



TORONTO FIELD NATURALIST

Number 700 April 2026



Hepatica. Photo: Donata Frank

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PRESIDENT'S REPORT

What a winter it has been! Toronto set a record on January 25th when 46 cm of snow fell in one day (recorded at Pearson), shattering the previous record of 36.8 in January 1966. January as a whole set a record as the snowiest January (88.2 cm) and the snowiest month (previously December 1951 with 86.6 cm). I'm sure we're all eager to see the snow melt and the first signs of spring arrive!

The Cottonwood Flats Monitoring Project already has a call out for volunteers for the 2026 season and soon it will be time to sign up for stewardship activities. I can't wait to get back to work removing invasive species.

Peter Smith has agreed to take over from Zunaid Khan as our Digital Team Coordinator. He will be looking after the volunteers who manage our social media and web pages. I'd like to thank Zunaid, not only for managing the team for so long, but also for his work in creating robust social media channels with thousands of followers to whom we can get out our message of loving and protecting nature.

I am pleased that, again this year, we are holding an Outings Leaders and Shepherds Workshop and Social (March 24), as this event has been very popular in past years. I hope that most of our outings volunteers will be able to attend, provide valuable feedback to the Outings Committee, and socialize with other leaders and shepherds.

Some reserves news: There is a single property lot between our Emily Hamilton and Helen and Aarne Juhola reserves. Earlier this year I began looking into it to make sure it was preserved. After some slogging through TFN board minutes, I found information in 2010 that indicated it was to be gifted to the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority. I was able to contact someone to confirm that they own it. That's good news for our reserves.

Lynn Miller

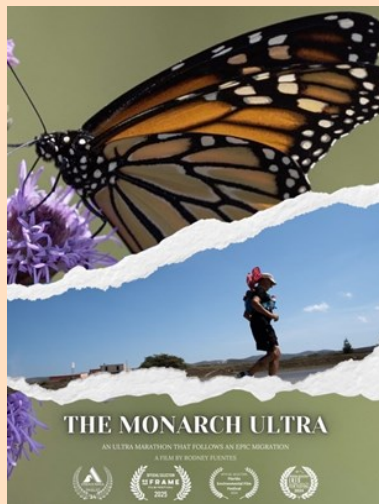
president@torontofieldnaturalists.org

The Monarch Ultra

This Earth Day, join the Toronto Field Naturalists
for an extraordinary cinematic journey!

When: Earth Day – Wednesday, April 22 at 7 pm

Where: Friends House (Meeting Room), 60 Lowther Avenue



How far would you go to save a species? For 46 ultra-runners, the answer was a 4,300 km relay from Peterborough, Ontario all the way to the mountain forests of Central Mexico. The Monarch Ultra is more than a film about a race; it is a cross-continental ode to the butterfly and a call to action for a species in steep decline.

Witness the grit of athletes running 50 – 100 km legs to mirror the monarch's own perilous migration. Through breathtaking landscapes and interviews with scientists, environmentalists and local heroes, you'll discover the deep connection between human endurance and environmental survival.

Come celebrate Earth Day with us and see how a community of runners turned an ultra-marathon into a powerful movement for pollinator conservation. Two copies of Nadina Galle's excellent book, *The Nature of Our Cities*, will be raffled off at the screening.

RSVP so we know how many chairs to set out: <https://tfngo.to/monarchultra>

SIGNS AND COLOURS OF SPRING

Photos from TFN Photography Group's challenges, April 2024 and 2025 –
a foretaste of what we might see this month.



Pussy Willow
Photo: Theresa Moore



By Grenadier Pond
Photo: Charlotte Broome



American Lady on Glory-of-the-Snow
Photo: Marlene Duhig



Elderberry Buds Opening
Photo: Lillian Natalizio



Tree Swallows Nesting
Photo: June D'Souza



Serviceberry in Bloom
Photo: Margaret Hall



Skunk Cabbage
Photo: Myrna Markovich



Trout Lilies
Photo: Lynn Miller



Bloodroot
Photo: Cynthia Miller

TFN OUTINGS INFORMATION

The list of walks available to members is posted at the beginning of each month on the *Walks* page of our *Members Only* website (<https://tfngo.to/memberswalks>) and can be downloaded or printed. You can download a calendar file (.ics) that will add all walks for a month into your calendar.

You are welcome to bring one non-member guest. Listed below are two April outings you might like to consider. **Please refer to the website for meeting location and other details.**

Ashbridge's Bay Park

Leaders: Jane and Jim Goad

Saturday, April 11, 2 pm

Outing Description: We will walk along the paved path that follows the shore of the marina area where there is usually a variety of waterfowl in the lake. This path then circles around the tip of the park, from which one can view a cityscape and Tommy Thompson Park, and catch a glimpse of the islands.

As we approach the beach, we will discuss the rehabilitation project currently underway to protect this shoreline.

