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CANADA SOUTH LAND TRUST

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# Newsletter

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Fall Newsletter 2012 Volume 9, Number 2

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## **Balkwill Lands Contribute to the Cedar Creek Christmas Bird Count, December 15, 2012**

The Cedar Creek Christmas Bird Count is a bird count conducted by an enthusiastic group of birders searching in a 15 mile diameter circle around Cedar Creek in southern Essex County which is divided into five areas. Area 2 is the area in which our group has counted for 28 years, and about which we have reported regularly. Area 2 extends south from the Town of Essex to Lake Erie, including the Cedar Creek watershed. The boundary to the east is the McCain Sideroad and to the west it is the Arner Townline. The Greenway marks the line between the counters in the southern portion of Area 2 and counters to the north of the Greenway.

This year the northern group, including Marg Calder, Betty Learmouth, Kathy Lesperance, Larry Onysko and Mac the Dog, decided to begin the count in the southern portion of our area. The group walked along a laneway off the Arner Townline which leads to a woodland. Visibility was good under cloudy conditions. This area is one that the group usually visited in the late afternoon on past counts.

We counted Blue Jays flying from the woodlands to lands to our south. The laneway passes along the edge of an old cedar woodland where warblers and other small passerines have been noted on past counts. We were lucky to spot two Black-capped Chickadees that responded to our pishing. But where were the Northern Cardinals that we had seen in the woodland on past counts? And where were the Yellow-rumped Warblers that we had found in the cedar woodland? We could see that we would need to work hard on the day's count.

About mid morning we made our way to the farm of Bill Balkwill and Jack Balkwill, a farm which the Canada South Land Trust monitors as a Conservation Easement was donated by the Balkwill brothers to the Land Trust during April 2007.

Bill Balkwill reported that either a Cooper's Hawk or Sharp-shinned Hawk was reducing, on a daily basis, the number of perching birds visiting the feeders. Bill showed us the coniferous trees in which the hawk was frequently found.

The following bird species were counted: 3 Downy Woodpeckes, 1 Blue Jay, 7 Black-capped Chickadees, 5 White-breasted Nuthatch, 1 American Goldfinch and 31 House sparrows.

Following a walk along the old moss covered Logging Road, the southern woodland edge and the pond and tallgrass prairie restoration site, the group returned to the residence area.

Jack Balkwill remarked that the moss on the old logging road is maintained by regularly sweeping the fallen leaves from the laneway in the fall as the moss will not thrive if covered by leaves. The Old Logging Road was a brilliant green with the colour enhanced by light rain. (Continued on page 3)

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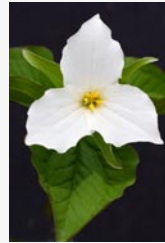
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#### Mark Your Calendar

Join Tom Hince for a tour of South Africa with wonderful images of birds, wildlife and scenery. This fund raising event will be held in Room C of the Essex Civic Centre on January 24, 2013 at 7:30 p.m.



Thank you to members who have recently renewed their Land Trust memberships.

#### Mark Your Calendar

**CSLT Annual General Meeting  
Thursday, March 7, 2013 at 7:30 p.m.**

**Annual Dinner and Silent Auction  
Caboto Club**

**Friday, April 19, 2013 at 6:00 p.m.  
Speaker: Terry Anderson**

**Topic: American Chestnut tree**

#### Earth Day

**Malden Park Visitor Centre & Area  
Sunday, April 28, 2013, 10 a.m. -3 p.m.**

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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

From page 1: Bill Balkwill and Jack Balkwill had told us an Eastern Screech owl had taken up residence in the old cattle barn. We followed the Balkwill brothers into the old barn and along a passage way that lead to a view of the barn's high ceiling. Two years ago an American Robin had built its nest under the roof. Now a delightful gray morph Eastern Screech-Owl used the old nest as a day time roost.

Thank you to Bill Balkwill and Jack Balkwill for their assistance with the count.

Upon departing the Balkwill farm, the group continued along the concession road, watching for any activity. We were rewarded with glimpses of American Kestrels and a Cooper's Hawk.

