous diet with seeds, insects, reptiles and amphibians.

During the day, the cranes rest, feed, groom, play, and dance in the fields and then in the evening converge on the sand bars of the braided Platte River which provides protection from predators. Here they spend the night until dawn when they take off to the area fields to continue to fatten up. As southerly winds start to blow in late March, the cranes will head to their breeding grounds in Siberia, Alaska and Canada.

## Sandhill Cranes on the Platte

There are 15 species of cranes in the world and only two are found in North America – sandhill cranes and whooping cranes. Of the sandhill cranes, there are six subspecies. Three – Florida, Mississippi and Cuban do not migrate. The remaining three that do are the lesser, greater and the Canadian – though there is debate on the Canadian sandhill crane as a distinct species since it overlaps with the lesser in some areas and the greater in other areas.

Most of the cranes that come through the central flyway are lesser cranes. At 3 to 3.5 feet tall, they are about one foot shorter than the greater and weigh 6–7 lbs., compared with the greater who weight 10–14 lbs. The Canadians are in between these two in height and weight. And the sandhill cranes that we see in Ontario? These are part of the Eastern population and breed in the Great Lakes region and winter in Florida and the southern parts of Georgia.

## Volunteering at the Rowe Audubon Center

Some 70,000 visitors from all over the world come to the Nebraska staging area to witness what is considered one of the world’s greatest migration spectacles. For five years, my husband and I would stop at the Iain Nicholson Audubon Center at Rowe Sanctuary for a few days to see the cranes from the viewing blinds situated along the Platte River. After the morning blind tour, we would cruise the area back roads to watch the cranes dance, socialize and play using our car as a blind. Binoculars and telephoto lens were required for the best viewing and photography experience.

I returned again in spring 2018, but this time I came as a volunteer instead of a visitor. In this capacity, I spent 10 days at Rowe guiding people to the blinds, greeting visitors, helping with education programs, and participating in a range of housekeeping and groundskeeping activities.

A typical morning would begin at 5:30 am where we would receive our blind assignment, help sort people into their groups, and take them out in the dark to one of three blinds, a quarter to a half mile away. Walking in the dark meant less possibility of spooking the cranes roosting by the thousands on the river. Excitement would build as the sun would start to hit the birds and they would become more animated and noisier. Soon they would take off in small family groups or sometimes even en masse to feed in the nearby cornfields. The sounds and sights of thousands of cranes peeling from the river left visitors spellbound. By 9 am we were usually back at the center looking forward to coffee and a chance to warm up since standing for 1.5 hours in a blind with open windows and a chilly north wind meant cold hands and feet.

Daytime was spent greeting visitors, staffing the gift shop, and providing a range of information about cranes (no, you cannot pet them, yes, they do mate for life) including the best locations to see them, and appropriate crane viewing etiquette from your car. For the evening viewing blinds, we walked to them in daylight and waited until dusk to watch the cranes return to the river from every direction, floating down to the sandbars by the thousands to roost for the night. We stayed until dark to exit so as not to disturb the birds.

My most memorable experience was working with Grade 3 students as they dug through somewhat frozen cow dung using knitting needles and chopsticks to simulate a crane's beak and feet to see



what could be found for the cranes to eat. To their delight, the students would uncover bugs, feathers, spent corn and other strange objects. They couldn't wait to go home to tell their family about playing with "cow poop"!

The volunteers come from all over the U.S., and many, like the cranes return year after year. Their passion was infectious. They became friends and mentors and I spent many hours learning from the veterans about cranes

and crane behaviour. The staff were equally supportive and most appreciative of our efforts. Like many of the other volunteers, I will be returning again this spring. In particular, I want to focus on learning more about their social body language and dances, understanding the differences between a jump-rake, run-flop, ground-stab and the stab-grab-wave. I am well on my way to becoming a "craniac!" ●

**Guelph Lake Nature Centre**

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# Eramosa River Conservation Corridor Update

## Completion of *raresites* Land Purchase Imminent

By John Prescott, Nature Guelph *raresites* Representative

*raresites* has now raised over \$850,000 for the 87-acre property, with a completed purchase expected by end of February. This sum is the purchase price plus nearly half of the projected stewardship funds. Fundraising by Nature Guelph for matching funds is ongoing. With the generous support of members, we have a match for \$5,450 so far. Pollination Guelph has donated \$1,000 since some of the agricultural land will be planted with pollinator-friendly seeds to

support Bobolink habitat as an “offset” for land being developed elsewhere, part of the Endangered Species Act process.

