



Friends of
Mashkinonje

The Wetlands Observer

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Home of Bald Eagles, White-tailed Deer and numerous other species

Winter: Challenge, Ingenuity and Enjoyment

By Chuck Miller, Park Superintendent

Killarney / French River / Mashkinonje / W. Sandy Island / Manitou Islands Provincial Parks



Photo by Chuck Miller

Mashkinonje offers some of the best opportunities in Ontario to view nature in winter while snowshoeing.

The temperature was -5C and falling, the wind was out of the north at 40km, the cold front had brought with it a band of snow flurries. It was definitely cool on the face but the fresh air and tingling cheeks were welcome. This Arctic blast meant that winter had moved in.

Winter is a time of challenge and ingenuity for all life. It is also an excellent time to observe wetland wildlife and to think about how animals have adapted to winter. Search out a tapping woodpecker, seek out a ruffed grouse that has spent the night in a snow bank, or follow the tracks of a feeding moose. Contemplate those animals that live under the ice such as beavers, muskrats and turtles. What about those that live under the snow pack like mice and voles? How about those adapted to the top of the snow

like hares and bobcats? Where are the marten, weasels and otters? Follow the tracks in the snow of a red fox along the edge of a pond and observe where its nose was in the snow trying to catch a vole it heard moving under the snow pack!

I invite you to enjoy winter, learn about nature, expend some energy, and be sociable with others by exploring the park on snowshoe this winter.

Whip-poor-will Numbers Declining in Ontario

By Angela Martin

The welcome call of a whip-poor-will of a summer's night is no more in many areas. The whip-poor-will does exist in the countryside but their numbers are declining along with other species in our natural world. Whip-poor-wills have been designated as special concern under the Ontario Endangered Species Act. Other species found in our area that have been added to the species at risk list are chimney swifts, common nighthawks, olive-sided flycatcher, Canada warbler and snapping turtles. Horned Grebes migrate through our area and have become listed.

The Ontario Endangered Species Act was passed in 2007 and came into effect in 2008. The act covers all wildlife species whether they are a plant, fish, mammal, bird, insect or amphibian. The scientific Committee on the Status of Species at Risk in Ontario (COSSARO) is responsible for designating the status of species.

Extinction of a species is a natural process but human actions have hastened the extinction rate. As more and more species cease to exist, the food chain starts to breakdown causing wide spread changes within our ecosystem.

Seven of the eight turtle species in our province are now listed as species at risk. The critical time for turtles is during nesting season. They leave their water home



Photo of Snapping Turtle Courtesy of Angela Martin

and travel on land to find ideal nesting locations such as the gravel along roads. At this time, the likelihood of road mortality is high. Snapping turtles take 15 to 20 years to mature so losing an adult turtle effects survival of the species.

Bird Studies Canada conducts several volunteer programs to monitor populations of birds and tries to determine the cause of change in species populations. This past summer, the first chimney swift survey was conducted. Many aerial insectivore populations have been declining including whip-poor-wills, common nighthawks, olive-sided flycatchers and chimney swifts. The diet of Canada warblers is also insects.

To learn more about our species at risk go to the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources website www.mnr.gov.on.ca and search for species at risk.

Annual General Meeting



Photo of Cake Courtesy of Angela Martin

As in previous years our picnic and Annual General Meeting was very enjoyable. The day was sunny, comfortable and the Friends made it extra special.

Carmelle Girouard created a work of art in her cake, we didn't want to eat the cake it looked so nice. We did break down with all the silent auction action and to prepare for our hike.

Board of Directors

There are some changes to our Board of Directors for 2009/10. **Liz Lang** resigned as Secretary-Treasurer and the Board after 7 years. Liz worked very hard for us and we appreciated all your contributions, thank you Liz.

Brenda Tunney has taken over as Treasurer. Brenda is retired from Revenue Canada, so we are in good hands. **Nicole Wilson** a long time member has joined our Board to be our Secretary. Nicole is a retired teacher, so again, we are in good hands. Thank you Brenda and Nicole.

Many Lives of Trees

By Fred Pinto, R.P.F.

