

Signs of Spring: by Tarah Walsh

There are many types of "signs" we look for or take notice of in our day-to-day lives. Sometimes they are beautiful flower buds which signal the coming of spring, sometimes they are fine lines around the eyes which are greater signs of the passing of time and sometimes they are physical structures which inform and instruct us. The latter is the type of signs you will start to notice appearing on and around the **rare** Charitable Research Reserve.

After careful consideration and thoughtful planning, **rare** has recently erected 5 in a series of 8 interpretive signs along Blair Rd. The signs are designed to be simple, pleasing to the eye, at home in the landscape and serve to educate the public on special features of the property as well. For example, one sign displays a beautiful photo of two bald eagles. Humorously titled "ROMANCE," this sign refers to a stretch of the Grand River where it meets the Speed, flowing next to **rare**, and is a favorite feeding spot for over-wintering Bald Eagles.



The Reserve's borders, with acres totaling just under 1000, falls within boundary limits of both the City of Cambridge and the Township of North Dumfries therefore requiring sign permits for installation from both municipalities. We were fortunate to receive sign approvals late last year for all 5 signs within North Dumfries which allowed us to erect them this spring as soon as the ground thawed. We are still working

hard to convince the City of Cambridge to grant us a variance to the sign by-law so that we would be allowed to build and install the 3 signs waiting to be completed. All sign designs, including those awaiting approvals, can be viewed on our website. They celebrate our historic buildings, and our heritage landscapes.

Additionally, these signs allow **rare** to spark conversations surrounding sensitive issues and concerns. For example, the south side of Blair Rd. just west of George St., now displays a sign which raises the issue of invasive plant species. Titled "ALIEN INVASION," this sign playfully references a key issue in land management. Invasive species are an ongoing threat to biodiversity, second only to habitat loss. The introduction of alien species to an ecosystem happens in a variety of ways. Sometimes it's due to humans travelling from one place to another and taking plant life with them (i.e. European settlers bringing over plants and seeds), sometimes seeds are transported by birds, some escape from our gardens and sometimes it's as simple as a dog running off leash through a forest and into a field, carrying and depositing seeds as it moves from one ecosystem to another. Garlic Mustard (as shown on this sign) is an example of an invasive which threatens the biodiversity of native plants here at **rare**. As part of our mandate to protect biodiversity, **rare** tries its best to manage invasive species where it can.

To view images of all signs and to learn about the meaning behind their content, visit our website at www.raresites.org and see the "News Section".

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Emily Damstra Profile: by Tarah Walsh



Photo submitted by: Emily Damstra

Covering many fields....

Working as a full-time, self-employed Science Illustrator is not Emily Damstra's only passion – although clearly her dedication to her day job is apparent. Specializing in detailed drawings of plant, animal and fossil life seems to simultaneously drive Emily's interest in the environment and issues of environmental concern. "I think I've always been interested in nature and the environment," states Emily "but this interest really expanded when I began taking science courses as an undergraduate and as a graduate student."

As a science illustrator, Emily has quite the artistic track record; her work can be seen in numerous publications and at several museums, including the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History. She has received awards from the biennial international juried competition *Focus on Nature* and from The New York State Museum. As well, she has exhibited in shows like The Guild of Natural Science Illustrators.

"I didn't know anything about the field of science illustration until after my graduate degree. I heard about a Master of Fine Arts program in science illustration and it was the perfect combination of my interest in science/nature and my art degree. I applied to the program and once I graduated I started freelancing immediately," says Emily.

Emily first learned about **rare** while searching online for volunteer opportunities. "I wanted to do something out

of doors, something that would enable me to learn more about nature. I could hardly believe it when I found **rare's** notice seeking volunteer land stewards because it fit the bill better than I could have hoped," she said. As an acting volunteer land steward, Emily has had a chance to connect with the **rare** property and learn more about the physical world. Funded in part by the Government of Canada's EcoAction Community Funding Program, the volunteer land steward (VLS) position allows community members to take action in projects that focus on increasing environmental awareness and positively impacting the environment. Since Emily became a VLS she has had the opportunity to serve these purposes.