At the compilation the species from Area 2 were combined for a total of 51 species. Thank you to Paul DesJardins and Pauline Renaud for their count.

The day's count was a total of 89 species including a Mountain Bluebird, reported by Alan Wormington. Luckily Allen had photographed this beautiful bird for all to enjoy.

Thank you to Tom and Peggy Hurst for again hosting the compilation, including a wonderful potluck supper.

### **2012 Ontario Land Trust Alliance Gathering**

The Ontario Land Trust Alliance (OLTA) hosted the 2012 Ontario Land Trust Gathering at the YMCA Geneva Park Conference Centre on the shores of beautiful Lake Couchiching, October 17-19, 2012.

The Ontario Land Trust Alliance is a charitable organization that aims to strengthen land conservation across Ontario by building and supporting a strong land trust movement. We accomplish this mission by building capacity through training and educational programs; connecting land trusts to each other, resources and their communities; supporting on the ground conservation work through funding and partnership programs; and acting as a voice for land trusts among the public, governments and other stakeholders. OLTA's land trust members collectively own and steward over 80,000 across the province, engaging the support of over 100,000 volunteers and supporters.

Two members of the Canada South Land Trust, Parma Yarkin and Betty Learmouth, attended the Gathering, joining a group on the afternoon of October 17, 2012 for a field trip on the Cardin Plain. Conservation work by the Couchiching Conservancy, the Nature Conservancy of Canada, Ontario Parks and other partners has protected more than 6,000 acres of alvar (flat areas where limestone exists below shallow soil which supports uncommon plant species), wetlands and woodlands. Areas visited included the Cameron and Windmill Ranches.

Conference sessions provide useful information for participants. Some of the sessions attended included Real Estate Appraisals; The ABCs of Being an Invasive Plant Buster; Working with American Friends of Canadian Land Trusts: Overcoming Tax and Legal Obstacles Facing U.S. Donors; Demystifying Tax Changes for Land Trust; and Update on Continuing Under the Canada and Ontario Not-for-Profit Corporations Acts.

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### **Mark Your Calendar**

Don't miss a digital slide presentation by professional tour operator Tom Hince who will discuss a recent tour to South Africa parks with an emphasis upon birds seen. Tom's talk will take place on Thursday, January 24, 2013 at 7:30 p.m. in Room C of the Essex Civic Centre. See page 8 for further details.

Call Betty at 519-944-0825 for further information and to let us know you will be attending.

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## Bird Banding, Loma Alta, Ecuador

Twenty-eight Canada South Land Trust friends and members gathered on December 6, 2012 in Room C of the Essex Civic Centre for a presentation by Land Trust member Todd Pepper about Loma Alta, Ecuador. This event was the first of several fund raising events planned by the Canada South Land Trust over the next few months.

Todd travelled to Loma Alta (“High Hill” in English) during December 2011. Loma Alta is located in the southwest corner of Ecuador in the coastal mountain range, in particular the Colonche Hills. This remote area is some 240 miles north-east of the City of Guayaquil.

Natural habitat in this area is dry scrub forest and montane tropical forest, a “fog” forest which is a source of water in this dry habitat. The study area is 6000 acres in size.

The nearest village within the Loma Alta area is El Suspiro. This small village of 300 persons has an agricultural economy, growing pineapples and other crops such as tomatoes, water melons and palm nuts.

Todd, through Life Net Nature, an organization that undertakes community-based conservation to protect wildlife and nature, was a member of a six person team which spent 18 days banding birds, counting hummingbirds at feeders and doing bird transects in both montane tropical forest and the drier scrub forests in the lowlands of Ecuador. They also conducted a Christmas Bird Count with the community.

Todd showed his audience a video of the banders at work. Two of the banders had been recording their sightings for eight years.

The group made its way to the banding area by mules which took everyone up the mountain side as well as all their supplies including a propane cylinder and fresh water needed for two weeks. The banding area workshop was in a building with a roof but with no sides. Some 270 bird species were seen in a few days. Sixteen mist nets were opened and closed each day.

