

THE CARDINAL

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The McIlwraith Field Naturalists of London

"To Preserve and Enjoy Nature"



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SUMMARIES OF EIGHT REGIONAL CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS FOR 2007/2008

For tabulated results of the eight regional Christmas Bird Counts reported below, see pages 34 to 36. To see online summaries of all Christmas Bird Counts everywhere, go to www.audubon.org/bird/cbc/.

LONDON. December 15, 2007, 0530 to 1700. Compiler Pete Read. Centre of circle is in London at the gates of Reservoir Park, Commissioners Road. The circle includes London, Arva, Lobo, Komoka, Delaware and Lambeth.

The temperature went from -10°C to a high of -7°C . The wind was out of the northwest, turning to west by afternoon, with a wind speed of 20 to 30 km per hour. Moving water was mostly open and still water frozen. The day was mostly cloudy in the morning but became overcast. There were some snow showers in the afternoon, adding about 2 cm to the 10 to 15 cm already on the ground.

There were 65 people taking part in the field in 33 parties, and an additional 33 feeder watchers. Total effort was 166.5 party hours (124 hours walking, 42.5 hours driving) and 754.5 km (152.5 km walking, 602 km driving), with an additional 6 hours and 40 km owling.

Our 99th annual Christmas Bird Count took place on a chilly Saturday. The total number of species was 73, about average, but the total of 24,059 individuals was below the 10-year average.

Many people complained about how cold it was at -10°C ; with the wind chill, I imagine it felt more like -20°C . At least we didn't quite get the huge storm that arrived on Sunday, forcing cancellation of a few southern Ontario counts.

Snow cover caused the field walkers to tramp around like marching soldiers, filling their usually high-enough boots with a bit of snowy stuffing. Drivers had to be aware of road conditions that would at times have been better for sleighs. I understand that the feeder watchers had an enjoyable time. Not only were they warm and snuggly by the fire, holding a warm cuppa, except, of course, when making a burst out the door to restock the feeders, but they were also lucky enough to have some of the best feeder counts in years as the little avian creatures constantly visited because of the cold and snow. People were not so fortunate in the field. Birds were either at backyard feeders or hunkered down in brush piles, thickets, or equally inaccessible locations. Fewer birds than usual were recorded by many parties, especially outside the city.

Even given the rather unfavourable weather conditions, as with all counts, there were some highlights, low-lights, and trends noted.

We had one new species, Trumpeter Swan. Three were noted by the Verboom party on the Wonnacott Farm river flats southwest of Komoka. They all had yellow wing tags but only number 299 could be read, and it turned out to be a second-year male tagged near Newmarket, Ontario.

For only the second time, a Double-crested Cormorant was found on our count. More remarkable than its rarity was the fact that the same party, the Caveneys, found the immature bird near the same spot at the Oxford Street west bridge where the last one, also an immature, was found in 2003.

Continuing with large white birds, there were 40 Tundra Swans reported, smashing the old record high of 12. This was only the sixth time they have been seen on our count. Even a Mute Swan was found on the north branch of the Thames by the Platt/Taylor party. The other large white birds were a flock of 17 Snow Geese, white phase, seen flying over the River Bend area, by a new group of observers. This was only the seventh London CBC for the species, and the number smashes the old high record of two birds. In fact, this year's number is higher than all other sightings combined.

Speaking of waterfowl, a lone Long-tailed Duck, our seventh record, was seen by an e-mail-in reporter, Stuart Immonen, while walking his dog near the Forks, and a good picture of the bird was submitted to firm up the identification. Pied-billed Grebes were found in two widely separated spots, one by the Larmour party, the other by

the Hayman party. Higher-than-usual numbers of some waterfowl were noted by riverside walkers in several parties. In numbers higher than the 10-year average were Mallard, Hooded Merganser, Canada Goose, Wood Duck, Goldeneye, and Bufflehead. In the not-so-good column, American Black numbers were well below average.

Though the number of Great Blue Herons was down overall, the exciting find of 10 in one spot near Greenway was enjoyed by two parties – the Warrick/Joneses and the "Rockgardens".

With the strong cold wind, only a pauper's number of screech-owls was found, the lowest in years, though Great Horned Owls were found in average numbers. We had a Barred Owl reported before the count, and, though we hoped it would make an appearance on count day, this was not to be. Remarkably, a Barred was seen by Steve Bucciarelli in northwest Whitehills within the count period.

Finding Merlins on a count is a treat, and finding that four parties each saw one is amazing, especially given the day's weather. Another good raptor was an immature Northern Goshawk found along the Thames by the Reads and Verbooms as they stood discussing a certain sighting of



An "amazing" four Merlins were seen on the London CBC.
(Photo by Mike Nelson.)

Trumpeter Swans. Despite those lucky raptor finds, there was not one Northern Harrier reported, and the numbers of red-tails, rough-legs, and kestrels were lower than the 10-year averages. There was good news, though, in that Peregrine Falcons were noted downtown and there were higher-than-average numbers of Cooper's Hawks and sharpies. And Bald Eagle tied in numbers with the last high of 12.

Higher-than-average numbers were recorded for Wild Turkey, Hermit Thrush, Cedar Waxwing, White-breasted and Red-breasted (new high) nuthatches, Snow Bunting, and Dark-eyed Junco. We even recorded a high of five Oregon-race juncos and two that appeared to be "pink-sided" forms. Also reported in higher numbers than average were Northern Shrike, Carolina Wren, Common Redpoll, American Robin, Pine Siskin, and American Goldfinch (new high).