Outing Details: A 1.5 to 2 hr, 3 km circular walk on mostly paved flat surfaces with some gentle slopes and no stairs.



Waterfowl at Ashbridge's Bay. Photo: Jim Goad

Lambton Park - Old Growth and Rejuvenation

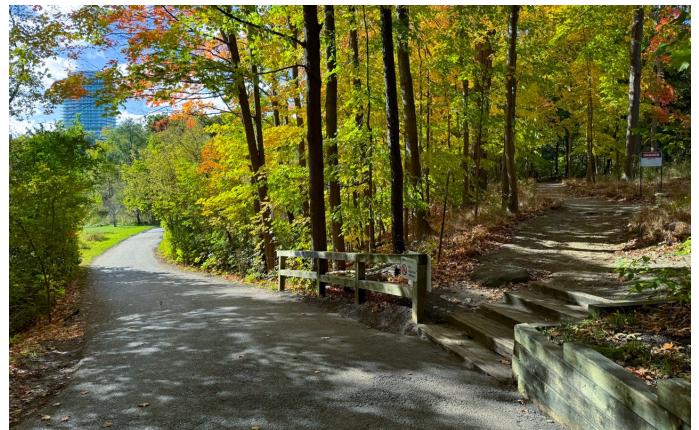
Leader: Lillian Natalizio

Thursday, April 16, 1:30 pm

Outing Description: An Environmentally Significant Area looming over the Humber River valley, Lambton Park contains a fragment of remnant black oak savannah, with old growth red pines and oaks. We'll look at how this rare habitat is being rejuvenated with prescribed burns and native plantings. We'll also look out for emerging spring wildflowers.

Entering the park from Dundas St, we'll move through meadow, savannah and woodland habitats towards the top of the hill, finishing at Lambton Arena.

Outing Details: A 1.5 hr, 2 km circular walk on mostly unpaved and uneven surfaces with some steep slopes and no stairs.



Lambton Woods. Photo from City of Toronto website

*Soft breezes, warm rains,
Small buds greening into life:
Yearly hints of spring.*

Haiku by Charlotte Broome

GETTING TO KNOW YOUR WALK LEADERS: PART 2



Linda McCaffrey

Linda has been leading nature and heritage walks for TFN since 2013. She specializes in Lost Rivers outings, where she tracks locations of previously existing rivers that have been buried or rerouted from their original paths.

Linda has a wealth of historic information about Toronto neighbourhoods, so you will definitely learn something interesting on her walks.



Charles Bruce-Thompson

Bruce is a past president of TFN, and has been leading walks since 2010. He leads an annual “Boxing Day on the Spit” birding walk to help people walk off any holiday over-indulgences.

Bruce is a proficient birder but also excels at plant ID – a skill he puts to use as part of the Cottonwood Flats Monitoring Project team.



Lillian Natalizio

Lillian has been leading walks since 2020, where she shares her extensive botanical knowledge. She uses that knowledge as well in her stewardship activities: she co-leads the Humber Arboretum CSP, participates in TFN’s Cottonwood Flats Monitoring Project, and volunteers at other stewardship sites in the west end.

She is also an excellent photographer, capturing the wonders of nature with her camera, and is on the TFN Board of Directors.

Outside TFN, Lillian volunteers with LEAF (Local Enhancement & Appreciation of Forests).



Zunaïd Khan

Zunaïd is a past president of TFN, a nature photographer, and a Fellow of the Royal Canadian Geographic Society. He has led walks for TFN since 2019. Zunaïd’s walks focus on photography, birds, natural history, and threats to our green spaces.

Zunaïd has been active in nature advocacy, particularly of the waterfront and Ontario Place grounds.

Outside TFN, Zunaïd is a board member and Director of Outreach of Green Ummah.

INSECT OF THE MONTH: FLIES

Flies often get a bad rap: from bloodsuckers like mosquitoes and horse flies to food pests like house flies and fruit flies, we seem to spend a lot of time swatting at them. However, flies (order Diptera) fulfil a wide range of ecosystem functions, including plant pollination. A large number of fly species are flower visitors, depending on carbohydrate-rich nectar to fuel their energy-intensive flight. Most flower-visiting flies have hairs on their bodies enabling them to pick up and transfer pollen. Some also have appendages for raking pollen from flowers. With an abundance of these individuals making large numbers of floral visits, flies comprise the second most important group of pollinators after bees.

The largest and best-known group of pollinating flies are the flower flies, family Syrphidae (also called hover flies). Adult flower flies (syrphids) typically feed on flower nectar and pollen. In order to deter predators while occupied on flowers, the majority of syrphids have developed appearances that mimic stinging bees or wasps. Drone flies (genus *Eristalis*) are so called because of the resemblance of a particular European species, the common drone fly, *Eristalis tenax*, to honey bee drones. However, *Eristalis* is a large genus, with species that mimic a wide range of hymenopterans, from honey bees to hairy bumble bees, to black and yellow striped wasps.