Most people are fond of trees and will recall that they clean the air, help water soak into the ground and are home to wildlife. Trees also have aesthetic value and evoke an emotional response, usually a positive one, in people. But did you know that trees have many lives? That is they serve different functions when young, old and dead.

A young tree locks up carbon dioxide with the aid of sunlight and water as it grows. Half of a tree's mass is carbon. An actively growing tree will be locking up carbon for as long as its wood does not decompose or burn completely. A group of young trees have other attributes. A young stand of trees will have many gaps between the trees. The gaps will be occupied by a variety of sun-loving plants and the various animals that live in these types of conditions. Can you name some of the animals and plants that live in young forests? A regenerating forest stand tends to be inhabited by a fairly unique group of wildlife species – that prefer open conditions – e.g., American kestrel, black-backed woodpecker, eastern bluebird etc. These forests are also important to other species at some times of year or for some parts of life cycle – e.g., moose, deer and elk because they provide an abundant supply of browse/forage.

As the group of young trees age their crowns begin to grow together blocking the amount of sunlight that reaches the forest floor. The abundance of sun loving plants starts to decrease. The dense stand now provides shelter to small mammals and birds that find safety from predators in the tangle of branches. The trees compete for light and other scarce resources that they need to grow and survive. Some of the trees will start to die and the others will grow into the space created.

The characteristics due to differences in species, such as bark texture, size of branches, type and density of foliage now start to become more pronounced as trees age. The older stands of different tree species offer habitat for organisms that seek specific food or shelter found in a mature tree of a particular species. For example, you will find wood thrushes in mature maple stands and are more likely to find northern goshawks in conifer stands.

Stands of mature trees also have large trees with hollows and cavities. These holes and fissures are homes or resting places for birds, mammals, invertebrates and a variety of plants.

As trees start to die or are killed by natural disturbances they may become infested with wood boring insects that are the preferred food of other invertebrates and vertebrates such as black-backed woodpeckers. Living trees with heart rot provide nesting sites for powerful excavators such as the pileated woodpecker. These trees are also good for colonies of carpenter ants, a favorite food of pileated woodpeckers. As the tree dies the bark loosens, providing nest sites for brown creepers and roosting sites for little brown bats while the moist sapwood may be home to wood boring insects that attract insectivores such as black-backed woodpeckers. When both heartwood and sapwood are well decayed, these trees may become home for weak excavators such as the friendly black-capped chickadee.

A tree that is no longer living will still harbor life. Dead standing trees provide perches for birds to rest, display and scout the area for prey, mates and rivals. Can you name some? As fungi invade the remains of the tree, invertebrates such as ants feed on the fungi or wood. The invertebrates are an important food source of many species such as hairy, downy and pileated woodpeckers.

Fallen trees continue to slowly decompose and return the nutrients and energy that they sequestered when they were growing. These fallen logs also provide homes for fungi, bacteria, invertebrates and vertebrates. Next time you in the forest roll over a fallen log and look at the various organisms that can be seen with the naked eye as they try to scurry away. The moist spongy woody mass holds moisture and is an important refuge for organisms such as salamanders that need a moist environment to live. Our most abundant salamander, the red-backed salamander lays its eggs in moist decomposed wood rather than in water. The moist environment also makes well decomposed logs an important seed germination site for a number of our small seeded trees such as eastern

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white cedar, eastern hemlock and yellow birch. About 40% of vertebrates in central Ontario use fallen trees for everything from feeding sites (e.g. black bears) to drumming sites (e.g. grouse), to plucking perches (e.g. northern goshawks) to access to subniven space and small mammal prey (e.g. martens). Subniven spaces are the air filled pockets found under logs that are covered with snow. Rodents who do not hibernate use these tunnels in the winter. Their predators such as the marten also use the snow tunnels to find their prey.

Dig into the soil and you will find the remnants of trees and other plants that have long ago decomposed into a dark colored organic mass that helps soil retain moisture and mediate other chemical and life processes.