Woodpeckers were found in good numbers. Though we missed Red-headed Woodpecker, one Yellow-bellied Sapsucker appeared at Mary Kerr's feeder. There was a new record high number of Red-bellied Woodpeckers for the eighth year in a row.

As mentioned above, thrushes were present in good numbers even though there were no bluebirds this year.

However, we did have quite a downside to our count. There were lower-than-10-year-average totals for several species. These included kingfisher (very low numbers), Blue Jay (down to fewer than 200), all gulls, pigeon, crow, chickadee, kinglets, Brown Creeper, Winter Wren, starling, and all the small sparrows except junco.

Though the gulls were fewer, the Dumpsters – Dave Martin, Linda Wladarski, and Ross Snider – were able to locate a single Glaucous as well as a lonely Iceland gull. Perhaps the American Crows were gathering elsewhere. The Strathroy CBC noted about 24,000 of these noisy, black birds. Rock Pigeon and House Sparrow were likely hiding out of the cold. The other smaller sparrows may have been hunkered down in stream valleys and brush piles and missed by field parties, or they may have moved farther south due to early snowfalls this year.

Reports from local CBCs and Ontbirds note that, due to failure of food crops in their normal wintering grounds, many species are showing up farther south than usual. On count day, Dark-eyed Junco, Common Redpoll, Cedar Waxwing, and even American Goldfinch (new high) numbers were higher than the 10-year averages. This trend was supported by a White-winged Crossbill at Sue Southon's feeders, and three more at the Lorimers' feeders. Higher-than-average numbers of Snow Buntings seen by many parties and a single Lapland Longspur (Smout party) lent further evidence of the trend.

The number of Northern Cardinals reached a new high, as masses visited feeders.

I am not sure why numbers of such species as jays and chickadees would be down, unless these birds were at feed-

ers rather than in the field. With only 33 feeder watchers, in a city with many more feeders, it is likely that many of these birds were missed. Another big miss on the count was any kind of blackbird, such as cowbird, red-wing, or even grackle, which is rather unusual compared to the last few CBCs.

There were several sightings of birds that are "reportable" due to their rarity or the possibility of misidentification, but not enough detail could be provided to safely exclude other species. It is often not possible to get a second look at rare species once you leave the area where you find them unless they are at a feeder. It is wise to take precise notes on plumage, and sort out the details while in the presence of the rarity. There are not too many species where this becomes a problem, but study up on those before the count, and perhaps, take out your guide book to help. Better yet, have a digital camera along.

Thanks to all who took part in our great adventure, whether counting feeder birds or participating in field work. If you have any questions, contact me by e-mail or

phone (see page 27). Thanks to Sue Read for co-ordinating the potluck supper, and special thanks to Ann Henderson and Mary Dalglish for their tireless efforts in the kitchen getting the food ready for the hungry crowd. Thanks also to Dave Wake and his husky crew for getting to the church on time and setting up the tables.

As you may have noted when you started reading this account, we will be in for a rather exciting count this coming year, our 100th consecutively run London CBC, which started in 1909. Much more will be coming regarding this notable event. I believe, with

our tradition of having our count on the first Saturday of the Audubon CBC period, our date for 2008 would be December 20. Save that date and let's celebrate this monumental McIlwraith milestone accomplishment together!

Pete Read



An immature White-winged Crossbill at Sue Southon's feeder in London. It was seen frequently during the fall and on CBC day. (Photo by Sue Southon.)

ST THOMAS. December 26, 2007, 0800 to 1645. Compiler Diane Dobson. Centre of circle is 4.8 km (3 miles) southeast of St Thomas at the junction of County Road 45 (John Wise Line) and Yarmouth Centre Road; circle includes St Thomas, Port Stanley, Aylmer, and Port Bruce.

The total of 75 species was down considerably from last year's 90. The number of individual birds – 17,328 – was also down from 2006 (29,095). There were 56 field observers and three feeder watchers.

Although ice fog hampered visibility, the count went very well. The most interesting sighting was an albino Northern Cardinal at a feeder near Port Bruce. Also, Gary and Gillian Crowther were amazed when they spotted six Northern Flickers on the water tower at Port Stanley. Earlier in the week they had seen Eastern Bluebirds on that same tower. Snow Goose and Hooded Merganser were seen during count week.

At the end of the day there was a good turnout of counters at the potluck supper.

Diane Dobson

WOODSTOCK. December 15, 2007, 0700 to 1730. Compiler Jeff Skevington. Centre of circle is at Oxford County Road 4 at the bridge on Gordon Pittock Lake; circle includes Hickson, Ratho, Bright, Braemar, Innerkip, Woodstock, Gobles, Vandecar, Oxford Centre, Curries, Sweaburg, and the east end of Beachville.

Weather: During early morning owling, it was mostly clear, -13°C , wind east at 25 to 30 km per hour. In the morning it was overcast, -13 to -8°C , wind east at 25 to 35 km per hour. In the afternoon it was overcast, with snow starting at 2:30, -9 to -7°C , wind east at 25 to 35 km per hour. Most water was frozen (creeks, ponds, and lakes frozen; moving water mostly frozen). The berry crop was poor, with the exception of Hackberry along the Thames River having fruit and Winterberry with some fruit.

In total, 26,398 individuals of 61 species were counted by 22 observers and eight feeder watchers.

New high counts were obtained for 13 species: Bald Eagle (2), Wild Turkey (98), Red-bellied Woodpecker (14), Hairy Woodpecker (25), Northern Flicker (12), Winter Wren (3), Hermit Thrush (2), American Robin (67), Bohemian Waxwing (4), Cedar Waxwing (231), Northern Cardinal (151), Common Redpoll (1032), and Hoary Redpoll (8).

