



CANADA SOUTH LAND TRUST

Newsletter

Fall Newsletter 2011 Volume 8, Number 2

Great Gray Owl Observed on Balkwill Lands

The appearance of a Great Gray Owl caused considerable interest among birders and naturalists in Essex County and beyond, during December 2011 and early January 2012.

It was December 23, 2011 when the Great Gray Owl was spotted, on the McCain Side Road in the Town of Kingsville. Karen Morgan alerted Randy Holland who called Point Pelee National Park Interpretation Coordinator Sarah Rupert .

One of the persons to observe this owl was Bill Balkwill who was returning home after an errand in Kingsville and happened upon the group that had gathered.

Essex County photographers Ken Cavanagh and Jason Telasco (as did other photographers) obtained some wonderful images of the owl on the McCain Side Road as it perched on a weathered post and rested in some coniferous trees.

This is the first time a Great Gray owl has been seen in Essex County. To find Great Gray Owls, one has to look in northern Ontario such as Kenora, northern Saskatchewan and Manitoba and mountainous areas. A shortage of food brings this owl species south as occurred in the Fall of 2004 and Winter of 2005. Literally hundreds of owls came south. This owl species is known for moving long distances when food supplies are scarce.

The Great Gray Owl is a spectacular bird with a five foot wing span.

The owl was seen on December 27 and December 28, 2012 in the fence row of the horse farm which is located to the east of the Balkwill Lands. Numerous photographers and bird watchers were on hand to observe the owl as it rested on the ground, watching and listening to all the activity on the nearby roadway. On December 29, 2012, the owl moved to agricultural lands and could not be located by the observers on the roadway.

Bill Balkwill reported that the owl spent some time December 29, 2012 on the Balkwill Lands. Bill stated that the owl caught an Eastern Gray Squirrel which it carried to a sturdy fence post located in the Balkwill's vegetable garden area. Here the Great Gray Owl skinned the squirrel very neatly which Bill was able to observe. Bill remarked that the local squirrel population was upset by the intruder, looking carefully around corners before venturing forth.

The Windsor Star featured the Great Gray Owl on December 30, 2012 with photographs and an informative article.

Pasta Nights 2012 at the Riverside Sportsmen's Club

Thank you to the Riverside Sportsmen's Club for the opportunity to again participate in Pasta Nights on **March 7, 14, 21, and 28, 2012**. Dinner is served from 5:00 p.m until 8:00 p.m. Dinner include a green salad, rolls, your choice of penne or spaghetti for \$10.00. Takeout is available.

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CSLT Raffle Winners, 2011
Prize #1 (Quilt): Tom Henderson
Prize #2 (Book): Moe Kolody
Prize #3 (Book): Gerry Kaiser



In Memory of Jim Henderson

Mark Your Calendar

**CSLT Annual General Meeting,
March 1, 2012 at 7:30 p.m.**

**Riverside Sportsmen’s Club Pasta Nights,
March 7, 14, 21 and 28, 2012, 5:00 - 8 p.m.**

**Annual Dinner and Silent Auction
Caboto Club
Friday, March 23, 2012 at 6:00 p.m.
Speaker: Tom Hince
Topic: Birding in Australia**

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Canada South Land Trust Mission

To preserve natural areas in the City of Windsor, Essex County, Pelee Island, and the Municipality of Chatham/Kent for future generations.

Membership fees

Single: \$20.00
Family: \$25.00
Please mail to 2405 Princess Avenue,
Windsor, Ontario N8T 1V2

Sightings on the Balkwill Lands, July 2, 2011 – November 11, 2011

Bill Balkwill reported bird activity around the Balkwill Lands on July 2, 2011. Young Blue Jays have been observed along with a single newly fledged Red-bellied Woodpecker. Eastern Bluebirds are nesting in the nesting box located on the front lawn of the residence.

At the rear of the residence, House Wrens are nesting with the adults bringing food for the young. Bill feels the male House Wren is not pulling his full weight as he brings small insects only, while the female will bring a large worm.

The deer are enjoying the Balkwill garden as they browse tender stalks in the flower garden. The vegetable garden is surrounded by an electric fence which was installed a few years ago.

A fabulous shrub called "Beauty Bush" which is covered in blooms is attracting a number of butterflies, including Giant and Tiger Swallowtails. Nearby, Bill has a garden which includes some twenty lily varieties. Under a very large tree near the Balkwill residence, Michigan Lilies bloom in profusion. The original two plants were found in a drain which was being cleaned. These plants have multiplied producing a wonderful floral display.