Some of the bird species observed were: Collared Antshrike, Baron’s Hermit, Blue-black Grosbeak, Rufous-browed Peppershrike, Silver-throated Tanager, and Scarlet-backed Woodpecker.

Loma Alta is not likely to be on a birding circuit as the area is remote. Todd will long remember the forest full of song and the easy to see woodland bird species.

Dusti Becker, a conservation biologist with Life Net Nature, leads several conservation research projects in Ecuador, and is the Loma Alta Christmas Bird coordinator. An article entitled Stat Trekker appeared in Audubon’s *American Birds*: The 112th Christmas Bird Count, 2011 -2012, Volume 66, pages 24 -29.

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### Mark Your Calendar

Canada South Land Trust will be holding its **Annual General Meeting (AGM)** on Thursday, March 7, 2013 in Room C of the Essex Civic Centre. Guest speaker will be Land Trust Director David Ainslie who will discuss the pollinators on his farm. Call Betty at 519-944-0825 to let us know you will be attending the AGM.

Canada South Land Trust will be holding its **Annual Dinner and Silent Auction** at the Caboto Club in the Windsor Room on Friday, April 19 , 2013. Guest speaker will be Land Trust Director Terry Anderson who will discuss the American Chestnut tree.

### **Balkwill Lands Sightings, July 2, 2012 - September 3, 2012**

Bill Balkwill reported on July 2, 2012 that this spell of hot weather has been difficult for bird life on his Lands in the Town of Kingsville.

Two older adult male American Robins appeared ill and were found dead a few days later.

Mourning Doves can be heard cooing along with Cuckoos which seem to like the hot weather.

A flock of six or seven Wild Turkeys can be seen in the bean field on an almost daily basis.

Single birds are seen in the garden.

The number of White-tailed Deer has declined.

On May 19, 2012, a male Red-headed Woodpecker visited, likely from the woodlands south of the Balkwill Lands.

Other bird species seen or heard around the Balkwill Lands include thrushes in the woodland and Tufted Titmice calling. A Northern Flicker enjoyed the bird bath as this note was being recorded. Eastern Bluebirds are another species that favour the bird bath.

Other bird species around the Lands include Rose-breasted Grosbeak, American Goldfinch, Blue Jays, Chipping Sparrow, Cedar Waxwing, Gray Catbird and lots of American Robins.

Bill remarked on the dryness with a little rain yesterday. Despite the extreme dryness, the Michigan Lilies had the best display yet.

Bill had hoped that the Helleborine would bloom but it has apparently dried up. Bill keeps an eye out for more frequent sightings of Garlic Mustard on his Lands.

Several species of butterflies have been noted, including Dainty Sulphur, American Snout, Hackberry and Tawny Emperor. Of special interest is the Dainty Sulphur which is a southern species. This species ranges in size from one inch to one inch and a quarter.

A Red-headed Woodpecker was observed for about an hour around the Balkwill residence on September 3, 2012.

Bill commented that more flycatchers appear to be around this season, including Eastern Phoebe, Willow Flycatcher and others.

Warblers have been moving through the area, enjoying an opportunity to catch flying ants in the front yard under the walnut.

The Eastern Bluebirds have been foraging in various areas, including the nut grove kitty corner to the Arner Stop (food and gasoline) and County Road 20.

The Tree Swallows have left with their young along with the Barn Swallows. The American Robins come and go.

In the woodland near the wet area in the northwest of the woodland, Cardinal Flower still has a few blooms, while the deer enjoy eating the stalks.

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### **Mark Your Calendar**

Canada South Land Trust will be holding its **Annual Dinner and Silent Auction** in the Windsor Room of the Caboto Club on Friday, April 19, 2013. Doors open at 6:00 p.m. and dinner is served at 7:00 p.m.

Tickets are \$35.00. Guest speaker is Terry Anderson who will discuss the American Chestnut tree. Call Betty at 519-944-0825 for tickets and further information. Items for the silent auction are welcome.

## Fall Sightings on the Balkwill Lands, October 30, 2012 to November 11, 2012

On October 30, 2012, Bill Balkwill provided an update with regard to wildlife on the Balkwill Lands over the last few weeks.

