

THE NEST BOX, NUMBER 11, SPRING/SUMMER 2004

THE OTTAWA DUCK CLUB

726 Weston Drive, Ottawa, ON, K1G 1W2

<http://odc.ncf.ca>



CLUB NEWS

NOTE: If you haven't been to the sanctuary lately, you'll find there have been some road changes.

Here's how to get there:

- From the 417, head north on March Road to Klondike (flashing yellow light), turn right and go to the end of Klondike, turn left onto March Valley Road (formerly Fourth Line Road) then a couple of hundred feet to the gate.
- From Carling, head north on Herzberg/Terry Fox Drive to March Valley Road, just past the Marshes clubhouse, turn right, cross the railway tracks (stop first to be sure no train is coming) then go left on March Valley Road as above.

It seems such a long time ago — March 16th — that we had our AGM, but it went off without a hitch. Nobody took the opportunity to stage a coup. Nobody asked **Bill Bower** what he knew about the sponsorship scandal and when he knew it. And, especially, why didn't we get some of the money? It was great to see **George Martin** at the meeting, getting around quite well following his knee operation. Bill tabled his Annual Report for 2003, a copy of which is enclosed for your reading pleasure.

I'm sure all members send their best wishes to **Dale Crook** as he goes for chemotherapy. We're all pulling for you Dale and looking forward to seeing you back at the sanctuary on a regular basis. The treatments haven't stopped him from doing his club work, however. He recently updated the ODC website again — the President's Annual Report has been updated for 2003 and the Hatch Results page has been revised to include the 2003 results. As most of you know, **Austin Taverner** checks about 40 of our boxes around the ponds on a weekly basis to follow the nesting activity. As of June 27, he had checked 61 boxes and found 578 wood duck eggs and 108 hooded merganser eggs. Both about average. To date, 178 WD and 62 HM eggs had hatched, while 86 and nine, respectively, are/were still being incubated. At 29, predation is a little higher than last year, but not unusual.

You can follow the nesting progress of 12 of these boxes by going to the Current Activities page on the

club's website and clicking where it says to, under the heading "Austin's summer checks of duck boxes." Contact Austin if you would like to help with these box checks.

Dale also sent letters of welcome to five new members: **Rodney Brook, Stacey Miller, Ben Mancini, Bruce Ralph and Isobelle Nicol**. On top of that, he has been studying the membership lists and discovered that our longest standing members are **Lorne Whitty** and **Ray Monpetit**, both of whom joined in 1966. I think it's high time they sat down. He also discovered that our oldest member is **Tom Lumby**, 93, who joined in 1999 at the Wildlife Festival. **John Thomas**, who will be 90 in November, is a close second. John checks duck boxes on his walks at McKay Lake, in Rockcliffe. He joined in 1996.

Recent activities and sightings

On June 16th, Bill attended the opening of the new food services building, the William Hall VC Building, at the Connaught Range. He says it's a beautiful facility and he's going to try to find good reasons to drop in for a coffee or a lunch now and then. He also had an opportunity to meet and get reacquainted with the Commandant, Lieutenant-Colonel Bryan Johnson, the Range Control staff and the administration staff at the event.

Bill says our list of people interested in coming out, when we do go out, is growing. People who couldn't make it on our usual Tuesday evenings have been able to come at other times — Monday evenings or Friday afternoons. The work is getting done, but there's always more to do.

If you haven't been out recently, and haven't been on Bill's e-mail list, I think you'll enjoy reading some of the reports he has sent:

April 13 - A pretty good day yesterday (better than today). We put the ski-doo's away and took out the mowers. Everything started until we tried the big tractor and found out that the battery is no longer

any good. New one on order. **Don Davies** even cut the grass in front of the sheds. Looks great.