As a week of hot weather commenced on July 17, 2011, Bill Balkwill reported, that, to his delight, he has discovered numerous small Leopard Frogs in the pond. Cattails have established in the pond which may be important to the small frogs and their survival.

Butterflies observed have included Little Wood Satyre, Pearly-eye, Eyed Brown, Southern Grayling, Question Mark, Common Hackberry, Tawny Emperor, Spicebush and Black Swallowtail.

Bill Balkwill provided an early fall report On September 21, 2011 of activity around the Balkwill Lands. Four species of flycatcher were seen including Eastern Phoebe, Eastern Pewee, Willow Flycatcher and, for several days, a Yellow-bellied Flycatcher.

Warblers observed have included Yellow-rumped, Black-throated Blue, Black-throated Green as well as unidentified species.

A kinglet was seen on September 21, 2011. One Dark-eyed Junco has been seen for a few weeks. Lots of House Finches have been coming into the feeders. White-throated Sparrows have been spotted in the woodland. The front yard was full of American Robins on September 20, 2011. Five or six Wild Turkeys have been seen in the woodland which is a new area for this species.

Bill Balkwill provided a late fall report on November 22, 2011. Several Northern Harriers are seen every day as they fly over the residence and down the ditch.

Other sightings include House Finches, American Goldfinch, two or three Northern Cardinals, two Red-bellied Woodpeckers, some Downy Woodpeckers, and 2 White-breasted Nuthatches. The Eastern Bluebirds have left. Good numbers of American Robins were seen in migration this year.

European Starlings are in greater numbers this year as they were noted in the sweet corn by the thousands. As well, the Starlings ate all the juniper berries.

An unknown owl species is around this year, perhaps a Long-eared Owl. A Great Horned Owl feather was found in the woodland.

Bill reports that a mildew/mold has caused the deaths of Prometheus Moth and Spicebush Swallowtail larvae. When the larvae of these species are examined they are found to have withered and dried.

A Passage to India

University of Michigan Naturalist Dorothy presented a Powerpoint program on December 1, 2011 at the Essex Civic Centre as a fund raiser for the Canada South Land Trust. Thirty persons attended, enjoying a program entitled *A Passage to India*, which was a colourful look at South India, its peoples and its birds. Thank you to Dorothy for sharing her experiences with us. A social hour followed with refreshments served. Thank you to all those who attended this enjoyable event.

Cedar Creek Christmas Bird Count, December 17, 2011: Balkwill Lands

Christmas Bird Counts are popular in Essex County with a choice of four bird counts in which local birders participate as well as two American counts that include a little Canadian soil along the Detroit River, and counts in nearby Chatham/Kent. The Cedar Creek Christmas Bird Count is well attended by a faithful group who come out year after year to determine the bird species and their numbers within a 15 mile radius of Essex County's Cedar Creek. The count circle has been divided into five count areas.

This year nine CBCers counted in Area 2 of the Cedar Creek Count which extends southward from County Road 35 (the Talbot Trail) to Lake Erie. The eastern boundary is the McCain Side Road while the western boundary is the Arner Townline. This is a large area so it is divided into two sections with the Greenway the dividing line between the southern and northern area. John Balkwill and Bill Balkwill's farm is in the southern portion of section two.

CBCers in the northern portion were Marg Calder, Betty Learmouth, Kathy Lesperance, and Larry Onysko.

Participants in the northern portion of Area 2 gathered at 8:30 a.m. with plans to do their area in a different sequence. Instead of driving along County Road 35, then onto the concession roads to the south with walks in two woodlands during the afternoon, the group decided to start in the southern portion and work northward.

Overcast, foggy conditions prevailed with light snow in pellet form falling.

The first stop was at the woodland south of Concession 2 in the Town of Kingsville. Here the CBCers found birds hiding in a grove of old cedars, including a flock of Dark-eyed Juncos and Northern Cardinals.

A visit to Jack Balkwill's and Bill Balkwill's farm in mid morning included an update on the day's feeder activity around the residence which included two Red-bellied Woodpeckers, two Downy Woodpeckers, nine Blue Jays, one White-breasted Nuthatch, one Brown Creeper, fifteen American Goldfinch, and one Brown Creeper. Away from the house, there was no bird activity as the CBCers accompanied Bill and Jack on a tour of the tallgrass prairie and pond site, the woodland edge as well as the moss covered laneway. Four Tundra Swans were noted passing overhead in foggy conditions.