During the week of October 22, 2012, a Northern Mockingbird was seen on two occasions, feeding on juniper berries and the fruit of a yew. On November 8, 2012, the Northern Mockingbird was spotted perched on a water hydrant behind the Balkwill residence.

It appears that there is not so much fruit on the shrubs this fall.

Eastern Bluebirds are still about. A Downy Woodpecker has been seen perched on one of the blue bird boxes by the drain. Bill commented that the Downy Woodpeckers will use bluebird boxes overnight, especially if they are clean, following the nesting of Eastern Bluebirds. The boxes are not so attractive if they have been used by Tree Swallows.

Due to the warm weather through October, Bill observed some interesting butterflies, including Checkerspots, Dainty Sulphur and possibly a Little Sulphur. The yard was full of Checkerspots sitting on the grass sunning. Dainty Sulphurs were around up until about October 24, 2012. A small butterfly could have been a Little Sulphur.

The following report is a description of wildlife activity on the Balkwill farm as provided by Bill Balkwill's notes:

On October 28, 2012, while riding on the combine harvesting corn, I notice a Red-tailed Hawk perched in a nearby tree. When the last round of that field was made several Cottontails ran out ahead of the combine.

After combining the head lands (end of the field), we returned to the end next to the finished field. At that time, I noticed the Red-tailed Hawk was eating something in a nearby wheat field. As we turned at the end, an immature Bald Eagle was swooping down from behind the hawk. Unfortunately the combine turned around, cutting off my view, so I did not see what happened.

I saw a pair of coyotes in the corn field. At first I thought the coyotes were deer. They appeared confused by the mowing, eventually disappearing into the corn field.

Gardening can be interesting as there are many different insect species, some good and some not.

The ground dwelling bees and wasps are most interesting, ranging from very small to the cicada killers.

One bee that looks like a small honey bee burrows into the subsoil. During the summer months it collects pollen. In the late fall it piles earth in a two inch mound, sealing the entrance. A more interesting species is the Thread-waisted Wasp. These wasps prey on worms, mostly army or cutworms, which they drag incredible distances.

In October I was hoeing in the flower garden when I noticed a Thread-waisted Wasp dragging a cutworm. As I watched, it stopped short in front of a large rhubarb leaf and started to dig. It uncovered a small tunnel. It chased the fly away and then made two trips down the tunnel to clean it, then chased the fly away again.

The wasp then dragged the worm down the tunnel. Upon emerging it persecuted the fly some more, then dropped some pebbles of sand to block the tunnel, then added dirt. It then placed a larger pebble in the centre where the mouth of the tunnel had been. The wasp chased the fly again, then alighted on a weed facing where the tunnel had been. It then flew to a rhubarb leaf and then to another rhubarb leaf, then back to the weed. It made this circle again, then flew a few circles above and then left. The fly also left.

An Eastern Phoebe was in the back yard on November 11, 2012 and still around on November 15, 2012, at the woodland by the pond which has been dry since June.

## **An Evening Walk on the Ojibway Prairie Provincial Nature Reserve, July 19, 2012**

Eight friends and members of the Canada South Land Trust gathered on a cloudy evening, July 19, 2012, hoping that no thunder storms would disrupt the walk. Two persons from Chatham-Kent were visiting the Ojibway Prairie for the very first time.

The Ojibway Prairie supports a variety of tallgrass species including Big Blue Stem, Cord Grass, Indian Grass and Switchgrass. On July 19, 2012, Big Blue Stem was taller than the walk participants. Tallgrass prairie is not just restricted to grasses. Tallgrass prairie is known for the numerous flowering plant species which contribute an array of colours to the prairie.

Historians estimate that in the past Ontario supported 40,000 acres of tallgrass prairie. Due to loss through development, tallgrass prairie is now found in only a few scattered localities such as our Ojibway Prairie and nearby Walpole Island.

Before stepping into the Ojibway Prairie, we paused to admire a showy group of Gray-headed Coneflowers and Wild Bergamot. The blossom colours of yellow and pink were a delight.