Other unusual sightings were Turkey Vulture (1), Snow Goose (1), Cackling Goose (1), Red-headed Woodpecker (1), and Eastern Bluebird (1).

Jeff Skevington

INGERSOLL. December 28, 2007, 0700 to 1700. Compilers Dave Martin and Ross Snider. Centre of circle is 2 km east of Putnam at Five Points intersection; circle includes Dorchester Mill Pond, Dorchester Swamp, Putnam Tract, Lake Whittaker, Ingersoll Wetlands, Oxford County Forest, middle branch of Thames River downstream from Thamesford, south branch of Thames from Centreville to Dorchester, towns of Ingersoll, Thamesford, Beachville, Putnam, Dorchester, Mossley, Harrietsville, Avon, Crampton, Banner, and various ditches.

This was the 26th Ingersoll CBC. Twenty observers and five feeder watchers counted 22,846 individuals of 64 species, the fourth highest number of species, well above the long-term average of 58 species and the 10-year average of 60 species.

New species recorded were Hooded Merganser (2) (recorded as a Count Week species in 1984) and Bohemian Waxwing (1). Species recorded for the third time were Mute Swan (1) and Red Crossbill (1) (at a feeder). This is the fourth count for two species: Tufted Titmouse (1) and

Hoary Redpoll (2), and the fifth count for two more species: Red-shouldered Hawk (1) and Gadwall (1).

New high counts were recorded for Wild Turkey (51) (previous high 10), Red-bellied Woodpecker (37) (previous high 25), Hairy Woodpecker (44) (previous high 34), White-breasted Nuthatch (121) (previous high 108), and Cedar Waxwing (192) (tied previous high count). Quite a few species had their second-highest counts in the 26 years. These were Canada Goose, Common Merganser, Cooper's Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, Mourning Dove, and Downy Woodpecker.

Winter finches were Common Redpoll (469) (third highest), Hoary Redpoll (2), Pine Siskin (48) (fourth highest), and Red Crossbill (1).

Species present in numbers considerably below average were American Kestrel, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Song Sparrow, and Swamp Sparrow.

Big misses were Northern Harrier, Ruffed Grouse, Long-eared Owl, and Purple Finch.

Turkey Vulture was noted during count week.

Dave Martin and Ross Snider



Pine Grosbeaks were seen on the Stratford and Strathroy CBCs. This is one of several northern species being seen in southwestern Ontario this winter. (Photo credit www.glennbartley.com.)

STRATFORD. December 29, 2007, 0830 to 1630. Compiler Gail King. Count is centred in Stratford.

Forty-six species (down from 49 the previous year) and 7219 individual birds (down from 10,593) were counted by 27 observers and five feeder watchers. A Beaver, a Muskrat, and two Virginia Opossums were also reported.

WEST ELGIN NATURE CLUB. December 27, 2007, 1000 to 1800. Compiler George Prieksaitis.

A total of 14,205 birds of 75 species was recorded by 77 observers. The sky was overcast, with light snow, and a high of 2°C . Winds were west to northwest, light to 10 km per hour.

New high counts were noted for Mourning Dove (1808), Northern Shrike (8), and American Goldfinch (1229).

George Prieksaitis

STRATHROY AREA. December 22, 2007, 0500 to 1700. Compiler Dave Skinner. Centre of the circle is located at the intersection of Glen Oak Road and Inadale Drive, about 10 km southwest of Strathroy. This is an inland area, with no lakes. The Sydenham River meanders through the circle. The towns of Strathroy, Mount Brydges, Melbourne, and Appin lie within the count area, as do the Longwoods, Strathroy, Melwood, and Wright conservation areas.

This is the twelfth year for the Strathroy Area CBC. The snow was quite deep and drifted in areas. The skies were overcast all day. However, it did not snow or rain as had been forecast. The temperature ranged from 3 to 5°C . The wind was approximately 20 km per hour.

There were 16 field observers and five feeder watchers. During the course of the count, a vehicle belonging to

one of the observers ended up in a ditch and a passing motorist had to be flagged down for help.

The species count was 58; the average for the first 11 years of the count is 55. The total number of individual birds counted was 36,885.

The high concentration of American Crows in the Strathroy area has been evident to most residents of this vicinity. There is a roost located near Carol Street, east of the Walmart store, over the railroad track. Late each afternoon the crows gather at this location. They disperse eastward at daybreak. We estimate approximately 24,000 crows are gathering at this roost each evening.

There were three new species added to the count: Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Bohemian Waxwing, and Pine Grosbeak. There were six record highs for the count: Cooper's Hawk (12), Wild Turkey (258), Great Black-backed Gull (3), Red-bellied Woodpecker (61), Northern Shrike (5), and American Crow (24,003). Other interesting observations were American Pipit, Bald Eagle, and Ruffed Grouse during count week. There was a Green-winged Teal at the Strathroy Conservation Area. Pileated Woodpeckers were seen in two separate areas and have become expected on this count. An Eastern Towhee was seen coming to a feeder on Second Street in Strathroy. For the first time since this count began, no Northern Harriers were located.

Dave Skinner



Wild Turkeys were found on all eight regional CBCs, in record high numbers on at least four. These Wild Turkeys visited a London feeder during the autumn.

(Photo courtesy of Madeleine Thomas.)

ST CLAIR NATIONAL WILDLIFE AREA. January 1, 2008, 0730 to 1715. Compiler Allen Woodliffe.

This was the 28th St Clair National Wildlife Area (SCNWA) CBC. The weather was relatively calm to begin with but by 9 am the wind, and then the snow, became a factor as a cold front went through. Northwest winds averaged at least 20 km per hour with gusts to 40 km per hour or more. Daytime temperatures were relatively constant, varying only from about +1 to -1 °C. Except for brief peri-

ods, snow, sometimes light and sometimes heavy, fell for much of the day. These conditions made this year's count "the year of the Snow Bunting", of which an incredible and probably conservative 14,592 birds were reported.