The Balkwill pond was brimming with water, a skim of ice covering the pond. A walk through the tallgrass prairie revealed a number of prairie plants that could be identified such as Compass Plant, Prairie Dock, Black-eyed Susan, Virginia Mountain Mint, Indian Grass, and Switchgrass. Along the woodland edge, numerous Praying Mantis egg cases were observed on vegetation stalks, as was a Promethea Moth cocoon, pointed out by Bill Balkwill. The attractive seed capsule of Bladdernut was seen along the moss covered lane. The following summary of the Christmas Bird Count is one provided by Dick Cannings,

coordinator of Christmas Bird Counts for Canada. "The CBC began over a century ago when 27 conservationists in 25 localities, lead by scientist and writer Frank Chapman, changed the course of ornithological history. On Christmas day in 1900, the small group posed an alternative to the side hunt, a Christmas day activity in which teams competed to see who could shoot the most birds and small mammals. Instead, Chapman proposed that they identify, count and record all the birds they saw, founding what is now considered to be the world's most significant citizen-based conservation effort – and a more than century-old institution.

Since Chapman's retirement in 1934, new generations of observers have performed the modern-day count. Today over 60,000 volunteers from all 50 states, every Canadian province, parts of Central and South America, Bermuda, the West Indies, and Pacific Islands, count and record every individual bird and bird species seen in a specified area.

The 112th CBC is expected to be larger than ever, expanding its geographical coverage and accumulating information about the winter distribution of various birds. The CBC is vital in monitoring the status of resident and migratory birds across the Western Hemisphere, and the data, which are 100% volunteer generated, have become a crucial part of Canada's biodiversity monitoring database."

River Canard Kentucky Coffee Tree Woods Secured

During 1985, thirty-eight natural heritage sites within Carolinian Canada were identified by a committee of biologists. Situated in Southern Ontario, Carolinian Canada is comprised of the lands within Essex County to the Niagara Region, and south of a line from north of Grand Bend on Lake Huron to north of Toronto. Within Essex County, there were eight Carolinian sites identified: Ojibway Prairie Remnants, River Canard Kentucky Coffee Tree Woods, Big Creek Marsh, Oxley Poison Sumac Swamp, Cedar Creek, Middle Point Woods, Stone Road Alvar and Middle Island.

A portion of the Kentucky Coffee Tree Woods has been owned and managed by the Essex Region Conservation Authority for a number of years. During spring 2011, a further 27 acres of the Kentucky Coffee Tree Woods was secured. The lead agency for this purchase was the Nature Conservancy of Canada. Contributors towards the purchase were the Essex Region Conservation Authority, the Richard Ivey Foundation of London, Ontario and the **Canada South Land Trust**.

The information below concerning this site has been obtained from Mike Oldham's *Environmentally Significant Areas of the Essex Region, 1983*.

The western-most portion of the Kentucky Coffee Tree Woods consists of floodplain woods on Caistor Clay soil. These woods are typical of the seasonally flooded woodland present along much of the Canard River's length. Dominant in the floodplain are Red Ash, White Elm, and Hawthorn with scattered oaks and hickories. The understory is quite dense in places, but the groundcover is generally sparse. Two small stands (clones) of Kentucky Coffee Trees occur in the floodplain. Above the floodplain is a ridge and a small area of upland woods. Upland woods are very rare along the Canard River, and this area contains a significant and unusual flora.

The recently acquired lands form a wooded corridor along the Canard River. The presence of the small stands of Kentucky Coffee Trees in the floodplain woods along the River Canard is very significant. This site is the only known example of a floodplain woodland community containing Kentucky Coffee Trees in the Essex Region. Within this site are examples of floodplain woods, a 10 to 15 foot slope, a small area of upland woods, stream bank vegetation, scattered wet depressions in the floodplain dominated by sedges, open sedge areas, and a pond.

Significant species include White Trout Lily, Upright Carrion-flower, Wild Yam, Lizard's Tail, Small-flowered Agrimony, Spring Avens, Prairie Climbing Rose, Cream Violet, Harbinger-of-spring, Fog Fruit, Veined Skullcap, and Ironweed.

This area along the Canard River is unique in Essex County, particularly from a rare plant standpoint.

