25th Anniversary • 1986-2011

LONG POINT WORLD BIOSPHERE RESERVE

MAB UNESCO

WHEN NATURE CALLS
Environmental Education

Spring 2011

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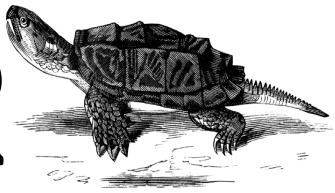
The SNAPPER



Mission Statement:
The Long Point World Biosphere Reserve Foundation is dedicated to conserving biodiversity, promoting sustainable communities, and partnering in research, monitoring, outreach and education.

Inside this issue:

Poison Ivy and CO2!

According to the *Wall Street Journal*, research published in *Weed Science* indicates that poison ivy has gotten MUCH nastier since the 1950's. Leaf size and nasty oil content are way up.

So it is not your imagination that it is worse than when you or your parents were kids. Seems like a minor problem, all in all, considering the possible consequences of a 33% increase in CO2 in only 50 years. Since poison ivy absorbs more than its share of CO2, it is helping combat climate change. So there IS something to love about this plant.

However, getting the rash is no laughing matter and can cause serious health problems. Check out http://poison-ivy.org/ to learn how to identify and deal with poison ivy safely.

It hurts to be blue: Karner Blues, Wild Lupines and Habitat Loss

By Bernie Solymár

Butterflies are important gauges of environmental change. As many other species of insects, they are sensitive to changes in climate and micro-climate, atmospheric changes and biotic changes. In part this can be explained due to the high degree of specialization in many butterfly species and their dependence on obligate host plants - examples include the Monarch butterfly and milkweed, the Red Admiral butterfly and nettles, or the Regal Fritillary butterfly and violets.

In nature, change happens naturally (forest or meadow succession) and artificially (man-made changes). Natural changes, whether climactic or biotic, are often gradual and can take hundreds of years to occur. Species of insects are often able to cope and adapt with these types of changes. However, clearing of natural habitat for farming (a large scale occurrence 150 years ago as European settlers clear-cut much of southern Ontario's forests and converted tallgrass prairie into farm fields), urban development, and introduction of exotic species (competitors) often has catastrophic results on native insect populations.

Wild Lupine *(Photo by B.ernie Solymár)*

The Karner Blue butterfly is an excellent example of how changes to the landscape of the Great Lakes region have negatively impacted this unique little powder-blue butterfly. Only the size of a quarter, the Karner Blue's larva feeds solely on wild lupine, associated with oak-savannah, a habitat dominated by drought-resistant prairie plants and widely-spaced oak trees. Historically, the Karner Blue occurred along a narrow geographic region from Minnesota, across portions of the mid-west, Pennsylvania, New York and north to Ontario. The butterfly has declined throughout its range and is now *extirpated* from Ontario, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania and Illinois, and *endangered* in most other parts of its natural range.

The disappearance of Karner Blue butterflies is directly linked to the disappearance of wild lupines, which, in turn, is intricately linked to the disappearance of the oak savannah habitat it flourishes on. This has occurred due to agriculture and development, but also due to the lack of wild fire. Fires were historically a natural phenomenon in prairies and oak-savannah, generally initiated by lightening strikes. This type of event was a harbinger of renewal, diversity and helped prevent encroachment of shrubs and other successional vegetation. Ash created by fire was also a rich and vital source of essential nutrients for wild lupine and other prairie/savannah plants.

Karner Blue *(Photo courtesy of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources Division of Wildlife.)*

The link between species and habitat is critical in understanding and responding to the recovery efforts for any species. In many states, and in Ontario, Recovery Teams have been formed to try to bring back the Karner Blue butterfly to its historical range and numbers. To do this wild lupines and oak-savannah must be restored and conserved as well - an extremely complex task for sure. And why is this important? Why should we care about a small butterfly no larger than a postage stamp? Because the Karner Blue is an important indicator of healthy oak-savannah habitat....and healthy habitats are not only critical for wildlife, but for humans too!

Spring Awakening: Searching for Salamanders and Frogs

By Bernie Solymár

Every April the Norfolk Field Naturalists, in partnership with the Long Point Region Conservation Authority, offer an Amazing Amphibians hike in Backus Woods. The event starts with a short PowerPoint presentation on frogs and salamanders that might be encountered in the woods – accompanied by sound bytes of frog song for each species. Then participants head into the woods to listen for and identify frog species, and look for salamanders under logs.