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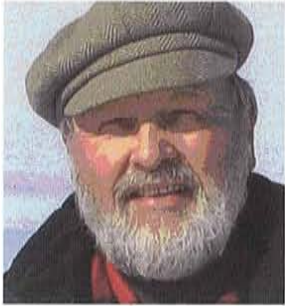
"As a VLS, it makes me feel good knowing that in some small way I might be helping to preserve the **rare** lands by monitoring the trails, by participating in research activities like last summer's Pollinator Monitoring, and other activities like tree planting. I like knowing that the land will be preserved in perpetuity and I'm interested in seeing how it changes over time."

As proof of how Emily's interaction with **rare** lands has changed and inspired her, Emily has recently focused her attentions on trying to secure funding from arts-focused granting organizations in order to create a lavishly illustrated map of the Reserve. The map is intended to give an accurate layout of the property, although embellished with many drawings of landmarks, flora and fauna. Included would also be elements of weather, history, mystery and fantasy. Another creative aspect of this project is that Emily hopes to include opportunities for others to contribute their perspective. "I am interested in how other people would create their own trail map(s). Would their interpretations of a plot of land differ greatly from mine? Would someone else record the hawk in the sky while I am making note of the mushrooms underfoot?"

There is no doubt that both Emily's volunteer dedication paired with her natural talent and passion makes her an important participant at **rare**. Without community enthusiasm like hers, this place would not be what it is.

If you are interested in volunteer opportunities or would like to find out more about Emily's mapping/art project please contact **rare's** Community Relations Officer, Tarah Walsh at t-walsh@raredsites.org or phone 519-650-9336 ext 112.

Nature Note Highlights: by Bill Wilson



RUFFED GROUSE reports for Winter 2010 were made by Laurie St. Peter (2) and Bill Wilson (2). Recent Christmas Count records for this region suggest significant decline.

Mark Pomeroy observed a GREAT HORNED OWL flying over Blair Road near Cruickston Creek on the evening of March 16.

On **rare** and nearby fields, SANDHILL CRANES, up to four, were reported in March, April and May by Jason Bracey (March 19), Vince Guiliani (April 11), Marco and Donna DeBruin (April 24), Larry Hubble (May 2), and Bill Wilson (May 10).



Harbinger of Spring
Photo Courtesy of: www.dnr.state.oh.us

On April 1, Matt Lawson, Bill and Heather Wilson observed HARBINGER-OF-SPRING, a nationally **rare** plant, in bloom on the reserve.

The Grade 12 Environmental Science from Southwood Secondary School

visited **rare** on April 1 with teacher Jason Bracey. The group documented an impressive array of natural history observations. Many were surprised to hear a "deafening" chorus of frogs – SPRING PEEPERS. The class returned on May 12 and 14 to undertake further nature study. Thanks for submitting your sightings, Sabres ☺

Jerry Guenther and Bill Wilson observed six FOX SPARROWS along the Grand Trunk Trail through **rare** on 5 April.

Spring 2010 will be remembered in Waterloo Region for unseasonably warm temperatures in April. Some sightings on the Reserve reflected an early spring – Jerry Guenther and Bill Wilson spotted a BLACK SWALLOWTAIL on April 23, a species normally first reported in early May. Bird migration, on the other hand, appeared to remain on schedule with AMERICAN TREE SPARROW – a winter visitor – last reported on April 15 and AMERICAN WOODCOCK – a summer breeder – first reported March 18, well within the normal departure and arrival times respectively. While listening to woodcock that evening, Jerry Guenther and Bill Wilson watched 20+ TUNDRA SWANS wing their way across the waxing moon.