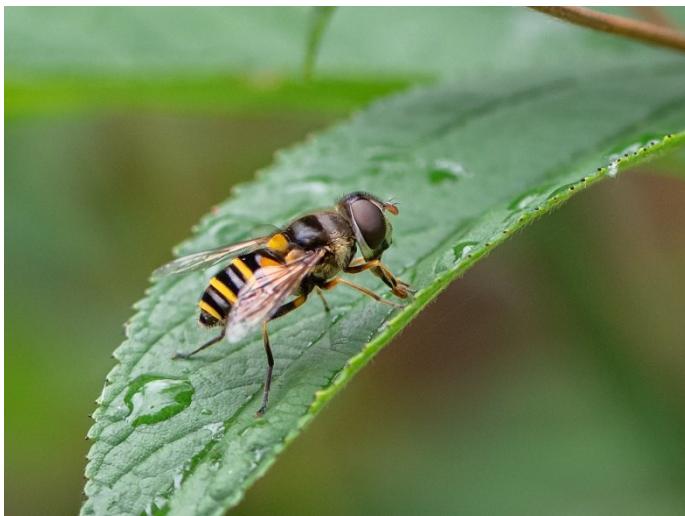
The transverse-banded flower fly, *Eristalis transversa*, one of the most abundant and conspicuous flower flies in Toronto, is a strong wasp mimic. This is a relatively large syrphid, approximately 1-1.2 cm in length, robust, and evenly covered with hairs. *E. transversa* is easily

identified by its bright yellow scutellum (a small, triangular plate behind the wing bases) and large, yellow, triangular spots on the second abdominal segments. Males and females differ slightly in appearance. Males have a second pair of large yellow spots joined across the top by a thin yellow band on the third abdominal segment. Females only have the thin yellow band across this segment. In addition, the large compound eyes meet at the top of the head in males, but females have a small separation between their eyes.

Like all Diptera, syrphids go through complete metamorphosis, from egg to larva to pupa to adult. Syrphid larvae are referred to as maggots. *Eristalis* larvae are aquatic: they live in stagnant water such as ditches, mud puddles, tree cavities, or moist decaying vegetation, and filter feed on microorganisms in the water. *Eristalis* larvae have a long, slender appendage that acts as a breathing tube, a feature that gave rise to their common name of “rat-tailed” maggots. Like the majority of syrphid species, the larvae of *E. transversa* are still unidentified. Though it is not yet known where *E. transversa* adults lay their eggs, they are active from May through October and produce multiple generations per year, likely overwintering as adults.

Syrphid larvae in the subfamily Syrphinae are terrestrial, with the majority being predators of soft-bodied insects, particularly aphids and other hemipterans. The aptly named Aphideaters (genus *Eupoedes*), Common Flower Flies (genus *Syrphus*), and Calligrapher Flies (genus *Toxomerus*) are among this group. The eastern calligrapher, *Toxomerus geminatus*, and the margined

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Female *Eristalis transversa* (lateral view).
Photo: Lillian Natalizio



Male *Eristalis transversa* (dorsal view).
Photo: Lillian Natalizio

WEATHER (THIS TIME LAST YEAR)

April, 2025

April was a seasonable month with few extremes, almost exactly on the 30-year average in terms of temperature (8.0° downtown and 7.3° at Pearson Airport). This was 0.1° above normal. However, maximum temperatures averaged slightly above normal and minimum slightly below normal. Temperatures showed high but typical springtime variability. It warmed above 20° as early as the 3rd, followed by rather wintry conditions a few days later, with high winds, a bit of blowing snow, and temperatures falling as low as -8.8° at King City on the 8th.

Downtown's minimum of -5.4° was the coldest April reading there since 2016. The warmest reading was 27.5°

at North York on the 29th, with Pearson close behind at 27.2°.

April was slightly drier than normal, and much drier than in 2024. We had 54.8 mm of total precipitation downtown and 55.4 mm at Pearson, the normal being about 76 mm. Most of the rain fell on the 2nd-3rd, although there were other occasions, including a strong but brief thunderstorm on the evening of the 29th with a cold front. Snowfall was light but near normal with 6.2 cm total at Pearson that fell during the cold period on the 7th-11th. There was blowing snow on the morning of the 8th, but total snowfall was low.

Gavin Miller

FLIES *continued*

calligrapher, *T. marginatus*, are among the most abundant flower flies in Toronto. Both species are slender wasp mimics, with a shiny black abdomen bearing bands of yellow markings and tapering to the end. *T. geminatus* is slightly larger (at 6-7.6 mm vs 5-5.7 mm) while *T. marginatus* has a distinctive yellow margin around the abdomen and a large black spot in the centre of the 4th segment.