We would like to make a cheque handover of the full \$10,000 match at the May 14th Annual General Meeting, which Stephanie Sobek-Swant, *rare*'s Executive Director, will attend, so please be generous. A tour of the property for Nature Guelph will be arranged for Nature Guelph in the summer. ●



Judy Brisson and John Prescott from Nature Guelph present cheques for \$12,000 to Stephanie Sobek-Swant, *rare* Charitable Reserve Trust. Flanked by Christine Thompson (left) and Tom Woodcock (right) from *rare*.

### Support the Eramosa River Conservation Corridor. *Every dollar counts.*

A contribution of any size means you will be making a significant difference to the health and beauty of our area – forever. A charitable tax receipt is available, and *rare* is even able to accept gifts of stocks. Donations to date amount to **\$5,450** which will be matched 1:1.

Donations can be made either by giving or sending a cheque to:

#### Nature Guelph

Laura Rundle, Treasurer  
P.O. Box 1401, Guelph, ON N1H 6N8

– or –

#### CanadaHelps.org

To donate through Canada Helps, search on their website for Nature Guelph, then under “Donate now” apply the donation to the “*raresites* Eramosa conservation land acquisition” in the drop-down menu.

Depending on how you donate, Nature Guelph or the Canada Helps website site will issue a tax receipt.

## Join Nature Guelph! Sept. 2018 – Aug. 2019 Annual Membership

**Choose One:**  New Member  Renewal  Update

**Fill Out Your Personal Information:**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Postal Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

I authorize Nature Guelph to communicate with me by email. (Required)

Yes  No Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to volunteer! (How would you like to contribute?)

**Select Your Membership:**

<input type="radio"/> Individual (\$25)	\$
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<input type="radio"/> Full-Time Student (\$10)	\$
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**Optional:**

<input type="radio"/> Newsletter printed, mailed (\$10)	\$
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<input type="radio"/> Donation <i>Tax receipt issued for amounts over \$10, not including membership fee</i>	\$
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<b>Calculate Your Total:</b>	<b>\$</b>
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**Choose Your Payment Method:**

Cash  Cheque payable to *Nature Guelph*

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

# Upcoming Events

## NATURE GUELPH MEETINGS & SPEAKER SERIES

**March 14, 7:30–9:00 pm**

### **Climate Change, Ice and Polar Bears**

*Dr. Martyn Obbard,  
Emeritus Research Scientist*

**April 11, 7:30–9:00 pm**

### **Eat, Prey, Love:**

### **The Secret Lives of Spiders**

*Catherine Scott,  
Behavioural Ecologist, Arachnologist*

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. Please bring your own coffee mug.

*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.*

## NATURE GUELPH OUTDOOR EVENTS

**March 10, 10:00 am–3:00 pm**

### **Mountsberg Conservation Area: Birds of Prey and Pancakes**

*Kyle Horner*

March can be a slow month for birding, so it never hurts to stack the deck! Join birder Kyle Horner on a trip to Mountsberg to see the residents of the Raptor Centre, take in a presentation

and visit Maple Town. We'll explore the woods and reservoir for wild birds too, so don't forget your binoculars.

*To carpool, meet at Wild Birds Unlimited, 951 Gordon St., at 10:00 am. Bring your binoculars and scopes. There will be an admission fee of \$7.75 and you'll need a little cash if you want pancakes. This event is kid-friendly but will involve some hiking on trails. This event is NOT dog-friendly.*

**March 24, 7:00 am–4:00 pm**

### **Birding Aylmer Wildlife Management Area and Long Point for Tundra Swans and Early Migrants**

*Larry Staniforth*

Every spring, Tundra Swans arrive in Southern Ontario on their migration to their far north breeding grounds. The Aylmer WMA is one of the more popular stops along their way. We will visit the site which has both indoor and outdoor viewing platforms to enjoy this spectacle.

After Aylmer, we will travel to the Long Point area where we may see many more Swans and possibly Sandhill Cranes which also migrate at this time. Depending on ice conditions, large numbers of waterfowl may also be present.

*To carpool, meet at Wild Birds Unlimited, 951 Gordon St., at 7:00 am. Bring refreshments. We will be stopping for lunch at a local restaurant along the way. This event is kid-friendly, but will involve a long day. This event is NOT dog-friendly.*

**May 5, 7:00 am–4:00 pm**

### **Haldimand Bird Observatory at Ruthven Park, Cayuga**

*Larry Staniforth*

*To carpool, meet at Wild Birds Unlimited, 951 Gordon St., at 7:00 am. Bring refreshments. We will be stopping for lunch at a local restaurant along the way. Please consider making a donation at the banding station. This event is kid-friendly but will involve some hiking on trails. This event is NOT dog-friendly.*

## NATURE GUELPH WILDFLOWER SOCIETY

**March 20, 7:30 pm**

### **Annual Seed Workshop**

Take home a tray planted with native plant species; propagation and growing on instructions included. Free for Nature Guelph members. \$25 for others.