Looking for birds on the expansive agricultural fields of southern Ontario during the non-growing season often results in few bird observations – some would say a futile endeavour. Nevertheless, the exercise can produce results. On April 12, Bill Wilson observed a small flock of 10+ HORNED LARKS. Feeding with the flock on the windswept upland fields south of Springbank Farm was a female LAPLAND LONGSPUR. This

sighting is the first record of this "arctic" bunting at **rare**, one more reason to 'scope the tilled agricultural fields during migration. Jerry Guenther and Bill Wilson encountered 12+ AMERICAN PIPITS on Blair Flats on May 17. Another reason ☺

Charlotte Moore reports that between May 3rd and 18th over 50 RED ADMIRALS, one BLACK SWALLOWTAIL, PAINTED LADY, CABBAGE WHITE, CLOUDED SULPHUR, one MOURNING CLOAK, SPRING AZURE, EASTERN COMMA, QUESTION MARK, PEARL CRESCENT, and three WILD INDIGO DUSKYWINGS.

Julia Marko Dunn reports the following plants in bloom at **rare** on May 7: FRINGED POLYGALA, WILD GINGER, NAKED MITREWORT, BISHOP'S CAP, FOAMFLOWER. Brett Woodman reported SHOWY ORCHIS in bloom on May 16.

Coyote sightings were more frequently reported this winter with weekly sightings, usually of the same individuals (Marco and Donna DeBruin, Jerry Guenther and others). MNR biologist, Art Timmerman, cited recent coyote studies to inform **rare** that there are no known "coydogs" in Ontario according to DNA analysis. The coyote in Ontario is the EASTERN COYOTE (a.k.a. Brush Wolf) that is somewhat larger than its western counterpart (the one depicted in many films and cartoons). Evidence in Ontario indicates, however, that some individuals are hybrid EASTERN COYOTE X GRAY WOLF. Numbers of Coyote observed together in winter are temporary family groups rather than packs, the social unit of both Gray and Timber Wolves.



Eastern Coyote

Photo Courtesy of: Billie Cromwell, Retired RGC

In early May, Julia Marko Dunn spotted a pair of BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHERS collecting lichen and building their nest. By May 7, when she revisited the nest site, the nest was complete and incubation underway – the first confirmed nesting of this species on **rare**. This southern bird, which is considered an uncommon breeder in Southern Ontario, moved into Ontario during the 20th Century. Jerry Knechtel, Kitchener-Waterloo Field Naturalists, found a nest in Galt as early as 27 June 1934 (see R. Curry 2006, Birds of Hamilton and Surrounding Areas); Berys Taylor reported a nesting pair in Galt during the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas, 1981-1985 (Paul Eagles, pers. comm.)

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Do, See, Grow and Know! by Tarah Walsh

Summer at **rare** is in full bloom. The nearly 1000 acre urban-greenspace, offers recreational opportunities for hikers, gardening space and advice for those with a green thumb, educational programming for the curious, beautiful sights for photographers and artists, a Grand waterway for the avid canoeist and majestic birds for passionate ornithologists. There are things to do, things to see, things to grow and things to know.

Things to do: The next few months are some of the busiest at the reserve. With all our trails open, there are many places to walk, run, bike or just sit and read. This year **rare** offers four trails (various in length and diverse in ecological setting): the Cliffs and Alvares trail (aka the River Trail), the Grand Trunk (a city-managed trail which runs through the Reserve), Springbank Farm Trail (leading to the community gardens; parking available at Springbank farmhouse, 681 Blair Rd.) and the Grand Allée Maple Lane Trails (entering from

Whistlebare Road or Langdon Drive). If you prefer to peddle yourself around, The Grand Trunk Trail is for you. Since it is a crushed gravel trail, it's the only one appropriate and approved for cyclists. This trail provides an environmentally sensitive way to get from Cambridge to the historic Village of Blair. As well, for those who enjoy paddles over peddles, **rare** lands fall on both sides of the Grand River; one of Ontario's Native transportation routes. A canoe ride is the perfect way to take in the spectacular views of **rare's** ancient limestone cliffs, a history dating back 420 million years! (For more information on **rare's** trails and or for questions about where to launch your canoe please call our Office Administrator, Brenda Pearce at 519-650-9336 ext 125 or visit us online at www.raresites.org)

Things to see: As you may already know, there are many unique and uncommon sightings to be had at **rare**. There are fossils imbedded in the wall of our 170 year old Slit Barn, a historical landmark we are trying to protect and restore, located in the heart of the Reserve and near to the head of our Cliffs and Alvares Trail. As well, there have been recent sightings of Wild Indigo Duskywings at **rare** – a native butterfly which hasn't

been recorded in the Region for decades. This species was observed by Jessica Grealey and Charlotte Moore (University of Waterloo) who informs **rare** that interestingly, this species has been reported as expanding its range rapidly, using CROWN VETCH (a non-native, invasive plant) as a host plant.