Sixteen observers and two feeder watchers tallied 61,028 individuals of 81 species of birds. This is about average for individuals (61,401) but significantly higher than the average for species (66) since the count's inception in 1981.

The SCNWA count area includes extensive wetlands along the east shore of Lake St Clair in an otherwise mostly agricultural landscape and therefore water birds are a significant element of this count. The cold and snow of two weeks earlier, as well as the approaching cold front, drove many of them out of the area, limiting the total waterfowl to just 16 species and 10,001 individuals. By comparison, the 2007 CBC tallied 91 species of which 26 (95,727 individuals) were waterfowl.

There was one new species for the count, Wild Turkey (6).

There were eight species with new high totals (previous high totals given in parentheses): Common Merganser – 2899 (1965), Bald Eagle – 13 (7), Red-tailed Hawk – 58 (55), Herring Gull – 4826 (2574), Short-eared Owl – 3 (1), Lapland Longspur – 155 (37), Snow Bunting – 14,592 (8293), and Common Redpoll – 607 (318).

Totals for seven species tied previous highs: Cooper's Hawk (11), Peregrine Falcon (1), Iceland Gull (1), Lesser Black-backed Gull (1), Glaucous Gull (3), Barn Owl (1), and Red-headed Woodpecker (1).

Count week species were Snow Goose, Redhead, Hooded Merganser, Thayer's Gull, and Brown Creeper.

Allen Woodliffe

Regional Christmas Bird Count results were compiled for The Cardinal by Dave and Winnie Wake.



THE ATLAS IS OUT

The second *Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Ontario 2001–2005* was released at the end of January, after years of effort. Volunteers, including many MFN members, logged an amazing 150,000 hours of time in the field between 2001 and 2005, and did 69,000 point counts. They submitted 1.2 million individual breeding bird

records.

The atlas has more than 300 species accounts, in more than 700 pages, with full-colour photos and maps for each account. The maps show not only the distribution of each

breeding species, but how its distribution has changed in the 20 years since the first atlas was published, and relative abundance (the first such maps for many Ontario species). Each species account includes breeding range and habitat, distribution, population status and history in Ontario, and information on breeding biology and abundance. General information on Ontario's biogeography and bird populations, and an overview of atlas results are also included.

If you pre-ordered your book, you probably have it by now. They are still available at \$92.50 + GST (includes shipping in Canada). To order a copy, call Ontario Nature at 1-800-440-2366 or visit www.birdsontario.org/atlas/index.jsp, where you can also view sample pages. Even if you have a copy of the atlas, the website offers additional access to maps, data summaries, and raw data.

Species	London 2004	London 2005	London 2006	London 2007	St Thomas	Woodstock	Ingersoll	Stratford	St Clair	Strathroy	West Elgin	Species
Snow Goose			1	17		1						Snow Goose (white form)
Cackling Goose						1						Cackling Goose
Canada Goose	4681	2511	3008	4155	1674	1488	4946	291	2251	1208	496	Canada Goose
Mute Swan			2	1	2		1	2	20			Mute Swan
Trumpeter Swan				3								Trumpeter Swan
Tundra Swan			9	40					950			Tundra Swan
Muscovy Duck								2				Muscovy Duck
Wood Duck	8	3	4	5				2	4			Wood Duck
Gadwall	1						1					Gadwall
American Black Duck	61	60	37	42	67	22	41	28	299	18		American Black Duck
Mallard	2274	2286	4731	2580	237	204	730	482	3204	360	1	Mallard
Northern Shoveler									4			Northern Shoveler
Northern Pintail									15			Northern Pintail
Green-winged Teal									1	1		Green-winged Teal
Canvasback									20			Canvasback
Ring-necked Duck	8											Ring-necked Duck
Greater Scaup	2		1						10		2	Greater Scaup
Lesser Scaup	3								1			Lesser Scaup
Long-tailed Duck				1								Long-tailed Duck
Bufflehead	7	5	1	11	9						6	Bufflehead
Common Goldeneye	5	27	3	27	7		2		279		22	Common Goldeneye
Hooded Merganser	6	5	17	20			2					Hooded Merganser
Common Merganser	461	165	494	215	10	67	41		2899		61	Common Merganser
Red-breasted Merganser			11		31				43		60	Red-breasted Merganser
Ruddy Duck			7		4				1			Ruddy Duck
Pied-billed Grebe		1		2					1			Pied-billed Grebe
Double-crested Cormorant				1								Double-crested Cormorant
Great Blue Heron	17	23	28	20	6	4	2	3	18		3	Great Blue Heron
Turkey Vulture						1					1	Turkey Vulture
Bald Eagle	5	5	12	12	3	2	1		13		13	Bald Eagle
Northern Harrier	3		7		6	1			10		24	Northern Harrier
Sharp-shinned Hawk	13	12	11	13	13	4	9	5	7	7	10	Sharp-shinned Hawk
Cooper's Hawk	18	21	25	13	17	6	12	4	11	12	16	Cooper's Hawk
Northern Goshawk		1		1							2	Northern Goshawk
Red-shouldered Hawk			1				1		1		3	Red-shouldered Hawk
Red-tailed Hawk	101	58	104	72	108	48	104	46	58	71	111	Red-tailed Hawk
Rough-legged Hawk	23	9	3	14	4	7	14	27	3	32	44	Rough-legged Hawk
Golden Eagle											1	Golden Eagle
American Kestrel	12	8	10	7	15	2	12	5	7	12	8	American Kestrel
Merlin	1	1		4			2					Merlin
Peregrine Falcon	1	2	2	2					1			Peregrine Falcon
Ring-necked Pheasant				2	1	2			3		3	Ring-necked Pheasant
Wild Turkey	22	91	51	190	170	98	51	50	6	258	248	Wild Turkey
American Coot	8		22						11			American Coot
Bonaparte's Gull					35						44	Bonaparte's Gull
Ring-billed Gull	1603	638	1517	647	1252	3	17	41	198	11	184	Ring-billed Gull
Herring Gull	1041	531	745	1075	105	28	86	542	4826	17	21	Herring Gull
Iceland Gull	3	2		1					1			Iceland Gull
Lesser Black-backed Gull									1			Lesser Black-backed Gull
Glaucous Gull	3	4	4	1				1	3			Glaucous Gull