Toxomerus geminatus is active from early spring through fall. *T. marginatus* also emerges in early spring, but declines in late summer to early fall. Adults of both species feed on the nectar of a wide variety of flowering plants, including grasses. Females lay multiple eggs in close proximity to where their larval foods (aphids, mites,

thrips, caterpillars and mealybugs) are abundant. (As such, these larvae are vulnerable to control measures targeting aphids and other plant pests.) Both of these calligrapher fly species have multiple generations per year, and may overwinter as larvae, prepupae, or adults.

There are wonderfully gruesome descriptions of the feeding habits of Syrphinae in *Flies: The Natural History and Diversity of Diptera*, an outstanding reference for all things diptera. *Field Guide to the Flower Flies of Northeastern North America* also has an excellent overview of the diversity of larval lifestyles, and is a useful resource for searching for and identifying flower flies.

Lillian Natilizio



Toxomerus geminatus. Photo: Ken Sproule



Toxomerus marginatus. Photo: Ken Sproule

JUNIOR NATURALISTS

BAT SLEUTHING

In the 1990's we took our young children wilderness camping on our island property in Northumberland County. It was an isolated place, which we reached by canoe. That land was home to many mammals. They made a life there, never suspecting that we would suddenly show up and proceed to make a fire and put up a dining shanty and tent. Fox pups played in front of their den, porcupines peered down at us from the giant red oaks in the forest, and deer left impressions in the grass where they had spent the night.

Our island property was surrounded by cattail marsh and, in certain seasons, was extremely buggy. Fireflies, dragonflies and mosquitos were abundant. By dusk, it was wise for us to be in the dining shelter or tent, or close to a smoky fire. Bugs at dusk were a challenge for us, but created perfect conditions for a mammal that flickered black against the pearly sky in large numbers — the winged wonder — the bat. Huge 'flocks' of bats would appear, hunting by echolocation, and putting on a brilliant airshow.

I didn't think to wonder, at the time, which species of bat this was. Could I figure it out in retrospect by a process of elimination, considering their hunting strategies?

In those days, there were eight species of bats in that part of Ontario. Populations went up and down, but they were basically

stable. Our campsite was on the edge of a meadow, and some distance behind us was a forest of mature ash, red oak, bur oak, silver maple, aspen and hickory. This was perfect for a group known as 'tree' bats that migrate south for the winter — the hoary bat, the silver-haired and the eastern red bat. They roost by hanging upside down

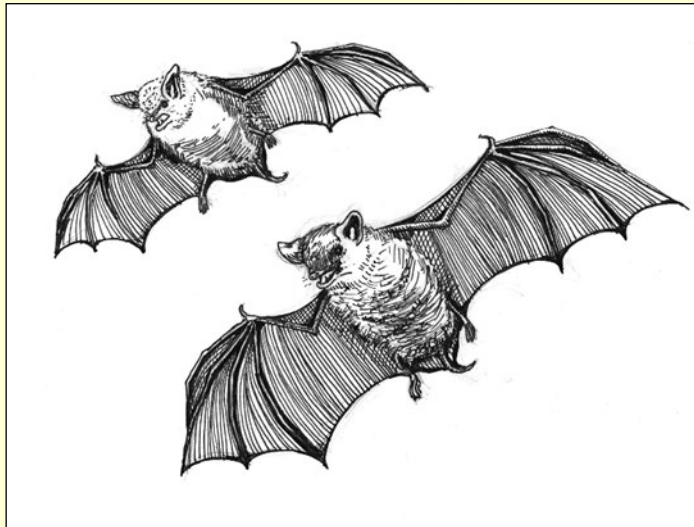
in foliage. The silver-haired bat hunts low over streams. The hoary and the eastern red bats are solitary hunters that like open areas. None of these were our bats, hunting in large 'flocks' high in the sky at dusk.

The remaining five Ontario species are called 'cave' bats.

These do not migrate south but spend the winter in

caves or abandoned mine sites, in some cases human structures, in the vicinity of their roosting areas. Of these, the big brown bat and tri-coloured bat tend to be solitary hunters. The northern myotis has a very high frequency of echolocation, so can hunt in cluttered locations such as forests. This is where we find them and the small-footed myotis.

This only leaves one species that could have been hunting in a large flock high above our campsite — the little brown bat. It is highly gregarious, forming large roosting colonies in summer and mating swarms of hundreds of thousands in the fall. It tends to hunt in large flocks, especially in areas of high insect density (*Wikipedia*), which our island most certainly was.



Bats. Drawing: Diana Banville

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TORONTO BAT CELEBRATION

*Spread your wings at a Toronto Bat Celebration event this summer.
Learn all about our flying friends and how you can help protect them.*

Toronto Bat Celebration shines a spotlight on just how special it is to share Canada's biggest city with threatened bat species. Join guided bat walks, attend expert talks that blend science with pure wonder, and spend magical evenings at Toronto's one and only Batio. It's your chance to discover these misunderstood mammals and give them the love, attention and conservation action they deserve. For details see: <https://tfngo.to/>

BAT SLEUTHING *continued*

If I were watching this bat phenomenon today and trying to figure it out, I would use a bat detector to determine the species. This is a machine that has become more commonly available due to the tragedy of the White Nose Syndrome, which is killing, particularly, Ontario 'cave' bats. The frequencies of sound waves that bats use for echolocation to find their prey are too high for humans to hear. A bat detector converts those sounds into a signal that can be heard by humans. Species have somewhat distinctive communication

patterns and the bat detector can be an aid to identification.