Additionally, over 206 bird species have been noted at **rare**; majestic Ospreys, Sandhill Cranes and Herons have all been known to make **rare** their "flapping-grounds!" As well, **rare** is home to more than one-third of the plant species found in Waterloo Region. With over 600 plant species, **rare** hosts 48 which are known to be on the significant species list of native vascular plants in the Region. It's the features and sightings like these that make **rare** a true gem. Photographers and artists are encouraged to experience this landscape and utilize the inspiration it naturally provides, although we do remind everyone to please, *stay on the trails and keep dogs leashed*.

(For more information on the Wild Indigo Duskywing at **rare**, please contact our Research Director, Peter Kelly at pekelly@raresites.org or by phone at 519-650-9336 ext 126.)

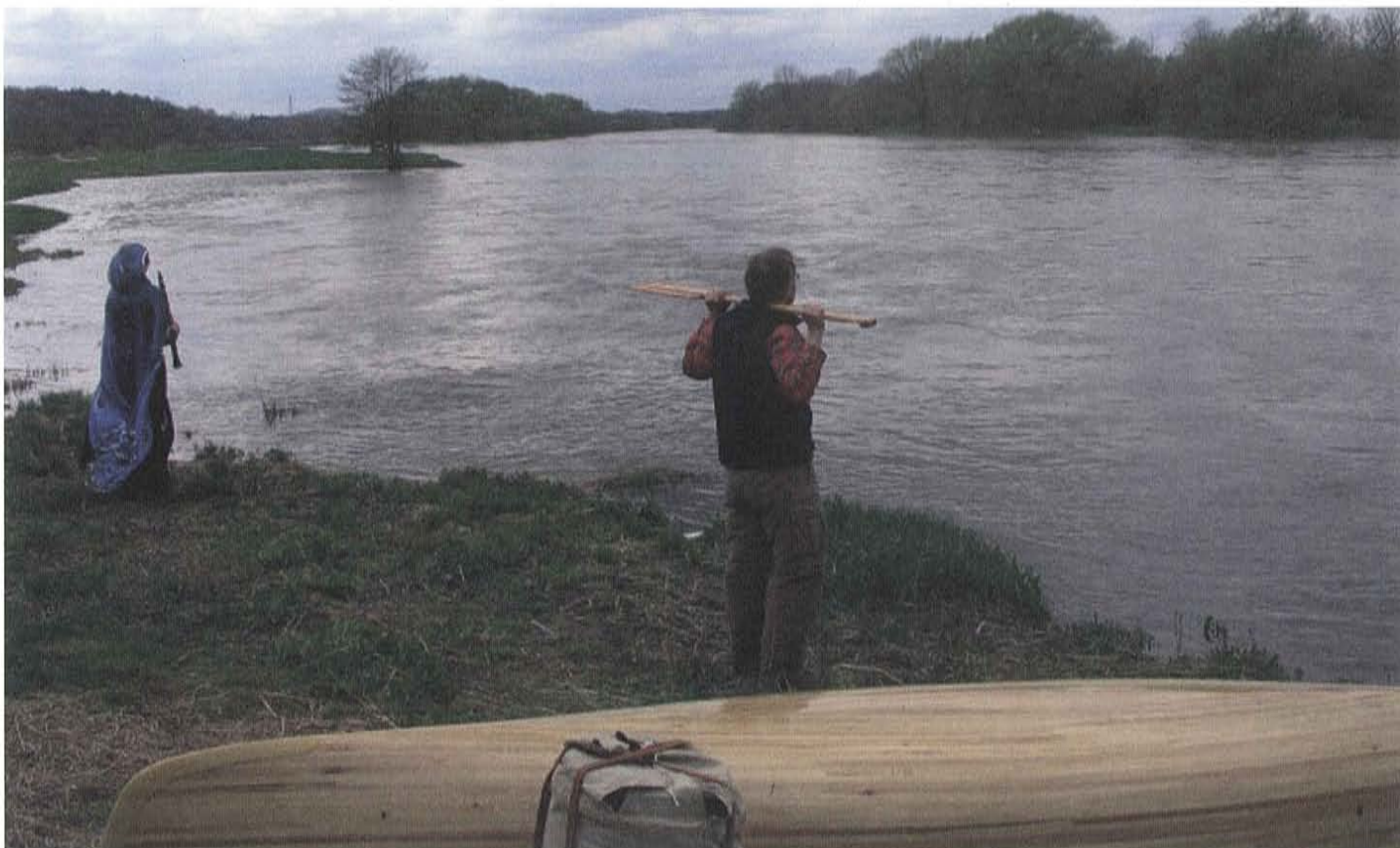
Things to grow: Take a look around you in any direction at **rare** and you'll see growth – from the 1500+ new trees that were planted last year, to the vegetation sprouting in the retired agricultural fields, the Osprey young to the vegetables in our Springbank Community Gardens. There's a lot growing at **rare**. In fact, for example, over the last three years the Community Garden plots have more than tripled in size – now hosting 40+ participants or families. These folks are making use of this economically reasonable and environmentally healthy place to grow their own food. Supplied with advice, tools, water and a social atmosphere with a great view, gardeners here have a safe place to increase local food production - lowering carbon footprints while having fun in the sun. The public is also welcome to come and hike the perimeter of the gardens on our Springbank Farm Trail (mentioned above), or rest and relax at a breathtaking site overlooking the Grand River Valley. Growing too is our list of supporters, helping us to manage all that is required in order to keep this Reserve protected intact and in perpetuity. Our recently launched Peer-to-Peer effort is helping us spread the word about the work of the organization. The concept is based on the old premise of "if you tell 2 people, and they tell 2 people..." We appreciate all you do to help us grow the awareness of the **rare** vision and to grow our base of much-needed supporters!