Species	London 2004	London 2005	London 2006	London 2007	St Thomas	Woodstock	Ingersoll	Stratford	St Clair	Strathroy	West Elgin	Species
Great Black-backed Gull	50	45	26	52	6	1	3	5	164	3	4	Great Black-backed Gull
gull sp.	313	8	36	52	400							gull sp.
Rock Pigeon	698	844	793	464	385	265	897	1113	593	360	455	Rock Pigeon
Mourning Dove	1562	1821	1264	1128	1652	468	1527	174	2118	1148	1808	Mourning Dove
Barn Owl									1			Barn Owl
Eastern Screech-Owl	9	13	14	2	7	17	3		11	18	61	Eastern Screech-Owl
Great Horned Owl	9	5	16	7	3	5	3		9	6	1	Great Horned Owl
Long-eared Owl					1				3		2	Long-eared Owl
Short-eared Owl					1				3	4	1	Short-eared Owl
Belted Kingfisher	19	8	13	7	2	1	3		1		1	Belted Kingfisher
Red-headed Woodpecker						1			1			Red-headed Woodpecker
Red-bellied Woodpecker	54	57	60	62	66	14	37	10	10	61	56	Red-bellied Woodpecker
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker		1		1	1						1	Yellow-bellied Sapsucker
Downy Woodpecker	257	225	262	223	157	90	130	43	61	106	147	Downy Woodpecker
Hairy Woodpecker	39	43	42	42	44	25	44	4		34	34	Hairy Woodpecker
Northern Flicker	6	9	6	8	28	12	5		1	11	12	Northern Flicker
Pileated Woodpecker					4	3	2			2	4	Pileated Woodpecker
Northern Shrike	5		4	5	4	4	5	4	2	5	8	Northern Shrike
Blue Jay	271	441	364	188	358	195	338	120	66	239	293	Blue Jay
American Crow	329	319	344	784	738	16738	2995	1225	18568	24003	990	American Crow
Horned Lark	91	125	30	74	56	101	43	36	844	133	153	Horned Lark
Black-capped Chickadee	957	1057	1030	723	572	369	519	225	30	428	432	Black-capped Chickadee
Tufted Titmouse	5	1			3		1	1			2	Tufted Titmouse
Red-breasted Nuthatch	73	76	50	90	41	28	15	5	3	51	31	Red-breasted Nuthatch
White-breasted Nuthatch	140	200	153	184	132	75	121	49	13	115	104	White-breasted Nuthatch
Brown Creeper	26	25	40	15	4	7	12	2		19	7	Brown Creeper
Carolina Wren	16	11	33	29	18				2	4	5	Carolina Wren
Winter Wren	14	11	3	3	1	3	3		3			Winter Wren
Golden-crowned Kinglet	45	33	26	34	16	7	12			30	9	Golden-crowned Kinglet
Ruby-crowned Kinglet		2								1		Ruby-crowned Kinglet
Eastern Bluebird			4		112	1				8	86	Eastern Bluebird
Hermit Thrush		2	1	3	3	2	2			1	1	Hermit Thrush
American Robin	72	196	45	59	28	67	18		1	27	60	American Robin
Gray Catbird											1	Gray Catbird
Northern Mockingbird	1		1	1	3				1			Northern Mockingbird
European Starling	3543	5330	3501	1628	1793	1593	5959	1482	2004	3307	2178	European Starling
Bohemian Waxwing						4	1			1		Bohemian Waxwing
Cedar Waxwing	77	302	36	190	289	231	192	9		41	14	Cedar Waxwing
Common Yellowthroat			1									Common Yellowthroat
Eastern Towhee		1			1				1	1		Eastern Towhee
American Tree Sparrow	2930	313	309	483	732	267	471	27	520	316	352	American Tree Sparrow
Chipping Sparrow					1				1		1	Chipping Sparrow
Field Sparrow	3	1	2		3					1	4	Field Sparrow
Vesper Sparrow			2									Vesper Sparrow
Fox Sparrow	2				1				2			Fox Sparrow
Song Sparrow	75	56	29	14	29	8	23	1	49	33	25	Song Sparrow
Lincoln's Sparrow		1										Lincoln's Sparrow
Swamp Sparrow	10	6	10	1	6	10	4		15	5	2	Swamp Sparrow
White-throated Sparrow	38	48	25	11	42		11	1	13	17	19	White-throated Sparrow
White-crowned Sparrow	2	1			30		1		43	16	21	White-crowned Sparrow