CSLT Annual General Meeting, March 1, 2012

The Canada South Land Trust is holding its ninth Annual General Meeting on Thursday, March 1, 2012.

This year's AGM will feature a presentation by Holiday Beach Migration President Bob Pettit as well as a summary of CSLT activities over the past year.

Bob's presentation is entitled *The Galapagos Islands*, featuring wonderful images of the animals and birds of these Pacific islands.

The AGM will be held in Room C of the Essex Civic Centre beginning at 7:30 p.m. Call Betty at 519-944-0825 to indicate you will be attending. Refreshments will be served.

CSLT Annual Dinner and Silent Auction, Friday, March 23, 2012

The Land Trust will hold its Annual Dinner and Silent Auction on Friday, March 23, 2012 in the Windsor Room of the Caboto Club. Doors open at 6:00 p.m. Dinner will be served at 7:00 p.m.

Our guest speaker will be birder and bird tour leader Tom Hince who will speak about a recent month long trip to Australia during Fall 2011. Tickets are \$35.00 each. Call Betty at 519-944-0825 to obtain your dinner ticket.

Donations towards the silent auction are welcome.

A Walk on the Ojibway Prairie Provincial Nature Reserve, June 23, 2011

Friends and members of the Canada South Land Trust gathered at the Titcombe Road entrance to the Ojibway Prairie Provincial Nature Reserve on Thursday evening, June 23, 2011. The Ojibway Prairie is one of the best locations to observe native wildflowers in the Windsor area.

Along the prairie fence, the prairie enthusiasts examined several plants of Purple Meadow Rue and Water Hemlock, a poisonous plant. Stepping through the entrance to the prairie, the group noted the lush growth of a profusion of tallgrass prairie plants, aided by this spring's plentiful rain fall.

Along the left hand trail, several Purple Milkweed plants were found blooming, its flowers a lovely red magenta colour. This plant resembles Common Milkweed, with the Purple Milkweed displaying a distinct pointed leaf. Also in bloom along the trail were Marsh Vetchling, the poisonous Water Hemlock, Indian Hemp, Dogbane with its bell like flowers, the delicate Pale Spike Lobelia, the showy Canada Anemone, Black-eyed Susan, Carrion Flower, Daisy Fleabane, and Whorled Loosestrife. In the old sand quarry, Two-flowered Cynthia was seen along with Colicroot. Further along the back trail, Wild Yam Root vines were noted along with the diminutive blossoms of this attractive vine.

A number of other plants on the prairie could be identified by their distinctive leaves including Prairie Dock, Tall Coreopsis, Virginia Mountain Mint, Tall Ironweed, Cord Grass, Showy Tick-Trefoil, Prairie Thistle, Dense Blazing Star and Wild Indigo.

Of interest were the remnants of last year's Smooth False Foxglove, a plant of the oak-hickory savannah where it is parasitic on the roots of the Ojibway Prairie's Black Oaks. The group noted the many black seed capsules and black stems with an abundance of leaves around the base of these plants. This year's blooming plants should be spectacular with their many attractive yellow blossoms.

The last plant examined was a Climbing Prairie Rose along the back trail. This large rose bush was covered with buds, indicating a spectacular show of blossoms within few days.

Despite evening showers the prairie enthusiasts enjoyed a display of early summer blooms with promises of many more on the next prairie walk, July 28, 2011.

Ojibway Provincial Prairie Nature Preserve, July 28, 2011

Six Canada South Land Trust and prairie enthusiasts (and two well-behaved dogs Katie and Mac) gathered on the evening of July 28, 2011 to explore Ojibway Provincial Prairie Nature Preserve. The previous week's record high temperatures caused the cancellation of that walk with a rescheduled date, luckily with clear skies and a humidex reported to be 40. It was hot!

At the prairie entrance off Titcombe Road, we looked at a Tall Sunflower which appeared to have grown at least two feet from a check on this plant two nights prior. Beside the Tall Sunflower was a Water Hemlock, still with a few blooms. This poisonous species has bloomed in profusion over the last few weeks.

We entered the prairie noting several plants of White Vervain with its tiny flowers. The plants around us at the entrance were representative of the tallgrass prairie including Tall Ironweed, Tall Coreopsis, Prairie Thistle, and Big Bluestem. Gray-headed Coneflower was perfection as it bloomed just over the preserve fence.