We filled a few goose sites and put out two floats in the Boegel Pond. The other anchor buoys are still frozen in the ice. When we left a goose was in one of the floats with her head sticking out. This was an old type float before we invented the new goose-free design. We plan to put out five more next Tuesday, at least. A number of wood duck boxes were checked and there were a few merganser eggs in one box. No wood duck eggs. Lots of activity around and everyone added a few birds to their list. A couple of turkeys were seen and deer were everywhere on the way out.

I was in earlier and went on an excursion. I found eight more Blanding's turtles and picked up three to be photographed. That's 13 in two days. More than I have seen in my whole life. And that was in one small pond that I visited for a total of about three hours. There must be a good population.

Bill

May 11 - a beautiful evening, with no bugs. We had 12 people out to the sanctuary — members and guests. We repaired a couple of floats and got a couple more ready to go out. Don cut some of the high grass behind the sheds next to the Gimmer Pond. Others were busy checking WD boxes and recording results. It was a good evening for birds. I know there were many warblers around but didn't identify many. Nice to see the purple martins back. There must have been 12 or more of them. They were there all evening, in and out of the holes. **Pat Sammon** was out from CHM Hill as he will be taking over the water sampling and changing the control structures. They have the contract with the City of Ottawa. I showed him the ropes, although there isn't much to it. Don found something to store the extra stop logs in so they can be available near the two control structures on the holding pond. We just have to let Pat know if we want more water down in our ponds or not.

Bill

May 31 - We had a great afternoon and managed to get a lot of grass cut. Just about everything has been cut at least once this spring. Don even cut around the Dyke Pond and the Narraway Pond field has been done. Place looks like a golf course. The baby raccoons have

been moved by the mother and we couldn't find them. A few deer were around but most of the females are in hiding ready to give birth. Austin found a couple hooded mergansers in our boxes with a box full of young ones.



*Hooded merganser hen with ducklings in box 180
(photo by Dale Crook, May 31, 2004)*

On my walk around I found a pied-billed grebe on a nest in the Dyke Pond. I could see one egg after the female dove into the water. Next time I will try and get out in a boat and get a picture. There is a boat close to the nest.

June 9 - We didn't get in until 5 PM but it was a pretty interesting evening just the same. There were eight of us and we did check a few wood duck boxes but didn't do much other work. It was very hot, but enough wind to keep most of the bugs away.

Here are a few of our more interesting sightings: The pied-billed grebe was on the nest and we just had a few seconds to see her before she dove into the water (and disappeared). It looked like she covered the eggs with vegetation before she left. Too windy to take the boat out for a closer look.

There was a small fawn in the Kindack Pond (small island). Probably the same female that left the twins there last spring. I tried to photograph this one but it slipped into the cattails and disappeared. Out-foxed by a two-day-old fawn. Harry Macleod (MNR) used to tell me that there were more fawns born on June 7th in Eastern Ontario than on any other day (on average).

We did see a couple of does that hadn't given birth yet. A few could be born as late as August.

A song sparrow nest was located by a garter snake and it had one of the young in its mouth. The nest was located and there was one baby left. The female was trying her best to protect the nest but to no avail.

A Painted Turtle was found pinned between two rocks (above the water line). Looked like she was heading back to the water and fell between the rocks. She had no hope of escaping on her own. She was dehydrated but was okay once placed back in the water. One lucky turtle.

Back at the sheds we watched an osprey flying over and just as we identified it, it dove into the Boegel Pond and came up with a rather large fish. Not sure what species. It struggled with the fish but then headed south probably to its nest.

The purple martin house was a bee-hive of activity which was great to see. The 24 compartments would appear to be about full. We will have to consider adding a second box in time for it to be checked out in late summer by the Martin colony. Some claim they locate a suitable nesting box before leaving for South America.

Other sightings included the common tern, bittern and snipe. The high wind prevented our seeing many of the smaller birds. I did see a green heron at Watts Creek just prior to going to the sanctuary. We have 10 wood duck boxes in the Watts Creek area.