This year's hike was held on Saturday, April 16th. After a rainy, windy day the skies cleared about an hour before the event, and the wind died down long enough to have a nice walk in Backus Woods. About 30 people, including lots of youngsters, attended. Due to the cool evening temperatures frogs were not calling – except for an odd Chorus Frog. Its song sounds very much like running your thumb over the teeth of a comb. Other frogs that were calling several days earlier but were silent on Saturday night are Spring Peepers ("peep, peep") and Wood Frogs (sound like a duck quacking). When you think about the fact that these 3 frog species overwinter under leaf litter and logs, and their bodies actually freeze solid, it's amazing to think that they become active in the spring and start calling before all the ice is even off the woodland ponds!

Although frogs were scarce, it was a very fruitful evening for finding salamanders – including Yellow Spotted, Blue Spotted/ Jefferson Salamanders, Red Backed Salamanders and even an Eastern Newt – which is quite rare in Backus Woods! Naturalist Steve Wilcox also found Yellow-spotted and Jefferson egg masses which were a hit, especially with the kids in attendance.

Like frogs, salamanders become active very early in the spring, well before even the first hardy hepaticas, trout lilies and trilliums emerge from the soil. For species like Yellow Spotted, Blue Spotted and Jefferson Salamanders (collectively known as mole salamanders) a warm couple of days and some rain will draw them from their underground burrows to the surface. From there they proceed en masse to nearby pools, where they frantically mate in large tangles of swirling salamander bodies. For those that have gone out in the middle of the night with strong flash lights it is an amazing sight to behold. When re-visiting the ponds 2 to 3 days later there is no evidence of any salamanders (they've all returned to the woods), but on underwater twigs and branches there are masses upon masses of salamander eggs contained in special jelly-like coverings. Depending on temperature these will hatch in 2 to 3 weeks into aquatic "larvae" with gills. These larvae feed on insects, worms and copepods for several months before leaving the water as adults in late summer, now with fully developed lungs.

Salamander egg mass

Photo by Bernie Solymár

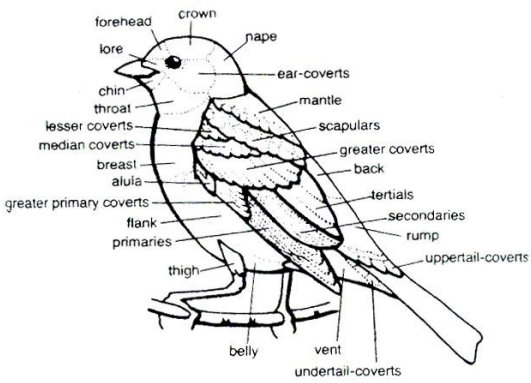
After spending an hour in the woods, and with darkness approaching (and some rapidly tiring children), a satisfied group made their way back to their cars. Those last to leave were treated to the sounds of American Woodcocks ("bbbzzzzpppp") in the adjacent Charles Sauriol Tract. What a great finish to a great evening!

How to identify birds

There are almost 1,000 species of birds in North America and ten times that many around the world, so how can one tell one from another? Birding is one of the fastest growing hobbies in North America and is a relatively inexpensive hobby in which to get started. The only equipment that is required is a pair of binoculars and a bird guide.

Most of us know what a Robin, a Mallard, a Canada Goose or a Bald Eagles looks like. But what about that new bird that appeared at the feeder this week that was black and white with a red bib*? How do you determine what it is?

Here are some tips to help identify different bird species. Use the diagram at left to learn about the parts of the bird's body that the guides use to describe a bird.



When you see a new bird, the first thing to note is its size. "Is it as big as a sparrow, a robin, a pigeon, a chicken or an ostrich? Is the bird fat or skinny, long or short. Look at each part of the bird. Is its bill short or long, thick or thin, curved or straight? How about the tail? What shape is it? Is it forked? Are the bird's wings pointed or curved, long or short?

Then check the bird's colours, which can be tricky depending on the time of day. A bird's colors look different when the bird is at the top of a tree at sunset than it does at noon. Check the color of each major body part. Sometimes just the color of a bird's legs can help you tell one species from another. Also check to see if the bird has wing bars or an eye-ring or a patch of color on its rump.