At the prairie entrance we noted White Vervain and Prairie Thistle. The entrance way vicinity in mid July is a good introduction to the tallgrass prairie as Big Blue Stem and Cord Grass grow here along with such colourful flowering plants as Black-eyed Susan, Virginia Mountain-mint, Culver's Root, Ironweed, Tall Coreopsis, Dense Blazing Star and Showy Tick Trefoil.

We noted that several Bracken had turned a burnt yellow orange. A borer which drills into the fern's root causes this reaction in the fern's foliage colour. A few other affected Bracken were seen.

Beside the left hand trail edge, we noted Water Hemlock, a poisonous plant, and Cowbane, also a poisonous plant.

We arrived at a point on the left hand trail which was open on the left but a closed thicket on the right. Here a stand of unwelcome Black Locust has expanded over the last few years. This past fall (2011), the Black Locust was cut, tree by tree, with each cut treated at once with herbicide. The treatment has has very good results, with a substantial area now free of this invasive species.

Proceeding along the trail, we found ourselves in a Black Oak savannah, with numerous large trees surrounding us. Of interest is the Black Oak/PignutHickory savannah that supports the delightful Smooth False Foxglove which we were able to observe in bloom on the nearby dry ridge.

The dry ridge was only a few minutes walk away from a lovely section of prairie where we admired Butterfly Milkweed and the bright pink blossoms of Dense Blazing Star in the background. Early Goldenrod was in bloom.

Along the dry ridge, we found Woodland Sunflower and Smooth False Foxglove in bloom. Our walk took us to the back trail of the prairie where we found the dried blooms of Colic Root. We noted the Colic Root's rosette of evergreen leaves which persist throughout the winter months. Everyone enjoyed chilled fruit before heading home.

**South Africa: Land of Surprise, Thursday, January 24, 2013**

Comical penguins, snow capped mountain ranges, super highways and blazing orange carpets of wildflowers - all of these images are typically South African. Yet so too are lions and leopards, hornbills and rollers, and acacias and baobabs that typify the classic African safari experience. Follow Tom Hince on a photo odyssey of this remarkable county, where surprises lie around every turn in the road.

Tom is a professional tour operator who has led six trips to South Africa. This past September and October he journeyed there again, with this group including five participants from Essex County. Tom's next visit to South Africa will be in the fall of 2014.

Join birding tour leader Tom Hince for an enjoyable presentation featuring birds of South Africa. Enjoy images of birds and wildlife from a variety of scenic locations including Kruger National Park. Tom's presentation will take place on Thursday, January 24, 2013 in Room C of the Essex Civic Centre at 7:30 p.m. This event is a fund raiser for the Canada South Land Trust. A donation of \$20.00 would be appreciated. Please call Betty at 519-944-0825 to let us know you will be attending. Refreshments will be served following Tom's presentation.

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**Canada South Land Trust's Annual General Meeting, Thursday, March 7, 2013**

The Land Trust's Annual General Meeting (AGM) is to be held in Room C of the Essex Civic Centre on March 7, 2013. Reports on the Land Trust's activities will be provided. Guest speaker will be Land Trust director David Ainslie who will discuss the pollinators on his farm.

Please call Betty at 519-944-0825 to indicate you will be attending. Refreshments will be served following the meeting.

We look forward to seeing you at our AGM.

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**Canada South Land Trust's Annual Dinner and Silent Auction, Friday, April 19, 2013**

The Land Trust's Annual Dinner and Silent Auction is planned for April 19, 2013 in the Windsor Room of the Caboto Club. Doors open at 6:00 p.m. with bidding underway for the Silent Auction. Dinner will be served at 7:00 p.m.

Guest speaker is Land Trust director Terry Anderson who will speak on the American Chestnut tree. Dinner tickets are \$35.00. Please call Betty at 519-944-0825 to obtain your dinner ticket.

We look forward to seeing you at our Annual Dinner.

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**Earth Day 2013**

Canada South Land Trust will be attending Earth Day 2013 to be held on Sunday, April 28, 2013. This year the location for Earth Day will be at the area around the Malden Park Visitor Centre as well as in the Centre. Exhibits may be visited between 10:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. Plan to attend.

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