



The Woodland Observer

Enjoy Nature!

Nipissing Naturalists Club

October 2011

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History of Laurier Woods

By Karen Major

Dick Tafel was our guest speaker for Tuesday's meeting. He gave us a very extensive and informative history about Laurier Woods.

George Hawks was the first person to draw a map of the Laurier Trails, as it was called back then. He was concerned about development taking over these woods especially when he saw a large hole on one trail where they were possibly doing soil samples and testing for development. George spoke to Ted Price, who was the President of the Nipissing Naturalist's Club, about this problem. They made a presentation to North Bay's city council about keeping these woods as natural as possible and not to let any development take place.

At first, they were turned down but after getting a petition with over 2000 names, refining the map of the woods and writing up a description of what Laurier Woods was all about, the city council changed it's mind. So in 1990 or 1991 the city council agreed with the principle of the idea for the land to be purchased and kept as a green space. Ted Price then wrote up a letter to the Editor of the North Bay Nugget thanking city council for this and letting the people of North Bay know about the possible purchase. This all took place over 20 years ago. Dick read off the names of all the Nipissing Naturalists who were responsible to getting the petition signed.

Since the city didn't own this property, the owner, Mr. Greenwood, was approached to see if he was interested in donating the property. He was not, but did offer to sell it. There was an appraisal done of the woods, which came in at \$75,000.00. This was not enough money so a city councilor asked if the Nipissing Naturalists would like him to negotiate the sale of the property on their behalf. The councilor got a very extensive appraisal done which came in at \$200,000.00. However, the appraiser did say that it would only be worth this to any property owners that were adjacent to the woods since it would be access for them. The owners adjacent happened to be the city.

At the same time, there was a nine acre parcel of land in

the middle of the main marsh that had been bought from Tembec. This was going to be developed by the owner until the Mattawa Conservation Authority said it couldn't,



as it was a flood plain. Well, the owner didn't like this idea and endeavored to drain the water from the pond by removing the beaver dams in it. He did succeed in removing one dam by hand. As he was trying to get the second one removed, a young naturalist named Bruce saw him. Bruce happened to have a movie camera with him and yelled at the owner to look up. When he did, there was Bruce making a movie of him destroying the dam. The owner was very irate, took his shovel and chased Bruce until he reached the roadway. That night on the evening new on TV, a segment of Bruce's movie was run showing the owner chasing him with a shovel after working to destroy the dam. The owner let things die down for a while but then in the months of Nov./Dec. took

a backhoe to the dam and succeeded in destroying it completely. After this took place, it was then discovered that the property on which this dam had stood was the city's and not his. Thanks goodness, with the help of humans and their shovels, the dam was reclaimed.

There were people in the city that wanted to prosecute the owner for this damage to city property but were told nothing could be done. So they went to the former mayor, Jack Burrows, and he suggested buying the man's property so he wouldn't be able to destroy any more of it. A monetary figure of \$80,000.00 was reached, but then had to be raised. The Nipissing Rotary Club came up with \$10,000.00, Nature Conservancy came up with between \$10,000.00 and \$15,000.00, the North Bay Mattawa Conservation Authority and the City of North Bay came up with the rest. In 1996 the Conservation Authority had a plaque put up to commemorate the acquisition of the land by these four groups. Unfortunately, this plaque has now worn down.

A group called the Friends of Laurier Woods was created in order to "obtain effective control of the woods to preserve

Continued on page 2...

The Quest for the Elusive Flooded Jellyskin

By Fred Pinto

The Flooded Jellyskin (*Leptogium rivulare*) is a globally rare lichen with Ontario having 5 of the 8 known occurrences in N. America. The earliest record of this cryptic lichen, it looks like a grey smudge on a tree trunk, is a sample stored at the Royal Ontario Museum from Long Point on Lake Temagami collected in 1946. To find out more: http://www.rom.on.ca/ontario/risk.php?doc_type=fact&id=301&lang=en

The question is, where is Long Point? No one had heard of Long Point and looking at a map of the lake shows many points of land that are long. So where do we start? Here the local sources that MNR staff from the Temagami Area have suggested that we look at Witch's Point. If you look for Witch's Point you will not find it as it is local name to a point of land that sticks out at Witch's Bay which is marked on maps of the lake. Witch's Point looks like a witch's nose or Long Point in Lake Ontario so we thought this was a good starting point for our search.



the Muskokas. Then they navigated through knee high poison ivy and reached the edge of the pond. The poison ivy and maple indicated soils with higher calcium. The pond was dry and showed evidence of water levels fluctuating over a metre in the growing season. These were almost ideal conditions (high calcium and deep fluctuation in surface water) for the Flooded Jellyskin. But time was running out as we had to leave soon to make it back by our planned return time – where should they look? Shaun took off instinctively stepping on firm soil while Brian followed often stepping into muck that sucked him in to his knees. Shaun had formed an image of the environmental conditions that would favour the Flooded Jellyskin. It did not take him long to point to a grey smudge on the tree trunk and say “Here it is!”