Finally, look around you. Are you and the bird deep in a forest, on your lawn or 50 miles out at sea? Each bird likes a certain habitat. Habitat refers to things like plants and trees in the area, the elevation (are you in the mountains or at the shore?), the climate in the area and the type of water nearby. See if the bird is swimming or wading. Can the bird climb trees? Does it wag its tail a lot? When it flies, does it go straight or up and down like a baby roller coaster?

Here is one final secret you need to know. Really good birders can "see" more birds with their eyes closed than you and I can see with our eyes open! They know the songs a bird sings. Even one chip note might tell them a bird called a Rose-breasted Grosbeak is hiding in the bushes. What we need to learn is... LISTEN ! A bird's song can tell you to START LOOKING FOR ME. Some birds such as rails and bitterns live deep in the swamp. You may never see them. But good birders can identify them just by hearing their call or their song.

For more birding identification tips, use the internet and google "how to identify birds."

* A Rose-breasted Grosbeak

Spring Nature Watch Checklist

Photos, unless otherwise noted, by Marg Werden

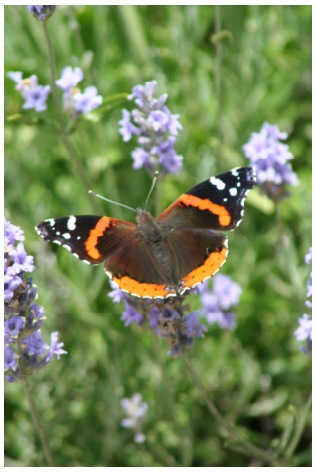
Photo by Bernie Solymár

SPOTTED SALAMANDER

The bright spots on this salamander serve as a warning to potential predators. Like most salamanders, the Spotted Salamander has toxins in its skin that discourage predators from eating it. Breeding occurs in early spring and is the easiest time to see this salamander. It lives mainly in the forested areas around ponds and is active mostly at night.

TURKEY VULTURE

The Turkey Vulture has a featherless red face and short, hooked, ivory-coloured bill. There is an important purpose to the vulture's bald head. When the vulture is eating carrion, a feathery head would capture unwanted pieces of the vulture's meal, along with all the bacteria such pieces would host. The bald head is therefore a matter of hygiene for vultures.



RED ADMIRAL BUTTERFLY

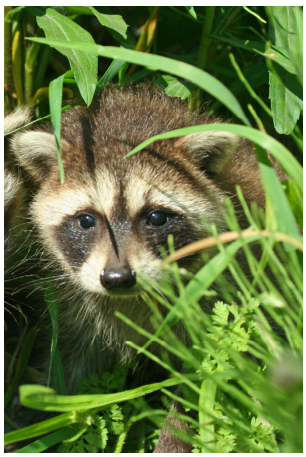
The Red Admiral butterfly is a common and widespread butterfly. The caterpillars feed on nettles. During migration, the Red Admiral can be found in a variety of habitats. Not all butterflies feed on nectar. The Red Admiral butterfly has decidedly peculiar tastes: they like rotting fruit and animal dung.

JACK-IN-THE-PULPIT

The Jack-in-the-pulpit, also known as “Indian Turnip,” is a hooded wildflower that is very unique. It has one “leaf” that creates a hood over “Jack”, the spadix. It resembles the old fashioned pulpits that were almost like small balconies that you can still find in a few churches today. In the fall it produces red berries that many wildlife love to eat.

FAMILIAR BLUET DAMSELFLY

This damselfly is one of 35 species of bluets known in North America. It perches horizontally on the ground, on logs, or on emergent vegetation. It plucks insect prey from the surface of vegetation in flight. Males make lengthy flights over open water, just above the surface, but females only appear at wetlands at breeding time.



NORTHERN RACCOON

Raccoons, also known as “masked bandits,” have become a nuisance in urban areas but in the wild they live in wetlands and damp woods. Although racoons will dabble in water for prey, they do NOT wash their food. Raccoons do not hibernate, but will stay in their dens for several days in bad weather. Young stay with their mothers for several months.

Weather Forecasting

Before the advent of computer models and satellite technology, predicting the weather was based on observing patterns and trends. For example, you can look up at the clouds and try to recognize telltale patterns as people did in the past. High, wispy clouds usually presage good weather. An overcast sky means rain or snow is on the way. Certain weather features seem to be associated with certain types of weather, at least most of the time.