Other plants observed were the vine Hog-peanut, Showy Tick-trefoil, Culver's-root and Flowering Spurge. Cow Bane was noted. Walk participant Gord Willcox remarked that the out-of-print government publication *Ontario Weeds* mentions that cows consuming Cow Bane will produce milk that tastes "off."

Along the left hand trail, we encountered Black Locust which is growing in profusion. Control of this tree species is a challenge for prairie managers. Continued on page 7 ...

Beyond the Black Locust we looked at the leaves of Prairie Dock in a damp area. Virginia Mountain Mint is growing in good numbers this year along the trail.

We paused in the Black Oak Savannah to view the Smooth False Foxglove which was just beginning to form buds. The plant has fabulous yellow blooms that are a highlight of a summer visit to the prairie.

A few stalks of goldenrod in bud were spotted along the trail, identified as Early Goldenrod. Approaching the dry prairie, we were delighted with the colour before us. Wild Bergamot provided splashes of delicate pink with bits of yellow provided by Early Goldenrod. Sprays of white were provided by Virginia Mountain Mint and with Culver's-root distinctive shape scattered through out. Big Bluestem provided a backdrop to all the colour.

Our walk took us along the dry ridge where we viewed Woodland Sunflower which prefers to have some shade rather than full sun. We noted a few stalks of Whiterod which is found in a particularly dry part of the ridge.

We passed over some wet spots, then continued along the prairie's back trail where we noted a few blossoms of the attractive Square-stemmed Monkey-flower. We stopped before a fine display of Wild Yam which covers several shrubs and small trees. The plants had bloomed and were developing their three-sided seed capsules.

Rather than replacing our steps, we continued on along the trail to the turnoff for Tom's Meadow and a circular path back to our vehicles. The trail took us through another Black Oak savanna with its display of Woodland Sunflower.

The trail meanders, leading the walkers to Tom's Meadow. In a wet spot we found Northern Cut-leaved Water-Horehound, a member of the Mint family. Two walk participants found a stalk of Michigan Lily with its blooms. Here we found Wild Indigo in bloom, and, in the Meadow, a fine display of Dense Blazing Star. We were troubled to see a single small Black Locust growing with the Dense Blazing Star. A small stand of Black Locust grows in one corner of this dry prairie, some distance from the single Black Locust.

Leaving the prairie, we walked over the nearby bridge which leads to a cluster of Common Milkweed. The aroma from all these flowering plants was exquisite. There was no evening breeze so it was as though we had entered a cloud of fragrance.

The group continued along the trail with the discovery of Steeplebush, a plant species that was new to many. This plant with its woody stems is noted for its fuzzy steeple shaped clusters of tiny 5- petaled pink flowers.

The group passed through several thickets, emerging into a sunny prairie dominated by Prairie Dock, many of which were in bloom. The blooms were at eye level so we had an opportunity to view both flower buds and flowers well. The Prairie Dock were certainly a treat.

As we approached the end of the walk, we found Spotted Joe Pye-weed in the wet depression, its flower clusters forming.

Throughout the walk, the group enjoyed the calls of Eastern Towhee with a few glimpses of this bird species flying about the Black Oak savanna.

Thank you to all who attended the walk. We enjoyed a fine array of flowering prairie plants.

Watch for announcements of spring time woodland walks and summer time tallgrass prairie walks.

Prize Winners for the Canada South Land Trust Raffle Draw, December 1, 2011

Prize #1

Handmade Double Bed Size Quilt “Autumn Hues”

Won by CSLT member Tom Henderson

Prize #2

Cicadas! (Children’s book)

Won by Moe Kolody

Prize #3

Flights of Imagination: Extraordinary Writing About Birds, edited by Richard Cannings (Book)

Won by CSLT member Gerry Kaiser

Upcoming Canada South Land Trust Activities

Canada South Land Trust Annual General Meeting, March 1, 2012

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Donations towards the silent auction are welcome.

Pasta Nights at the Riverside Sportsmen’s Club

Thank you to the Riverside Sportsmen’s Club which provided a fund raising opportunity for the Canada South Land Trust during 2011. Pasta nights were held on each Wednesday of March 2011. The pasta nights were also an opportunity to sell tickets for the CSLT quilt raffle as well as 50/50 tickets.

Mark your calendar for March 2012 as a reminder to attend the weekly pasta nights held between 5:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m. Dinner includes rolls, green salad and delicious pasta, either penne or spaghetti, with pasta sauce. Everyone is welcome. The pasta dinner or take out is available for \$10.00.