The Toronto Zoo, TRCA, and High Park Nature Centre, along with other parks, collaborated to put on the Toronto Bat Celebration in August 2025. This was a series of events that gave Toronto bat-lovers a chance to have their own adventure with bats, helped by bat experts. It will be repeated this coming August — a series of bat discovery events not to be missed!

Anne Purvis

References:

[Ontario Nature](#) [Toronto and Region Conservation Authority](#) [Neighbourhood Bat Watch](#) [Toronto Zoo](#)

UPCOMING JUNIOR NATURALISTS' EVENTS

We're looking forward to more exciting programs for Toronto Field Naturalist Juniors (aged 6-14 yrs). We hope many of you can join us on Saturday mornings, most often from 10 am until noon. An adult must remain with their children for the duration of the program. Once registered, you will receive invitations to our events with detailed instructions on the location and activities. Register at: <https://tfngo.to/join-juniors>

- April 25: Explore the spring ephemerals of Warden Woods, and do some Earth Day clean up and planting at Prairie Drive Park.
- May 23: Join the Toronto Bird Celebration and enjoy the peak of the songbird migration at Colonel Sam Smith Park.
- June 6: Meet Robert and Deirdre Bean at Earl Bales Park; observe active bird boxes and learn about *Nestwatch*.

THE SONG SPARROW'S APRIL DECLARATION

Some of the first true music of Toronto's spring does not come from a robin. It comes from a small, streaked bird perched boldly atop a shrub, fencepost, or wire – head tipped back, throat pulsing, singing as if the season depends on it.

By early April, when branches are still bare and the landscape feels undecided between winter and spring, males begin to reclaim territory with a song that is both emphatic and structured. Loud introductory notes are followed by a cascade of trills and phrases, each male with slight variations, but always with that unmistakable rhythm: clear opening statements, then a tumble of musical lines.

I remember the first time I truly noticed one.

I was walking along the Lower East Don Trail, near Cottonwood Flats, when a single voice kept calling out – bright, confident, insistent. In the absence of any other birdsong, the sound felt deliberate – almost beckoning.

I didn't yet own binoculars; I was only beginning to pay attention. But the bird seemed determined to be found.

Eventually I spotted him, perched on an electric wire, singing his heart out against a pale early-spring sky.

Up close – or as close as I could manage – he was not flashy. Brown. Streaked. Almost sparrow-generic at first glance. But then I noticed the details: the bold facial stripes, the heavily marked breast, and there – in the centre of his chest – a darker spot formed by converging streaks. His song, too, had shape. It wasn't a continuous warble but a composition in parts. When I later matched sight and sound in a field guide, it struck me how perfectly the name fit.



Song Sparrow. Photo: Ken Sproule

Song Sparrows are wonderfully variable. Across North America they show remarkable regional differences in size and coloration, and even within Ontario, individuals can appear darker, paler, greyer, or warmer-toned depending on light and habitat.

Their streaky appearance often leads beginners to assume they're seeing a House Sparrow, but the two are quite different. Song Sparrows are native, slimmer, more finely patterned, and far more musical. Unlike House Sparrows, they are birds of brush, marsh edges, meadows and riversides.

They are also ground dwellers. Though they sing from elevated perches, they forage low and build their nests on or near the ground, tucked into grasses or shrubs. That combination – bold singer above, quiet life below – feels emblematic of April itself: proclamation in the open, renewal hidden close to the earth.

Reflection

As you walk Toronto's trails this month, pause when you hear that bright, structured song carrying across still-bare

branches. Look for the silhouette – small body, upright posture, head thrown back in full declaration. The landscape may not yet be green, but spring has already begun to speak.

Kaliopi Nikitas

You can follow Kaliopi at: <https://www.youtube.com/@BirdingwithKaliopi>

EXTRACTS FROM OUTINGS LEADERS' REPORTS

Mount Pleasant Cemetery: What Trees Do in Winter, Feb 3. Leader: Ellen Schwartzel. We were 18 walkers on an overcast morning with the temperature about -3 degrees. Cemetery grounds remained blanketed in deep snow a week after a record-breaking January 25 snow storm, but cleared roads allowed easy walking. Squirrels were active in many trees, especially those with cavities. A small group of chickadees and a nuthatch were also feeding in trees.