Forest operations in Ontario require that all of these functions of trees and ecosystem processes continue into the future. That is why careful consideration is given during forest operations to ensure forest stands of different ages and species composition are maintained now and into the future. All forests on public lands must have plans that have considered what ages and tree species will occupy these forests over the next 100 years. Forest operations are also controlled to ensure standing trees and fallen logs are retained for ecological purposes such as wildlife habitat in all cutovers.

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Sharing our Accomplishments Day

We accomplished so much in 2009; the lookout tower, hardening of trails and our new trailhead signs that we wanted to share them with everyone. Mashkinonje has come so far, we are so fortunate to have this gem in our back yard.



Thank you Lucie Rochon from the Municipality of French River for administering the grant for staff to harden (place boardwalks over wet areas) trails. This work is done over the winter so as not to damage habitat or disrupt wildlife breeding time. You can well imagine the difficulties and climate. Lucie has acquired similar funding from the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities again this year.

Thank you Shell Environmental Fund, Doug Innes and Harley and Liz Lang for contributing and creating our new lookout tower. Doug Innes is a landscape architect with Ontario Parks who created the towers design and oversaw changes. Harley spent many hours working on the design, figuring out the logistics of how to construct a tower in the middle of the park without damaging habitat. Well Harley did it and to perfection as is his way. It is a monument for many to enjoy for a long time to come.



Thank you to the Ontario Government for providing the funds under the Species at Risk Stewardship Program to acquire our trailhead signs identifying species at risk. The signs were created in partnership with the Friends of Mashkinonje and Ontario Parks. Ontario Parks provided the park map and French translation. Christina Stoppa is an artist who created all the drawings on the trailhead signs. Thank you Christina, they are wonderful.





ON 2010 Calendars

The 2010 Endangered Reptiles and Amphibians of Canada calendars are \$10 each - free shipping in Canada!

This program is to raise awareness for reptile conservation and to help several non-profit organizations and charities raise money for endangered species conservation, education and stewardship. Each month features one of Canada's "at-risk" reptile or amphibian species and includes information such as species status, unique behaviour, ecology, threats and interesting facts. The bottom page of each month has a background image that displays the typical habitat of each species, with pictures showing various identification characteristics or behaviours.

To purchase a calendar, please mail a cheque for \$10 per calendar to:

Joe Crowley
50 Eugenie Street
Chatham, ON
N7M 3Z1



ON Nature Magazine

The Nipissing Naturlaists Club is affiliated with Ontario Nature. In the current issue of ON Nature magazine, you can read about:

- ◆ Global warming and how climate change will affect wildlife, agriculture and energy.
- ◆ Can wind power and wildlife coexist?
- ◆ Chimney swifts: A high flying ace goes into free fall.
- ◆ Forecasting: Mapping the weather for the 21st century.

To read back issues of ON Nature, visit www.onnaturemagazine.com

To learn more about Ontario Nature and to become a member, and to receive award-winning ON Nature magazine four times a year, visit www.ontarionature.org



Community involvement defines the character and approach of Ontario Nature. With its member groups and individual members, Ontario Nature has made a significant impact on conservation issues in communities across Ontario and continues to build a natural legacy for future generations.

The Ontario Nature Conservation Awards recognize excellence by honouring individuals, groups, government agencies and corporations who have worked to protect nature in Ontario. For more information about the awards criteria and the nomination procedure, and highlights key dates and events, please go to:

www.ontarionature.org/home/conservationawards.html

Youth Writing and Art Contest - 5th Year !!!

As you may know, the year 2010 has been declared the Year of Biodiversity by UNEP. To support this initiative in raising awareness about the critical importance of biodiversity for a healthy planet, the topic for this year's Ontario Nature Youth Writing and Art Contest is **Wild species and wild spaces: why biodiversity is important to me**. The contest is open to students in Grades 7 & 8 across Ontario.

Prizes include Canada Savings Bonds, mountain bikes, Mountain Equipment co-op gift certificates, ON membership, and other cool stuff.

Information about the contest is posted on www.ontarionature.org/events/youthchallenge.html, so be sure to check it out. There's a link to the official Convention on Biological Diversity 2010 IYB website and a video that's worth watching.