Over the years, the observation of weather patterns has resulted in folk wisdom about the weather, a good deal of which is inaccurate, but some of which is supported by science. You've probably heard the expression, "Red skies in morning, sailor take warning; red skies at night, sailor's delight." A red Sun can presage rain, since it occurs when the air is full of dust and water vapour.

Here are some other weather rhymes:

· When the dew is on the grass, rain will never come to pass.

· When the grass is dray at morning light, look for rain before the night.

· When the wind is in the east, it’s good for neither man or beast.

· When the wind is in the north, the old folk should not venture forth.

· When the wind is in the south, it blows the bait in the fishes’ mouth.

· When the wind is in the west, it is of all the winds the best.

· Rain before seven, clear before eleven.

· A circle around the moon steams rain or snow coming soon.

· A storm that comes against the wind is always a thunderstorm.

· Swallows flying low is a sign of rain; high, of clearing weather.

· When gulls fly to land, a storm is at hand.

· The higher the clouds, the better the weather.

· Cold is the night when the stars shine bright.

· When leaves show their undersides, be very sure that rain betides.

· Chimney smoke descends, our nice weather ends.

When Nature Calls Coming Events

WHEN NATURE CALLS

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LONG POINT – CAROLINIAN NATURE FEST

Saturday, May 28 & Sunday, May 29, 2011: 7 a.m. – 5 p.m.

NatureFest is a celebration of our local nature and features a weekend of birding, wildflower identification walks, salamander monitoring, frog and amphibian walks, tree identification, kids activities, displays, workshops, crafts and local foods. There is something for the whole family! Join us at Backus Heritage Conservation Area and throughout the Long Point Biosphere Reserve to experience the best of what Norfolk's nature has to offer.

BIO-BLITZ BONANZA

Sunday, June 5, 2011: 10 a.m.

Celebrate the 'International Year of Forests' by exploring the fascinating and diverse world of a forest habitat. Equipped with field guides and a camera, your task will be to find and identify as many species of plants and animals in one of the best examples of a Carolinian forest. Selected photos will be included in the summer edition of our newsletter '*The Snapper*'. Meet at the Backus Woods, Sugar Bush Trail parking lot on the 3rd Concession.

BUTTERFLY AND DRAGONFLY FESTIVAL

Sunday, July 10: 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Come to the Backus Heritage Conservation Area to enjoy this family-friendly event, providing opportunities to learn more about these beautiful and amazing creatures! There will be numerous scheduled activities and exhibits throughout the day including cookie decorating, crafts, and guided walks around the pond in search of dragonflies and in the meadow to identify butterflies.

FOREST-FEST

Saturday, August 13 and Sunday, August 14, 2011

What better way to celebrate the 'International Year of Forests' than by attending Forest Fest – a festival dedicated to the education and awareness of our local forests. ***When Nature Calls*** will be there with all kinds of children's crafts and activities, so be sure to come by and get involved.

EARTH CACHING

Saturday August 27, 2011: 2 p.m.

If you like treasure hunts and orienteering, you will not want to miss out on this high-tech scavenger hunt! Armed with a GPS unit, your task will be to find hidden earth caches using the coordinates and clues provided to you. If you manage to find them all, a surprise awaits you at the end! Meet at Hay Creek Conservation Area at the corner of Radical Road and Port Ryerse Road.

STARS AND STORIES

Saturday September 10, 2011: 7 p.m.

Join us for a night of star gazing and story telling...not only does this area have a fascinating and rich history, but also some of the best spots to set your sights on the night sky. Come out and join the North Shore Erie Amateur Astronomers to have a look through a telescope and to sit around the campfire, enjoy some hot chocolate and listen to tales of days gone by. Don't forget to bring a mug and lawnchair! Fee: $5/person or $15/family. Meet at Wagon Wheel Produce and Corn Maze, #1371 Charlotteville Rd, 1 km. west of Charlotteville East Quarter Line.

GREAT CANADIAN SHORELINE CLEANUP

Sunday September 18, 2011: 10 a.m.

Roll up your sleeves and lend a hand cleaning up the beaches of Long Point. The TD Great Canadian Shoreline Cleanup is a national conservation initiative that allows all Canadians to have a positive impact on their local environment. More than just a program to pick up trash, valuable data is collected from each cleanup to determine the major (and minor) causes of shoreline litter in each area. We will meet at the parking lot across from the Causeway restaurant in Long Point.