We considered the many winter adaptations of trees. In autumn, they prepare by forming next year's leaves and packing them into tiny buds protected by bud scales. Dropping their leaves in fall reduces the risk of branches breaking under wind and the weight of snow and ice. Trees, even partially hollow trees, can withstand winter gales. Trees also protect their vulnerable living phloem layers just below the bark from destructive ice crystals by largely dewatering those tissues and converting starches to sugars with anti-freeze properties.

We experienced the challenges of winter tree identification, and appreciated the convenience of the arboretum's tree ID tags. We observed that both silver maple and shagbark hickory trees have shaggy, loose bark when mature, but the bark of hickory appears more silvery and somehow more elegant. American sycamore and London plane are similar trees, but the latter bears fruit clusters in pairs or threes – except when winter winds have tugged them off. A most helpful companion on any tree walk is *A Field Guide to Trees of Ontario* (2023), co-authored by James Eckenwalder and published by the ROM.



Shagbark hickory.

Photo: Jason Ramsay-Brown

jungle area led by two Animal Ambassadors. Based on participants' feedback, our visit was a success. The Ambassadors were excellent at sharing their knowledge and answering questions. A few TFN participants already knew quite a lot about certain species, so asked interesting questions.



Newt at Mystik Café. Photo: Paul Overy

Looking for Animal Tracks at Charles Sauriol Conservation Area, Feb 15. Leaders: Lynn Miller, Lynn Short. The snow was perfect for identifying tracks. We saw the tracks of squirrels, raccoons, rabbits, deer, a fox, a coyote and a domestic cat. In one spot we saw coyote tracks over the tracks of a raccoon as the coyote took the easier route through the snow. Chickadees were eating berries in the sumacs, and we also saw a Red-breasted Nuthatch and a Northern Mockingbird. We were walking through snow that was about a foot deep. There were no other human footprints to be found.



Coyote track over raccoon track.

Photo: Lynn Short

Come to Know our Reptile Friends! Feb 10. Leader: Paul Overy. This outing was a shared visit at the Mystik Café, a remarkable new space in the Kensington Market area that offers opportunities to experience and learn about reptiles with a comfortable café sharing the space. The TFN event was a 1-hour guided session in the reptile

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SHARING NATURE ENCOUNTERS

A Spider Courtship Dance?

By good luck, I was able to watch several minutes of what I think was a courtship dance between our resident female common house spider and a visiting male.

The two spiders were in the female's web, facing each other, with their bodies about 1 cm apart, moving forwards and backwards and from side to side. They were equally active, so this was not just a male courtship display. On two occasions, the tips of their two front legs touched, and I wondered if that would do the trick, but they just stayed like that for a couple of seconds and then resumed their dance, and I never did see them actually mating.

Don Roebuck

Sign of Spring!

Michèle Macartney-Filgate was excited to share this first sighting of snowdrops on March 9th.



EXTRACTS *continued*

What Ponds Do in Winter, Feb 27. Leader: Ellen Schwartzel. High Park at the tail end of February remained snow-covered, with icy areas on many trails. Walking poles and crampons were useful and, luckily, we had no falls. Many Mallards were feeding in a small patch of open water at the north end of Grenadier Pond, with one or two Wood Ducks. The rest of the pond was entirely frozen over. A bit further along the path, we met chickadees, a White-breasted Nuthatch and a Downy Woodpecker.

We talked about the multiple stress factors for pond life in winter, especially low oxygen levels under the ice and high salt concentrations from road salt. Fish

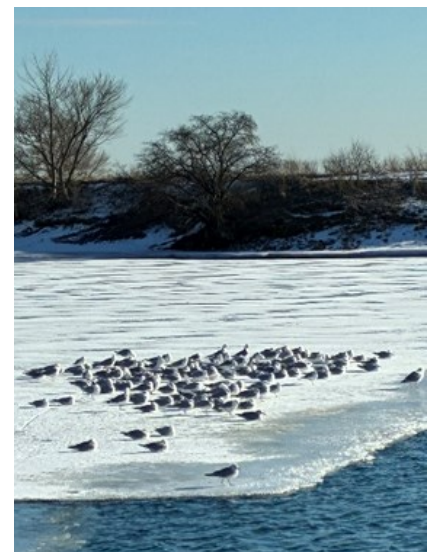
diversity in Grenadier Pond has declined in recent decades, and in March 2025 dozens of dead fish were observed in the melting ice – a sign of winterkill. We imagined the innumerable organisms sharing the underwater pond ecosystem, from single-celled algae to paramecia and tiny water fleas to huge dormant snapping turtles, all waiting for spring. Our route took us south and



Downy Woodpecker.
Photo: Cynthia Miller

east around the Lower Duck Pond (also frozen over) and then uphill through the zoo paddocks. A number of us enjoyed lunch-time conversations at Grenadier Restaurant.