2009 Christmas Bird Count

January 2, 2010

There were light flurries in the morning of January 2nd and a brisk wind blew all day. Eight field observers and sixteen feeder watchers paid close attention to any birds in the area. The total species found was 26 with 931 individuals. The number of species was the second lowest since we began in 2002. The total individual birds was the lowest in our history, less than half of 4 previous years and 30% less than our next lowest year. Part of the reason for the low count is the lack of cones on the coniferous trees. The coniferous trees were stressed in the summer of 2008 and didn't produce buds for the 2009 cone year.

We discovered 2 new species for our count this year; Hooded Mergansers and Common Grackles. The Hooded Mergansers were found by Randy Moratz in the open water at the north West Arm Narrows bridge along Hwy 64. This is the first time ducks were recorded on our count. The Common Grackles were found by Steve Ward at his feeder on Michel Rd. The feeder watchers also found a Red-tailed Hawk and Carmelle Girouard and Marguerite Lemieux identified a Rough-legged Hawk north of Lavigne. The only House Sparrows counted were the four living in Carmelle Girouard's barn. Cal Osborne and Sandra Arsenault discovered the only Common Redpolls. Gary and I found a "charm of American Goldfinches" on Hillman Rd. in Lavigne. A flock of American Goldfinches is referred to as a charm, after their gold like plumage. We also found the only Pine Grosbeaks; a flock of 30 on Hillman Rd. and a dozen in the Musky Island Rd. area. Chuck Miller and Karen Mikoliew found 5 lovely Gray Jays east of Hwy 64 and south of the Mashkinonje.



Photo Hooded Merganser by Randy Moratz
& Field observers by Chuck Miller

Upcoming Events

Cross the Park Snowshoe

Feb 21, 2010

Earth Day Hike

May 2, 2010

Annual General Meeting

August 15, 2010

Contact: Angela at 594-1153

Buy a Bench

What a bargain at \$25. Harley Lang has done it again, created masterpieces. His benches are strong, permanently attached and should be there for many years. Thank you to those who have bought a bench. We still have others, so don't take too long to decide.



Photo Courtesy of Liz Lang



Photo Courtesy of Ontario Parks employee

Canoe Raffle

Our 2009 canoe raffle winner was Megan Osler from Toronto. Congratulations Megan and may you have many years of enjoyment from your new canoe.

A rose by any other name ...

Many of you have wondered how to pronounce and what does **Mashkinonje** mean.

Today and here, we pronounce it as **mas-kin-onj**.

The name is of Algonquin origin. It can be spelled maskinonje, maskinonge, masquinongy and muskellunge. The meaning has a fish origin and refers to a big ugly pike fish. The Oxford Canadian Dictionary lists maskinonge – ultimately from Ojibwa = great fish.

If you look at a map of the area, you will see various spellings.

would smell just as sweet...

— William Shakespeare

*Hike the trails, and enjoy the sweetness
of our park.*

FOM Directors

President: Angela Martin
Vice President: Dr. Peter Beckett
Secretary: Nicole Wilson

Treasurer & Membership: Brenda Tunney
Park Liaison: Chuck Miller, Ontario Parks
Superintendent

2009 Donors

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The Friends would like to thank the many generous supporters.

Thank you Barbara Parkinson of Collins Barrow Chartered Accounts from Sturgeon Falls for completing our tax returns. Collins Barrow has looked after us since 2000. Your help means so very much to us.

A special thanks to TJ and Monique Quesnel of Due North Marketing. They have provided our website www.mashkinonje.com free since 2001.

Thanks 2009 silent auction contributors: Tilley Endurables, Mountain Equipment Coop, White Squall, Johnson Outdoor Canada, Coleman Lantern, S.C. Johnson & Son Inc., Jean's Home Hardware Eric & Claude Bouffard, Ted & Grace Price, Peter Beckett, Sheldon McGregor, Gary and Angela Martin and Chuck Miller.

CONTACT US

We hope you enjoyed our newsletter. To view past editions, visit our website

www.mashkinonje.com

or contact us at:

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New members

Dianne Furchner
Joan Clark

Thank you for being a Friend