Bill

June 11 - Four of us turned up and got a fair amount of work done. Temperature was just right. We cut quite a bit of grass but left a few fields so "others" would not be disappointed come Tuesday evening (next). Austin checked just about all the wood duck boxes in our study area. Lots of activity. We made one trip to the DND dumpsters and got rid of a lot of garbage. Another trailer full is ready to go. Place looks a lot better. We are getting there. And, we even got rid of the old bridge between the Gimmer and Don Gray Ponds. All we have to do now is build the new one. All the materials are there and already cut.

Didn't see a whole lot. One male Canada goose kept the entrance road well patrolled and nothing got by without a fight. Lots of deer (does and yearlings). One new fawn was spotted (two meanings I guess).

The purple martins are doing well and some day we will look at putting up a second box near the first. Again, we have everything ready and just need the time.

And finally, I found a large female Blanding's turtle out on the Perimeter Road in the middle of the grain fields. It was nine inches (they all are), very heavy and full of eggs. A beautiful specimen. That makes 14 I have seen so far this spring and I have taken photos (close ups) of six of them. A good year so far.

Bill

June 30 - Six of us took the risk of going out Tuesday evening, June 29th, even though the skies were black. We got a bit wet with the showers and then got a whole lot wet when a thunder storm hit. All work came to a halt, except for those out on the trails checking Wood Duck boxes. No place to hide out there. They should be dry by now.

Anyway, after the storm passed it turned out to be a beautiful evening. Nice and warm and no — well maybe a few — bugs.

Quite a bit of activity around. The Purple Martins were busy feeding and it was interesting to see that a number of them were examining our second house situated near the Narraway Pond. Have to keep a watch on that.

Lots of deer around. We saw about 15 including two bucks and one fawn. It is hard to believe that the fawn was only about four weeks old or so. Running along the road just like an adult. The spots gave it away. No doe in sight but likely one close by.

On the bird list we saw a green heron and, with great patience, a marsh wren on the Willow Pond in the cattails. We think it would be a long billed.

A number of duck families were observed including hooded merganser, mallard and blue-winged teal. I guess the wood ducks are more secretive. The two eggs in our killdeer nest are gone and we didn't see any adults around. Looks like a thief got them. There

is another pair over on the road to the grenade range. Four common terns were fishing on the Boegel Pond. Must be nesting closer to the river or out on the islands. We may see some juveniles later on.

Mowing was postponed due to wet grass but we did do a bit of clipping around. It has been a great spring for growth, and not just in the grass.

We picked up quite a few of the larger goose feathers and at some point will try and get them to Randall's Paints. Some of the local artists like to use them in their work.

The Blanding's Turtle patrol came up empty.

Bill

Besides Bill's regular epistles, Austin has an interesting story to tell about one of his box checks:

I opened a wood duck box earlier this year and it contained three dead chicks and one chick that was alive — this was after the hen had departed with a successful brood in tow. I threw out the three dead chicks and released the chick that was alive — it managed to swim in among the cattails.

I was counting the remaining unhatched eggs when I heard a peeping sound coming from the box. I removed all the eggs and now the sound came from the eggs on the ground. I then checked the eggs and the sound was coming from a small bill poking out through a hole in one egg. I carefully removed the shell and ended up holding a wet peeping wood duck chick. Now what to do? A storm was approaching so I decided to take the chick with me. I placed it in a small pet container that Bill uses for turtles, and took it home with me. My intention was to release the chick at Petrie Island the next day if it survived. The next morning it had dried off and was still alive, but it was clear that things weren't going well. Judy and I checked every 15 minutes, as the chick had very little energy and struggled to raise its head. I wish I had a happy ending for the story but the chick expired around noon.

Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas

This is year four of the five year Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas survey, and Austin and Dale are helping **Peter Browne**, a bird bander, gather evidence for the project in the 10 km square evocatively called 18VR22, which includes our sanctuary.

For the following birds, confirmed evidence of breeding was found in the 81-85 atlas but so far most only have a probable status and some only possible. (The aim is to get a confirmed for as many species as possible. So far, in the current atlas, 53 species have been confirmed in the square.) Please watch for any sign of breeding evidence for the above birds at the sanctuary, and let Austin or Dale know.