Late-Winter Ducks, Mar 1. Leader: Clara Guadagni. On a sunny day, a small group of mostly experienced birders gathered at Colonel Samuel Smith Park where we saw a good number of ducks, including female and male scaup (I think mostly Greater), female and male Common Goldeneyes, male Buffleheads, a few female Common Mergansers, and Mallards. Some people saw a Long-tailed Duck in the distance. Among other birds, we saw Mute Swans, many Ring-billed Gulls, a few Herring Gulls, American Tree Sparrows, juncos and Red-winged Blackbirds.



Gulls at Colonel Sam Smith Park.
Photo: Clara Guadagni

IN THE NEWS

Birdbrain benefits: How being an expert birdwatcher may boost cognition. NBC News

A recent Canadian study compared the brains of 29 expert birders aged 24 to 75 recruited from organizations such as the Toronto Ornithological Club and Ontario Field Ornithologists, with the brains of 29 novices aged 22 to 79 recruited from the same birding groups as well as from outdoor clubs focused on activities such as hiking and gardening. MRIs revealed that the brains of expert birders were denser in areas related to attention and perception than those of novices. Such density may indicate increased communication between neurons, and these structural differences, which exist regardless of age, were associated with more accurate bird identification.

The study doesn't prove that birding prevents cognitive decline, but the results suggest that birding may support brain health in older adults. Other facets of birding that have been shown to support brain health, such as being in nature, walking, and socializing, may also be involved. The researcher suggested a future longitudinal study, tracking novice birders over time, to see if their brains change as they gain expertise. You may read the full article by Lindsey Leake at: <https://tfngo.to/birdingandcognition>

See the *Earth Watch* feature in the Winter 2025/26 issue of *ON Nature Magazine* for several environmental concerns.

Banding Together for the Chorus Frog

Listed as endangered under the federal *Species at Risk Act*, the western chorus frog continues to lose the forests and seasonal wetlands it needs for breeding, due to urban and agriculture expansion into those habitats. Protecting this umbrella species from further habitat loss incidentally benefits other wetland wildlife. [ON Nature Magazine - Winter 2025 - Page 6-7](#)

More Study Needed on the Impact of Low Ice on Lakes

As the climate warms, less (and thinner) ice forms on freshwater lakes, creating a cascade of effects on aquatic species. With thinner ice, light and oxygen levels increase in the water below, affecting the growth of plankton, the primary food source for many marine creatures. The loss of ice protecting lake bottom hibernators from predators and storms leaves them open to danger. As cold layers of water warm, the metabolism and behaviours of cold water fish species change. The question remains: how quickly can aquatic life adapt to so many other changes? [ON Nature Magazine - Winter 2025 - Page 10-11](#)



Female Red-winged Blackbird nest-building.

Red-winged Blackbird Populations Declining

Conservation efforts focus on species at risk, but 'common' species also need help. Our familiar Red-winged Blackbirds are just one example: in spite of their high visibility (especially in the breeding season), as they lose the wetlands they need for breeding, their numbers are falling. [ON Nature Magazine - Winter 2025 - Page 8-9](#)

Canadian Government Classifies 'Forever Chemicals' as Toxic

Many chemicals (especially PFAS) used industrially and in common household items such as no-stick cookware are virtually indestructible. Lake Ontario and the water used by the Greater Toronto Area are highly contaminated by these persistent chemicals that have been linked to many health concerns in animals, including humans and fish. Recent legislation gives the federal government power to phase out these chemicals, but cleaning up their pollution in the Great Lakes will be more difficult now that the US has cut back on protecting our shared waters. [ON Nature Magazine - Winter 2025 - Page 16-17](#)

Charlotte Broome

FOR READING

Medicines to Help Us: Traditional Métis Plant Use
by Christi Belcourt (2023)

Christi Belcourt, a Métis artist, author and environmentalist, has created a beautiful visual history that honours traditional Indigenous plant knowledge. Before written language, this information was shared through oral storytelling and visual practices such as weaving, beading, and embroidery. Plants were used both fresh and dried, guided by Elders (or Medicine People) who possessed a deep understanding of their healing properties, passed down through generations. Their work was grounded in gratitude and respect for the natural world.

The book's introduction addresses mindful harvesting practices, emphasizing respect for plants and their ability to reproduce and thrive. While the book does not necessarily invite readers to harvest*, it encourages further learning for those who are interested. A short opening essay by Elder Rose Richardson is not to be skipped.

Belcourt's original artwork, *Medicines to Help Us*, depicts 27 plants, and forms the basis of the book; each plant is presented with its Indigenous, scientific and English names, medicinal uses, Canadian range and additional context.

Out of curiosity, I searched for all 27 plants on *iNaturalist* and found that many have been recorded within Toronto's boundaries. While these entries should be treated with caution due to possible misidentification, it was interesting to see how close we live to where many of these plants grow. Two years ago, on a walk along Etobicoke Creek, I spotted a bright orange tansy (featured in the book), and I've witnessed people gathering stinging nettle (also featured) for tea in Toronto ravines.