Species	London 2004	London 2005	London 2006	London 2007	St Thomas	Woodstock	Ingersoll	Stratford	St Clair	Strathroy	West Elgin	Species
Dark-eyed Junco	1683	1192	990	1585	1870	856	655	189	521	974	1304	Dark-eyed Junco
Lapland Longspur				1					155			Lapland Longspur
Snow Bunting	501	677	75	532	66	585	53	23	14592	546	316	Snow Bunting
Northern Cardinal	765	612	601	766	422	151	243	48	235	260	277	Northern Cardinal
Rose-breasted Grosbeak			1									Rose-breasted Grosbeak
Red-winged Blackbird		4			20				194		1	Red-winged Blackbird
Eastern Meadowlark										1		Eastern Meadowlark
Rusty Blackbird									28			Rusty Blackbird
Common Grackle					29		1		23		6	Common Grackle
Brown-headed Cowbird	4	15	8		254	6	69		2708	83	104	Brown-headed Cowbird
Pine Grosbeak								30		5		Pine Grosbeak
Purple Finch	4	5		1	7	4		1	3		14	Purple Finch
House Finch	689	587	232	534	302	98	269	35	139	232	522	House Finch
Red Crossbill							1					Red Crossbill
White-winged Crossbill				4								White-winged Crossbill
Common Redpoll	38	80		645	426	1032	469	160	607	706	325	Common Redpoll
Hoary Redpoll						8	2				1	Hoary Redpoll
Pine Siskin	68			108	157	3	48	1		3	4	Pine Siskin
American Goldfinch	1589	1335	868	1636	644	517	397	327	218	608	1229	American Goldfinch
House Sparrow	2498	2815	2032	2486	1582	537	1164	338	1268	905	1333	House Sparrow
Total Individuals	29971	25428	24250	24059	17328	26398	22846	7219	61028	36885	14205	Total Individuals
Total Species	71	69	71	73	75	61	64	46	81	58	75	Total Species
Number of Observers	61	52	58	65	56	22	20	27	16	16	77	Number of Observers
Number of Feeders	45	21	30	33	3	8	5	5	2	5		Number of Feeders

PHOTO IDENTIFICATION

NOT ON THE FROG POSTER

Bruce Parker wrote of his photo "We found this little guy on the rocks at Collins Bay Inlet near the town of Killarney, Ontario. We checked our Frogs of Ontario poster and it did not match any. It was just over two centimetres long and a brilliant green colour on the top surface."

The bright green back (with grey colours underneath) is hardly what one would expect from something called a "Gray" Treefrog, but that is

what Bruce discovered this to be. According to Bob Johnson's *Familiar Amphibians and Reptiles of Ontario*, these treefrogs are "masters at changing colour". Bright grey-green colours are usually seen on warm days and when the treefrogs are in full sun; dark grey-black colours in colder weather and during breeding (in cold water). Darker colours may absorb more heat. The white squarish spot visible below the eye is diagnostic, whatever the colour.



LEAF-FOOTED BUG

This leaf-footed (or leaf-legged) bug, *Acanthocephala terminalis*, was photographed and identified by Robin McLeod. It is a true bug, i.e., a member of the order Hemiptera. In the photo, one can see the leaf- or flange-like projections on a rear leg that give this group of bugs its name.

Also visible is a round white dot on the pronotum (which is the covering of the upper surface of the prothorax, the first segment of the thorax, or middle part, of an insect). The dot is a parasitic fly egg, attached where the insect can't dislodge it. Robin McLeod has found that eggs attached in this way are common on *A. terminalis*.

REPTILES AT RISK: THE NEXT CHAPTER

Scott Gillingwater

Many Years of Studies and Protection

Thunder cracks through the sky, leaving tremors in our chests, and increasingly in our confidence. The sky blackens, save for the blinding strikes of lightning gaining more intense brilliance with each eruption. As the giant Sycamores begin to toss their limbs to the ground and sheets of rain surround us, I suggest it may be a good time to take a break from searching for turtle nests. Huddled under a canoe, in the middle of nowhere, many kilometres from our vehicle, we contemplate our situation. Each of us creating stories of our demise and wondering what our loved ones would say if we were carried off by the “imminent” tornado, or hurricane, or Thames River tsunami! . . . But as quickly as it appears, the summer storm slips away to the east. Within an hour, the 35-degree-Celsius heat is again beating down on our backs, while deer flies wait patiently for their turn to dine, and, as we wipe the sweat and dirt from our eyes, we can see a new area we have failed to search. But ask any one of us what we would rather be doing, and the answer is always the same, we prefer to be doing this. Is it the adventure of trekking through southern Ontario’s last bits of nature, risking our lives in freak storms for a rush, or is it something more that compels a small group of people to allow our social lives to pass us by, and our bodies to pay the price for our persistence? It is much more than a selfish thrill; it is the realization that we are losing a group of animals that has existed since the age of the dinosaur, and this is an opportunity to give rather than take away.

Ontario’s turtles and snakes have declined at such an alarming rate that populations are failing across the province. The number of threats keeps growing, with habitat loss, road mortality, pet trade, and human persecution high on the list. While our team struggles with fatigue, heat and humidity, and missed weekends off, we remain clear in our goals.

Reptiles have often been an afterthought, resulting in their current declines. Without immediate changes, we will lose many species we take for granted, and others we barely knew existed. In Ontario, six of our eight turtle species are at risk and 11 of our 18 snakes are also at risk. What this means is that these reptiles cannot adapt to current threats and now need our assistance to survive.