Turkey Vulture	Red-Tailed hawk
Kestrel	Wild Turkey
Common Tern	Rock Pigeon
Ruby-throated Hummingbird	Belted Kingfisher
Downy Woodpecker	Northern Flicker
Pileated Woodpecker	Least Flycatcher
Great Crested Flycatcher	Warbling Vireo
Red-eyed Vireo	Common Raven
White-breasted Nuthatch	House Wren
Marsh Wren	Veery
Hermit Thrush	Wood Thrush
Chestnut-sided Warbler	Magnolia Warbler
Yellow-rumped Warbler	Mourning Warbler
Black-and-white Warbler	Chipping Sparrow
White-throated Sparrow	Field Sparrow
Baltimore Oriole	Goldfinch
Evening Grosbeak	

This is what to look for:

CONFIRMED Breeding evidence is as follows from lower to higher evidence:

DD - Distraction display or injury feigning

NU - Used nest or egg shells found

FY - Recently fledged young or downy young

AE - Adults leaving or entering nest indicating occupied nest

FS - Adults carrying fecal sac

CF - Adult carrying food for young

NE - Nest containing eggs

NY - Nest with young seen or heard.

There are three other categories of recording breeding evidence:

OBSERVED, POSSIBLE, PROBABLE

Falcon Watch

As most of you will know, the annual Falcon Watch has just ended after 15 days. Ottawa's peregrine pair, Connor and Horizon, nested again on the Crowne Plaza Hotel. While tall buildings make pretty good nest sites for peregrines, and pigeons provide a reliable food source, the buildings aren't a perfect replacement for the peregrine's normal cliff side habitat and present some serious hazards, so under **Eve Ticknor's** direction, a number of volunteers kept track of the two chicks, **Senator** and **Zanar**, and helping to keep them out of trouble. Several ODC members, including Austin, Bill, and **Gretchen and Tony Denton**, were part of this effort, having put in a dozen or so shifts. The watch ended July 3, with both chicks flying and landing successfully and not needing human assistance.

CHURCHY'S COLUMN

George Martin's daughter e-mailed some pictures of him in Kentucky. In this one he seems to be trying to identify a large grey bird with a long black neck. I think it's known as the Canada goose, *George*, but I could be wrong.



Corrie Rabbe of Carleton University contacted Bill and arranged to visit the sanctuary with fellow Environmental Studies students **Mark Baldwin** and **Patrick McGuire**. They are doing conservation work in the Oxbow Park area of the university. They plan to build and set up bird boxes, plant native shrubs, put up various educational signs, and monitor the area. Corrie's boyfriend **Ron St. Louis**, a keen birdwatcher and photography student at Algonquin College was also part of the group. They picked a good night for their

first visit and were delighted to see all the wildlife activity around the sanctuary. They saw just about everything including a female goose on a nest with the male next to her and three goslings just outside of the nest, waiting for one or two more eggs to hatch. They are hoping to gain experience with bird boxes, wetland species diversity, and species behaviour by volunteering at the Duck Club. And we're happy to have them.

Acadia University volunteer opportunity.

I was idly channel surfing one day last winter when I came upon a program about The Atlantic Bird Observatory operated by Acadia University on Seal Island and Bon Portage Island, near Yarmouth, Nova Scotia. Almost 270 species of birds have been seen or banded there. The islands are also home to a nest site for Leach's Storm Petrels, one of those nocturnal pelagic birds that are rarely seen on land. Anyone who is interested in a very Spartan working holiday should look up their website at <http://landscape.acadiau.ca/abo/index.html> where they have a section on volunteer opportunities. Or just look it up to see what they do.