Each plant's entry includes a photograph in bloom alongside a swatch from Belcourt's painting depicting it. To see the full painting, visit this link: <https://www.metismuseum.ca/resource.php/06645>. The book includes a glossary, endnotes, and references. It is available as a regular loan at the Toronto Public Library.

Katrina McGuire

***Note:** TFN's ethical principles oppose harvesting of wild plants in the city. Ed.

In the Name of Plants: From Attenborough to Washington, the People behind Plant Names
by Sandra Knapp (2022)

This book presents beautifully written and illustrated stories about 30 plant genera named for people, and something about those so honored. Some were botanists, but many were famous for other reasons, including Comte de Bougainville (soldier-explorer), Erasmus Darwin (physician), Ben Franklin, Lady Gaga, Francisco Hernandez (physician), Jorge Juan and Antonio de Ulloa (geographers), Meriwether Lewis, Kwasi (slave, scout for slavers in Surinam), Sir T.S. Raffles, Sequoyah (inventor of Cherokee syllabary), Sir David Attenborough, Sophia Charlotte of Mecklenburg-Strelitz (wife of George III), Queen Victoria and George Washington. While these have led interesting lives, the heart of the book is about the plants, the botanists who described these genera, and the botanists for whom the other genera were named, five of them women. One wonders what stories could be told about the other 21-36 thousand plant genera (*Interim Register of Marine and Non-Marine Genera*).

Bob Kortright

The Nature of Our Cities - Harnessing the Power of the Natural World to Survive a Changing Planet
by Nadina Galle (2024)

Bob Kortright recommends this book, stating that, "in Goodreads, the average of 210 ratings is 4.14 out of 5. Based on the reviews, its popularity is due in part to the optimism and reporting on ingenious solutions to the challenges of climate change."

From the Toronto Public Library website: "This book is a stirring exploration of how scientists from around the world are harnessing local ecology and innovative technology to protect the planet's cities from the effects of climate change. Ecological engineer Dr. Nadina Galle argues that nature is our most critical infrastructure for tackling the climate crisis. She has been at the forefront of the growing movement to use nature and technology together to prepare urban life for the climate challenges upon us. Now, in *The Nature of Our Cities*, she embarks on a journey as fascinating as it is pressing, showing how scientists and engineers from around the world are harnessing the power of technology and the natural world to save their cities. Optimistic in spirit yet pragmatic in approach, Galle writes persuasively that the future of urban life depends on balancing the natural world with the technology that can help sustain it."

Wendy Rothwell

ABOUT TFN

TFN is a volunteer-run non-profit nature conservation organization.
We connect people with nature in the Toronto area, helping them to understand, enjoy,
and protect Toronto's green spaces and the species that inhabit them.

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NEWSLETTER

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Please email to:

newsletter@torontofieldnaturalists.org

Submissions deadline for May: April 1

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TFN LECTURES

Each year TFN offers eight free talks (from September to May) by noted experts, exploring everything from nature in the city to global environmental issues. Starting in March 2026, these talks will be presented Tuesday evenings at 7 pm. They are usually 45 minutes in length followed by discussion. Visitors are always welcome. TFN Members have access to recordings of past lectures via our *Members Only* website.

Learn about this month's lecture on the back page.

You may join the April lecture via Zoom. The link will be posted on the Lectures page of TFN's *Members Only* and public websites. If you prefer, you can dial in to the lecture by phone:

Dial in: 1 780 666 0144 Meeting ID: 889-1838-3474 Passcode: 393754

FOCUS ON NATURE: SHADOWS AND LIGHT

The February challenge for TFN's Photography Group was Shadows and Light. This image titled *Winter Shadows* was created by Theresa Moore.

There were many icicle shadows in my neighbourhood. I chose this particular scene because the juxtaposition of the angular icicle shadows with the softer tree shadows was appealing.

I photographed it with a telephoto lens at F10, 1/500th second, and ISO 200. I converted the image to black and white to further emphasize its graphic nature. Then I used Photoshop's Automatic Geometry tool to better align the vertical lines, and did a final crop of the image.

Theresa Moore



If you would like to join the Photography Group, email photography@torontofieldnaturalists.org.

TFN LECTURE

Tuesday, April 7, 7 pm via Zoom. See page 15 for information

*Your Lawn is a Battlefield:
The Fascinating World of Ant Diversity, Ecology, and Behaviour.*



Dr. Aaron Fairweather, who has had a lifelong passion for insects and dedicated their undergraduate and graduate career to studying ants, will share their knowledge about the diversity of ant species, ecologies, and behaviours found around the GTA and beyond. We will learn about what ant castes are, common species of the GTA, how ants communicate, and, yes, ant war, espionage, animal husbandry, and even air conditioning.

Upcoming lecture:

Tuesday, May 5, 7 pm The Role of Toronto's Tree Canopy in Urban Resilience.
Kim Statham, Director of Urban Forestry for the City of Toronto