

NATURE NOTES
by Bill Wilson
(unabridged)

from *The rare Review* – Spring 2013

On September 6, 2012, a COMMON BUCKEYE was observed on the *rare* ECO Centre parking area, and a PAINTED LADY on the grounds of Lamb's Inn by Jerry Guenther and Bill Wilson.

While monitoring the Hogsback on September 12, 2012, *rare* Research Coordinator, Jenna Quinn, observed a BLUE-SPOTTED SALAMANDER. This species has been designated as a Specially Protected Amphibian under the Ontario Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act which offers protection to individuals but not their habitat. On October 25, she observed a pair of COYOTES while monitoring in the Hogsback. DEKAY'S BROWNSNAKE is primarily nocturnal in its habits. Fall monitoring by Jenna tallied five individuals in two monitoring areas – Indian Woods and the Hogsback.

Birdbanders Kevin Grundy, George Hentsch, Brett Fried and Erica Hentsch banded seven bird species for the first time this autumn at *rare*: four species of swallow, VEERY, WINTER WREN and CAROLINA WREN. A total of 79 species were banded during fall migration, 2012. During banding sessions, four species were observed for the first time at *rare* during the fall migration period although not banded: COMMON RAVEN (previously observed in spring and summer), WHITE-WINGED CROSSBILL, RED CROSSBILL and EVENING GROSBEAK.

Monitoring of the autumn bird migration was once again carried out on weekends from mid-August to the end of October thanks to monitors Marilyn Armstrong, Jason Bracey, Emily Damstra, Marco and Donna DeBruin, Jerry Guenther, Gerry Grainge, Ruth Kroft, Anne McLagan, John and Michelle Tomins, Rob Unruh and Bill Wilson. Covering selected trails and sectors of the property, monitors tallied 91 bird species. A list of all the birds recorded at *rare* is at: http://www.raresites.org/conservation/flora_fauna/bird-species/list-of-bird-species/

Fall bird migration monitoring results at *rare* included more than 150 AMERICAN PIPITS and ORANGE-CROWNED and PALM WARBLERS mixed in with more than 65 YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLERS. Tallying sparrow species during fall migration is one of the monitoring highlights of Jerry Guenther and Bill Wilson. This year, they observed 13 sparrow species during September and October monitoring. At the Springbank Banding Station, Bander, Brett Fried, added CLAY-COLOURED SPARROW thus bringing the tally of sparrow species to 14.

The Hamilton Fall Count, November 4, included coverage of approximately two thirds of the *rare* property. Species of note observed by Jason Bracey at *rare* included ROUGH-LEGGED HAWK, EASTERN SCREECH-OWL and WHITE-WINGED CROSSBILL.

Scoping the confluence in late autumn and early winter for migrating and over-wintering waterfowl, Bill Wilson and Jerry Guenther tallied 13 species of waterfowl: MUTE SWAN, GREEN-WINGED TEAL, NORTHERN PINTAIL, GADWALL, AMERICAN WIGEON and HOODED MERGANSER. As many as 38 BUFFLEHEAD were seen on November 30; at least 25 remained into mid-January. On December 27, Ruth Kroft reported a GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL in the same area.

Both the Kitchener and Cambridge Christmas Bird Counts (CBC), December 15 and 16 respectively, cover separate sections of *rare* so that over the weekend, counters cover almost the entire property (except for the out-of-bounds Bald Eagle wintering habitat along Blair Flats and Cliffs and Alvar sectors). Including river habitat readily covered by telescope from the Preston side of the river, CBC participants Jason Bracey, Jerry Guenther, Bill and Heather Wilson tallied 50 species.

Two BALD EAGLES, observed and described throughout the summer months on a few occasions, continued to roost and hunt – albeit infrequently – throughout the autumn at the confluence. In early January 2013, during the MNR annual waterfowl count along the Grand River between Conestoga and Paris, MNR Biologist, Art Timmerman, and volunteer, Bill Wilson, observed 12 Bald Eagles, four within the reach of the river through *rare*.

Members of the *rare* migrating bird monitoring team were joined by Land Steward, Shawna Craig, during a winter outing on January 12. Sightings of interest included: signs of RUFFED GROUSE (a declining species in this region), male PEREGRINE FALCON, adult NORTHERN GOSHAWK and 15 COMMON REDPOLLS.

Sightings of WILD TURKEY during the winter season declined. Bill Read reported four in the Cruickston Creek sector of *rare*.

A late winter walk along the Thompson Tract trail by Marco and Donna DeBruin on March 3 flushed a pair of WOOD DUCKS from a tree limb. Spring inspection for potential nest tree cavities by the ducks had begun despite the mid-winter conditions.

On March 7, while on a course-related visit to *rare*, teacher Jason Bracey and his students observed a RED-TAILED HAWK mantling prey it had just caught. As the hawk flew to a nearby tree, the prey in its talons was identified – a GRAY SQUIRREL. Observations and reports of Red-tailed Hawk hunting behaviour observed and received by Bill Wilson during the last three years in Cambridge and North Dumfries indicates that local Red-tailed Hawks are being more frequently observed as proficient hunters of Gray and Black Squirrels.

Reliable harbingers of spring – RED-WINGED BLACKBIRDS, COMMON GRACKLES and BROWN-HEADED COWBIRDS – were first reported at *rare* this year by Jason Bracey on March 10.