*University of Guelph Potting Shed  
Go west on the South Ring Rd. from Gordon St. Park in the lot numbered P 59 on your left at the end of the road. The Potting Shed is a small building to the right of the Biodiversity Centre.*

**April 17, 7:30 pm**

### **Fungi, Friend and Foe**

*Kyle McLoughlin, Arborist*

*John McCrae Public School Library,  
189 Water St., Guelph*

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



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2019

# Nature in the City

## FREE Family-Friendly Talks & Walks

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

At every Talk and Walk, collect Nature Guelph buttons and earn an entry into a draw to win a field guide.

## Kick-Off Event

**Sun. April 14, 1:30 pm**

Opening presentation at The Arboretum Centre followed by a **Sciensational Sssnakes** demonstration at 2:00 pm!

## Roots & Shoots

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

**TALK: Sat. May 11, 1:00 pm**

**WALK: Sun. May 12, 1:00 pm**

Wildflower Hike at Starkey Hill

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

## Slime & Scales

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

**TALK: Sat. April 27, 1:00 pm**

**WALK: Sun. April 28, 7:00 pm**

Evening Frog Walk at The Arboretum

*Meet at west entrance info kiosk on Arboretum Road*

## Fins & Shells

What aquatic insects, fish and crustaceans live in the Eramosa and Speed Rivers?

**TALK: Sat. May 25, 1:00 pm**

**WALK: Sun. May 26, 1:00 pm**

Eramosa River Aquatic Search

*Meet at Barber Scout Camp entrance, 733 Stone Rd. E.*

## Feathers & Beaks

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

**TALK: Sat. May 4, 1:00 pm**

**WALK: Sun. May 5, 1:00 pm**

Birdwatching along the Eramosa River Trail

*Meet at Wooden Covered Bridge near The Boathouse*

## Scavenger Hunt

Explore Preservation Park and Hanlon Creek to find as many species as you can.

**Sat. June 2, 1:00 pm**

*Meet at Preservation Park entrance, 505 Kortright Road W.*

*Park across the road in Hanlon Creek Park.*

For full program details:  
[natureguelph.ca](http://natureguelph.ca) or [info@natureguelph.ca](mailto:info@natureguelph.ca)



Guelph Public Library  
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## 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Pollination Symposium

Local Actions and Partnerships for Pollinators – Bee Part of Our Community!

Saturday, March 9, 2019  
Guelph Curling Club,  
816 Woolwich Street, Guelph

[pollinationguelph.ca/  
pollination-symposium](http://pollinationguelph.ca/pollination-symposium)

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## ROM Special Offer for Nature Guelph Members

ROM is offering Nature Guelph an exclusive 20% discount to experience Wildlife Photographer of the Year and other ROM exhibitions.

**To save 20% off regular rates, purchase your tickets online at [www.rom.on.ca](http://www.rom.on.ca) and use the promo code: WILDLIFE18**

In addition, the ROM Wildlife Photographer of the Year contest returns for a fourth year! Share your captivating images of the natural world for a chance to win a G Adventures 14-Day Experience Borneo tour, a Digital SLR camera courtesy of Henry's Camera, and have your photograph prominently displayed in the ROM's Wildlife Photographer of the Year exhibition.

Nature Guelph is grateful for the loyalty of our advertisers and thank our members for supporting them.

## Stay informed with Nature Network News

Stay up to date with happenings in the naturalist community. This monthly electronic newsletter features informative articles about conservation issues throughout Ontario and a listing of events hosted by Nature Network member groups. It is offered free of charge to all nature lovers and members of Nature Network groups who want to be part of an informed naturalist community. Visit [ontarionature.org/about/nature-network/](http://ontarionature.org/about/nature-network/) to sign up today.

Check out Nature Guelph's active Facebook community: [facebook.com/natureguelph](https://facebook.com/natureguelph)

## Call for Volunteers

Nature Guelph is looking for an **Outdoor Programs Coordinator** to help organize our outdoor events.

Please email Christine Bowen, Volunteer Coordinator at [volunteer@natureguelph.ca](mailto:volunteer@natureguelph.ca)

### NATURE GUELPH EXECUTIVE TEAM

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Nature Guelph News  
Please submit all contributions for the next issue to Sandra MacGregor by email on or before April 8, 2019.

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