(To inquire about renting your own garden plot for this year or next, to have a friend signed up to receive future newsletters, or to make a donation, please visit our website www.raresites.org or contact the office by phone at 519-650-9336. Any of the staff would be happy to help.)



Wild Indigo Duskywing

Photo by: Charlotte Moore



Tilly Kooyman and Rae Crossman perform *From the Bow*, Open Ears Festival, 2009

Photo by: Peter Kelly

Things to know: As new research initiatives get underway at **rare** by graduate students and researchers from visiting universities, our Chain of Learning is continually fed and the scientific literature is added to. For example, Nigel Selig, M.Sc. Candidate in the School of Planning, Faculty of Environmental Studies, University of Waterloo Supervised by Dr. Roger Suffling, in 2009 undertook a research project named **"Planning for sustainable forest ecosystems in Waterloo, Ontario: a future radial-growth forecast of four significant tree species."** The results of his work will be valuable for those planning the effects of climate change in the region. Here, taken from the **rare** website is a summary of his study:

Trees produce annual rings in their wood. Valuable information can be extracted from these tree-rings: 1. the number of tree-rings is equal to a tree's age, and 2. the width of any one tree-ring is determined by the local climate in the year that it was growing. Therefore, the tree-ring records within trees can be used to reconstruct past climate. Nigel Selig wants to find out if the reverse is also true. For example, can tree-ring records be reconstructed from climate and therefore can we predict how some tree species will respond to forecasted climate change? Nigel will use the long tree-ring records available on rare property (from sugar maple, white pine and eastern hemlock) and the local historical climate data (collected at meteorological stations) to determine the relationship between tree-ring width and climate (i.e. are the tree-rings wider during hot years; or are they wider during wet years etc.?). He will then use this relationship and current climate forecasts to reconstruct how tree growth in the Waterloo Region will respond to climate change over the next 100 years.