Golden Horseshoe Greenbelt

Chris Grooms of Ontario Nature recently asked us to circulate this message to all members:

The Ontario government is proposing to establish a Greenbelt of protected natural habitats and agricultural lands in the "Golden Horseshoe" area. This Greenbelt, expected to be at least 1.6 million acres in size, would have as its backbone the already-protected Niagara Escarpment and Oak Ridges Moraine, plus critically important additional lands such as Niagara's tender fruit and grape lands, the Holland Marsh, Areas of Natural and Scientific Interest (ANSIs), wetlands and woodlands. While rural economic activities such as farming would, of course, continue to flourish, the Greenbelt will keep urban sprawl at bay and save precious natural areas for the future.

Ontario Nature supports the government's proposed Greenbelt in principle. It builds on the work we have done over the past 25 years on both the Escarpment and the Moraine. But even more important, it can serve as a stepping stone for environment-first land-

use planning - planning that puts a high priority on nature protection - *across all of southern Ontario*, not just in the Golden Horseshoe.

Ontario Nature strongly encourages you to write the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing to **support the Golden Horseshoe Greenbelt** proposal. Here are some additional points you can make:

- There needs to be a freeze on urban boundary expansions in the Golden Horseshoe, since there is already enough urban-zoned land available to meet population growth needs for at least 30 years if we grow smarter communities through urban intensification and re-development of abandoned industrial lands.
- There should be an immediate moratorium on the planning and construction of 400-series highways and municipal roads of equivalent scale. The government needs to create a smart, transit-first transportation master plan for all of southern Ontario, a plan that for the first time would fully mesh transportation planning with urban and regional planning.
- Indicate your support for Ontario Nature's Southern Ontario Greenway Strategy. The Golden Horseshoe Greenbelt should not be seen in isolation, since if nothing else is done, we could see "leapfrog" urban development over the Greenbelt to lands beyond it. What we need is implementation of Ontario Nature's *Southern Ontario Greenway Strategy* that would apply to all of southern Ontario.

Note: Comments are due by **July 13, 2004**. Comments must include the Environmental Bill of Rights registry number (**EBR Registry No. PF04E0002**) and must be sent to lynne.peterson@mah.gov.on.ca or by fax to (416) 585-4006 or by regular mail to:

Lynne Peterson
Provincial Planning & Environmental Services Branch
Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing
777 Bay Street, 14th Floor
Toronto, ON M5G 2E5

Ducks (and geese) in the news

Our feathered friends seem to have been much in the news lately. On May 29th the Ottawa Citizen carried a story about a Regina cyclist who complained that the city wasn't doing enough to control goose populations. It seems he was attacked, while riding through Wascana Park, by a goose protecting her 15 goslings. He suffered a broken collarbone and will be off work for six weeks. It was hard not to laugh when the article said "The goose then fled the scene." And the victim said "It just wandered off like nothing had happened." I guess he feels that if the city isn't going to control the numbers of geese, then it needs to teach them about civic responsibilities.

Then on June 7, CBC's *As It Happens* reported on a Pennsylvania man who rescued a duck that was stuck in the muck, and then had to be rescued himself by firemen. A few days later, they carried another story about a British researcher who found that "Cockney ducks" have a different, harsher accent than Cornish ducks. Apparently it's because the Cockney ducks have to compete with the noise of the city. Keeping up the fowl theme, they had a third story about a young Newfoundlander who convinced the local council to put up duck crossing signs where the ducks waddle to the harbour for a swim.

Joining in the fun, the *Globe and Mail* reported on June 12, that a French study found that banded birds reproduced at about half the rate of unbanded birds. The article said "The so-called flipper tags apparently caused the animals trouble swimming and the stress that ensued diminished their fertility."

Correction: About those 150 cm long voles Dale wrote about in the last issue. That would be about the size of a very big dog, or a small horse. It seems they're not quite that big after all, they're actually a rather puny 150 mm. Churchy, the editor, ought to have noticed.

Tail Feathers

A farmer had just returned from a trip abroad and was telling his friend about the wonderful sights he had seen: "There are spectacles," he said, "that you never forget." "I wish I could get me a pair," said the friend, "I'm always forgetting mine."