As long-term MFN members know, my assistants and I have been working at this project for a while through the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority (UTRCA). Since 1994, we’ve been working with the Spiny Softshell Turtle (threatened), and each year adding more species to

the mix, such as the Queen Snake (threatened), Eastern Hog-nosed Snake (threatened), and Spotted Turtle (endangered). Since 2002, we have gone far beyond our early days, and are now enacting recovery efforts along with our research and education initiatives. Luckily we realized long ago that we could not do this alone, and some good friends were always there to offer support. These good friends included the McIlwraith Field Naturalists of London. In addition to assistance in the 1990s, during our work in 2003 and again in 2004, MFN championed our efforts, acting as a sponsor to receive funding through the Ontario Trillium Foundation (see page 6). With the UTRCA and other funding partners such as

the Federal Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk, we were able to do the work necessary to effect change for local reptile populations.

We have been able to benefit from the Ontario Trillium Foundation funding since 2003. Like all good things, they come to an end. While we are still moving forward and seeking funding for 2008, the exceptional results over the past few years have aided in our knowledge of reptiles at risk, leading to on-the-ground stewardship activities and large-scale education and outreach opportunities.

A brief summary of our results, primarily with Spiny Softshell Turtles and Queen Snakes, follows.

In 2002, a mark-recapture study of softshells along the

Thames was initiated, the first mark-recapture study for softshells in Ontario. From 2002 to 2007, activities included mark-recapture surveys, nest site rehabilitation and monitoring, nest protection and monitoring, hatchling data collection and release, visual surveys, public education and awareness-raising, and data collection on nest success, behaviour, habitat use, morphology, and threats.

Results for 2004 to 2007

A total of 567 Spiny Softshell Turtle nests were discovered along a five-kilometre stretch of the Thames River. These included 406 nests that were found to have been predated by mammals between June and September, and 161 nests (2970 eggs) that were found and protected by the study team.

Unfortunately, even nests that were protected by our wire cages were not 100% successful. Illegal poaching, vandalism, persistent mammalian predators, fly larvae, severe summer flooding, cattle, ATV use, and drought claimed a large number of these eggs. However, keeping



A male Spiny Softshell Turtle in Thames River.



Spotted Turtle on a Muskrat's lodge.

in mind that mammals are known to take up to 100% of turtle eggs, we were very successful in our efforts. Over a four-year period we released well above 1200 hatchlings back into the river system. This is in addition to young that were released through our efforts in previous years. We are seeing the fruits of our labour as juveniles of many age classes are now commonly located at these sites. During surveys in the mid-1990s, almost no young were observed, so the population is beginning to increase. Although many young will still fail to reach adulthood, many more will get there than would have without our efforts.

Our efforts do not stop at just protecting eggs; we also create, rehabilitate, and maintain turtle nesting habitat. We remove non-native vegetation, plant native vegetation, work with local landowners, and solicit observation reports from the community. Our mark-recapture program is allowing us to understand the population dynamics of softshells in this area and to make well-informed decisions about recovery implementation. We have marked more than 150 adult Spiny Softshell Turtles and the recapture information allows us to estimate population size. Early radio-telemetry efforts also shed light on seasonal migration of nesting females, when they routinely move 12 kilometres upstream from nesting sites back to hibernation sites. We are also discovering "nursery" sites for juvenile turtles, basically safe areas that are used to avoid detection while still providing thermoregulation (temperature control) and foraging opportunities.

The public education campaign was also very successful. Thousands of people of various ages, and from a variety of groups, were informed about reptiles at risk in southern Ontario. Many presentations were delivered throughout the watershed. Fact sheets and "Report Your Sightings" posters were available at all functions to further aid in awareness and public support. The fact sheets and posters were also distributed to pet stores, veterinary clinics, feed shops, and outdoor sports stores and suppliers within the City of London. In addition, the *Spiny Softshell Stewardship Guide* (a 60-page, full-colour booklet on how to save turtles in Ontario) was distributed to a number of landowners and land users along the Thames River. In all, approximately 5000 school children were reached, and over 15,000 individuals of all ages were provided with an opportunity to better appreciate our scaled neighbours.

Things were not always positive, however. In addition to turtle eggs being stolen or nests being vandalized, Spiny Softshell Turtles were found dead and injured due to fish-hooks embedded in their throats and stomachs, while others were shot, and yet others were collected as pets. Queen Snakes did not often fare much better, with problems rang-

ing from crushing injuries caused by people walking along the river to blatant and illegal fires destroying habitat. These problems show that there is much more we need to do, and that keeping a strong pace, one step in front of the current threats, is necessary.

Great advancements were also made in our knowledge and protection of the Queen Snake. Although only small remnant populations appear to remain in our watershed, we have found methods of assisting females in gestation and of providing safety from predators, and are currently looking at ways to protect populations of the Queen Snake's favourite prey item, crayfish. We also surveyed for Spotted Turtles and Eastern Hog-nosed Snakes, along with other reptiles at risk, and heavily promoted them in our outreach and education initiatives. We were always met with very positive responses from the members of our great urban and rural communities, pushing us to try harder to reach more people.



A Queen Snake basks at the river's edge.

While the peaks and valleys, successes and downfalls, were many, there isn't the space to provide you, the reader, with all accounts. I used to wonder who really cared about reptiles. But I have found their guardians, and while they are few in number, their efforts and interest speak volumes. As members of MFN, you are providing opportunities and inspiration for projects like this one: projects that do more than talk about our current issues, but effectively act for the benefit of nature. I am still inspired by all the MFN members who helped me with this endeavour, and I only hope that I have done them proud in my efforts. This partnership would not have been as successful without the efforts of MFN members Cathy Quinlan, Karen Auzins, Katherine Turner, Don Lodge, Winnie Wake, Anita Caveney, Jack Lorimer, Betsy Baldwin, my friend Barbara Bain, and of course the master of organization and giver of so much time, Shirley Lorimer. I am indebted to you all. If I have missed anyone, my sincerest apologies; with a brain thinking about reptile conservation 99% of the time, the rest of the world sometimes passes me by!