Beyond research, **rare** has a commitment to this community and continues to provide public educational programming for all ages. Our *Every Child Outdoors* school-based programming is in full-swing until the end of June, starting back up in September while our public events this summer covers a wide range of topics from gardening/composting tips, tree identification, edible wilds, native history, and evolution. This August we have themed our events to explore First Nations history. Since there are historical reports of extensive aboriginal presence once on **rare** lands, each week during the month, a new event will be offered with subjects including First Nations medicines, stories and oral traditions, tools and weapons and local geographies. Please see our Events Calendar inside this issue of the **rare review** for more details and how to register.

So, as you can see there is much to do, see, grow and know about **rare**. This Waterloo Region gem exists to offer you -- the public-- environmental education, artistic inspiration and healthy opportunities for recreation and eating. If you have any questions about **rare** or you want to become more involved please contact Tarah Walsh by phone at 519-650-9336 ext 112 or by email at t-walsh@raresites.org. Thanks! We hope to see you soon.

2010 *rare* Charitable Research Reserve *Wish List*:

Some items from our previous Wish List have been donated. We want to sincerely thank those who have found a wonderful way to support the work of the organization. Here then is an updated Wish List with some of the things we still need. Donations of these items or of the funds to purchase them would enable us to complete our tasks more easily and with greater efficiency. Thank you in advance. It takes a community....

- A New Digital Point-and-Shoot Camera (minimum 10 megapixels) \$150 - \$300 each
- 2 Pairs of Chest Waders (approx. \$130 each) Sized Medium and Large.
- "My Weigh" 44OZ Series Digital Scale (\$55)
- Books:
 - A.) Merritt and Cummins – Introduction to the Aquatic Insects of North America (\$80)
 - B.) Thorp and Covitch – Ecology and Classification of North American Invertebrates (\$140) C.) Pennak – Freshwater Invertebrates of the United States: Porifera to Crustacea (\$160)
- Gift Cards of any denomination for: Canadian Tire, Amazon, TSC or Staples
- PC Desktop Hard Drive: Dual Core 2.60GHz Processor minimum. 2GB Ram minimum, preferably 4GB.
- PC Laptop for Power Point Presentations — \$600-\$800 range
- Fireproof Filing Cabinet (two door) new or in good used condition (Retail approx. \$800)
- Advanced Botany/Zoology Dissection Kit (Retail approx. \$18)
- Uniden GMRS 2-way Radios, 45 km range (Product # 69-8002-6) (Retail approx. \$79.99 at Canadian Tire)

Snowbirds return to *rare*: by Peter Kelly



Yellow Warbler

Photo by: Peter Kelly

This is a story about two compadres from the Waterloo Region; Luis and Pedro. These two buddies spend their winters in the warmer climates of Central and South America while the harsh winds of winter blow through Ontario. In the spring they fly up north with summer romance on their minds and an appetite for the bugs that will keep their bellies full.

Bugs...in their bellies! Who are these two? Well, the two 'men' in question are actually two male Yellow Warblers that have made a habit of visiting *rare* each of the last three springs despite the vast distances and numerous obstacles between *rare* and their winter homes. It is 3,000 to 4,000 kilometres between South/Central America and *rare*. Still, the bird banding team, led by Kevin Grundy, that has been banding birds at *rare* since spring, 2008, have found Pedro and Luis in their mist nets three straight springs!

These two travelling companions first visited *rare* on May 24th, 2008 where they were caught in the nets just east of

the Slit Barn. Almost a year later, Pedro returned to the same spot and was caught again on May 18th, 2009. Luis was caught five days later on May 23rd. Like clockwork, Pedro and Luis returned to *rare* this past spring - Pedro being caught in the nets on May 1st, Luis following his buddy the next day. The unusually warm spring may explain their early arrival in 2010. Data collected by Kevin in 2008 indicates that Luis is now four years old while Pedro is at least five years old.

The bird banding team is not only finding that the Grand River is a major corridor for migrating birds, but also that some migrants are returning to the same small area at *rare* year after year. Twenty-two other birds, including American Redstarts, Red-Eyed Vireos and American Goldfinches have also been recaptured at *rare* after having been banded the year before. The coming years can only bring more successful and fascinating stories like Pedro and Luis'.

For more information on birding or bird banding at *rare*, please visit our website at www.raresites.org or our bird banding blog at www.pannyfants.blogspot.com

A rare walk

More than 900 acres of beautiful landscape – a natural, urban green space dedicated to conservation, research, education and ecological management.

Escape with us for a few hours this fall to explore and experience the magnificent environmental jewel that is **rare**. Teeming with a diversity of organisms – some which are species at risk regionally, provincially, nationally and globally – **rare** belongs to all of us.

Your participation, on Sunday October 3rd, as a sponsored walker can help make a difference now and for future generations. Participants will be invited to join us after the **rare** Walk for a BBQ to celebrate our efforts.

Please watch our website for further details, or to request more information please contact Tarah Walsh at 519-650-9336 x 112.



The 1840s limestone Slit Barn

Photo by: Peter Kelly

Nature Notes Continued from Page 3

OSPREY carrying goldfish? Several birders, most recently Christopher Giesler and Jason Bracey on May 7, have observed this activity. Friend of **rare**, Bernice Beal of Barries Lake south of the Reserve, told Bill Wilson that over the years the lake has been a repository for unwanted goldfish. The Osprey nesting on the **rare** raptor platform have been doing their part to rid the lake of this alien invader: 11 reports of goldfish being carried to the nest have been received (so far) since summer 2009.

Three Finnish birdwatchers visiting southern Ontario to observe the spring migration spotted a male YELLOW-HEADED BLACK-BIRD at Blair Flats Slough, May 7 – the first sighting of this species at **rare**. After birding **rare** and North Dumfries with Jerry Guenther and Bill Wilson, Harry, Hendrik and Arne Lehto were heading for Rondeau and Point Pelee.



Capybara
Photo Courtesy of: www.amersol.edu

The first VIRGINIA RAIL to be reported at **rare** was heard in Blair Flats Slough by Larry Hubble and Bill Wilson on May 9.

Jerry Guenther reports seeing an adult BEAVER 1.3 km from the river and south of Blair Road. Given that distance, he wondered for a brief moment whether a Capybara had escaped from an Ontario zoo!

Five of the six species of vireo that breed in Ontario have been observed at **rare** this spring. Dates first observed are as follows: WARBLING VIREO (May 1, George Hentsch), RED-EYED VIREO (Jerry Guenther, May 14; Marco and Donna DeBruin, May 15), PHILADELPHIA VIREO (Andy Steinberg, May 15), YELLOW-THROATED VIREO (Julia Marko Dunn, May 17). Andy Steinberg's annual spring bird migration outing with Friends of **rare** on May 16 provided as many as 17 species of warbler. Participant Jenni Clayfield, added NORTHERN PARULA to her life list. During the morning outing, Andy listed 75 bird species, many of which were seen and/or heard by participants.

Deb and Randy Fowler, **rare** trail monitors, had an interesting sighting as they finished up monitoring Linear Trail on Sunday, 22 May 2010. Deb reports that "we saw a deer chase a coyote across the river from the other side of the river [Blair Flats] to the **[rare]** island at the confluence. It was just like an episode of 'Untamed Kingdom'! ... the deer kept the coyote on the shore until she had chased him to our side of the island [and] then the deer crossed back [to Blair Flats]!"

For a complete listing of this issue's Nature Notes and to learn more about our Sightings Records Station, please visit our website at www.raresites.org and go to the "NEWS" section.

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Larry Lamb, retired, Consultant, Vegetation Specialist



Contact Us!

rare Charitable Research Reserve
 1679 Blair Road, Cambridge
 ON N3H 4R8

Phone: (519) 650-9336
 Toll Free: 1-866-927-3866
 Fax: (519) 650-5923
 Email: rare@rarsites.org
 Website: www.rarsites.org

Staff

Brad Booker, Education Assistant
Julia Marko Dunn, Land Steward
Peter Kelly, Research Director
Matthew Lawson, Manager of Education
Patti Leather, Director of Community Relations
Charlotte Moore, Research Assistant
Amanda Newell, Gardens Coordinator
Brenda Pearce, Office Administrator
Ian Rowett, Bookkeeper
Tarah Walsh, Community Relations Officer



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