While the future of this project is always unknown, I will continue to seek funding and do what I can to inspire others as they continue to inspire me.

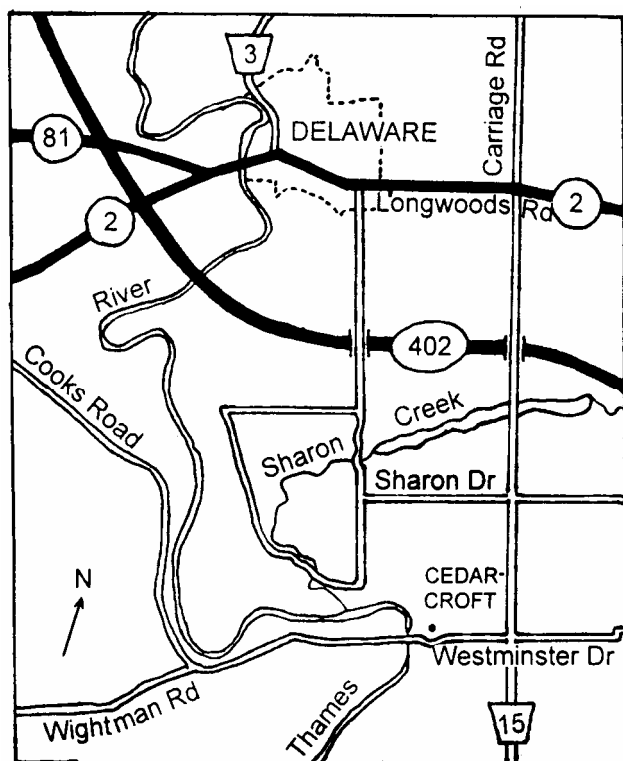
(Scott Gillingwater is a Species at Risk Biologist with the UTRCA, and has been a reptile enthusiast since childhood. MFN members have enjoyed a number of his lively talks, illustrated by his excellent photos, at MFN meetings and at the "Nature in the City" series.)

(All photos by Scott Gillingwater.)



An Eastern Hog-nosed Snake tests the air.

CEDARCROFT



Turn west from Carriage Rd (County Rd 15) onto Westminister Dr. (12th Sideroad). Watch for No. 10736 on the right before the road slopes down to the river. Enter through the gate by the "Private Property No Trespassing" sign.

Visit MFN's website at www.mcilwraith.ca
E-mail: info@mcilwraith.ca

MFN CALENDAR CHECK

Fri. Feb. 15	Climate Crisis, Gordon McBean;	
	Annual General Meeting	MTG
Fri. Feb. 22	SwiftWatch, Winnie Wake	BW
Sun. Mar. 9	Vauxhall Park Stroll	FT
Fri. Mar. 14	River Project, Kevin Bice	MTG
Sun. Mar. 16	Aylmer WMA	FT
Sat. Mar. 22	Long Point Birding	FT
Fri. Mar. 28	Birding in Ecuador, Paul Prevett	
	and Candy McManiman	BW
Sun. Apr. 13	Mitchell SL and Hullett PWA	FT
Fri. Apr. 18	Members' Night	MTG
Sat. Apr. 26	Springtime at Cedarcroft	FT
Wed. Apr. 30	Woodcocks on the Thames	FT
Fri. May 2 to Sun. May 4	Birding on the Bruce	FT

FT = field trip, **MTG** = regular meeting, **BW** = Birding Wing. For details, refer to listings on pages 49 and 50.

THE MCILWRAITH FIELD NATURALISTS OF LONDON ONTARIO INCORPORATED

More than a Century of Commitment to Nature
Box 24008, London, Ontario N6H 5C4

The origins of the McIlwraith Field Naturalists go back to 1864, with the founding of the London branch of the Entomological Society. In 1890 this insect-study group added sections devoted to botany, ornithology, geology, and microscopy. Only the ornithological section survived, changing its name in 1903 to the McIlwraith Ornithological Club and in 1965 to the McIlwraith Field Naturalists.

The McIlwraith Field Naturalists of London, Ontario, offers a program of indoor meetings during the autumn, winter, and spring. Regular monthly meetings are usually held on the third Friday of the month and feature presentations on a wide variety of topics related to natural history and conservation. Birding Wing meetings, which cater to the particular interests of birders, are held on the fourth Friday of the month.

Field trips provide an opportunity for members to observe local and regional natural history with assistance from experienced members. For information on the current program of meetings and field trips, see pages 49 and 50.

MFN works to protect threatened natural areas and takes action on other issues affecting the local environment. As part of MFN's commitment to conservation, the club owns an 11-hectare nature reserve, Cedarcroft, near Delaware. In 2000, MFN became a founding member of the Thames Talbot Land Trust. Projects such as the Christmas Bird Count, the Butterfly Count in July, Project Peregrine, and SwiftWatch encourage the study of local natural history. *The Cardinal* is published four times each year.

MFN is affiliated provincially with Ontario Nature (former Federation of Ontario Naturalists) and nationally with Nature Canada (former Canadian Nature Federation).

To learn about MFN's activities, visit our home page at www.mcilwraith.ca. For information on how to join the McIlwraith Field Naturalists, see page 3.

DO YOU HAVE FRIENDS WHO ENJOY NATURE?

If so, why not surprise them with a gift membership in the McIlwraith Field Naturalists? Benefits include field trips led by knowledgeable leaders and an indoor program of illustrated talks, including a special series for those particularly interested in birds. All members receive the quarterly publication, *The Cardinal*. An individual or family membership in MFN makes a great gift. See details on page 3 or call Joan Taylor at 519-438-3330.