The Quest Continues, page 4...

*Flooded Jellyskin -
photo by R. Lee*

Maps of the area and recent e-photos plus older aerial photos were collected by Shaun Thompson, District Ecologist from Kemptville District and a leader in the search for Flooded Jellyskins. Sean narrowed the possible locations we needed to search and we set off on a long bone-shaking boat ride to our first search location near Witch's Point. We clambered up the loose scree and fought our way through balsam fir thickets and cedar windthrows to get to the first set of ponds where we searched the edges for the Flooded Jellyskin. We did not have any luck but Sean still had his number 1 spot that now looked even better as he spotted a sugar maple stand up the escarpment from the shore and behind it was a pond that the photos showed were flooded in the spring but turned mucky in late summer.

I thought the person that had collected the first sample would not have gone too far off shore to look for plant samples so I volunteered with others to search the sloughs along the shore of Witch's Bay. These sloughs were covered with cotton grass, pitcher's plants and tamarack. Tamarack indicates the water levels do not change very much making these wet areas here unsuitable for Flooded Jellyskin.

Brian Naylor and Shaun Thompson set off to look for the lichen. After climbing the escarpment they walked through a magnificent maple stand that looked like it could be in

Laurier Woods, con't

its natural state for future generations”. On August 30, 1991 they got their Formal Charter.

In 2004 the remainder of the property was donated to the Friends of Laurier and the Mattawa Conservation Authority for joint control and Tembec gave 1 acre of land on Brule Street for a parking lot. When the City of North Bay decided their yard was too small and were going to move it to 100 acres that they owned off Old Callander Road, the Friends of Laurier asked if the city would donate the wetlands surrounding these 100 acres. Volunteers made boardwalks so the public could get through the wetlands in Laurier Woods easier. Now Laurier Woods had grown in size to 140 acres from its inception.

In Nov. 2010 there was an ad in the North Bay Nugget about a parcel of land (100 acres) for sale. This 100 acres just happened to be adjacent to Laurier Woods. An offer of \$75,000.00 was put in by the Friends of Laurier Woods to purchase this property and was accepted. Now Laurier Woods has grown to 240 acres in size. The money was borrowed from the bank and the Friends of Laurier Woods are looking for donations toward this loan. If you are interested in donating, please see Dick Tafel.

Calendar of Events

Next General Meeting

Tuesday, October 11, 2011 at 7:00 p.m.

Topic: Bristlecone Pines of the White Mountains in California

Speaker: Jeff Dech, Assistant Professor, Nipissing University

Find out more about the world's oldest non-clonal organism in this fascinating part of the world.

Saturday, October 29, 2011

Hallowe'en Hike in Mashkinonje Provincial Park

Call Angela Martin for details to participate in this fun, annual event! 705-594-1153

Tuesday, November 8, 2011

Topic: Wolves, Coyotes and Nature Connection

Speaker: Alexis Burnett

Alexis Burnett is a Naturalist, Tracker, Wilderness Skills Practitioner and Canoe Guide from Orangeville, ON. He resides in central Ontario, spending his days tracking and running his Outdoor School and Wilderness Canoe Tripping company, Earth Tracks. Alexis is lead guide for the wilderness canoe trips and head instructor for all the programs and classes. He has been practicing indigenous skills, pursuing naturalist/tracking studies and guiding canoe trips for over ten years. Alexis teaches classes both for Earth Tracks as well as through various organizations, for people of all ages. Some of these workshops have focused on such topics as Wilderness Survival, Wildlife Tracking, Wild Crafting & Herbal Preparations and Naturalist Studies.

This talk will focus on learning about the biology and behaviour of wolves and coyotes and nature connection. We will discuss how these animals relate to each other, the landscape and the eco-system as a whole. Part of the presentation will also focus on 'Coyote Mentoring' and how we use these teachings and techniques to draw us towards a closer relationship with nature. Alexis has spent over 12 years tracking and following wolves and coyotes as well as mentoring and teaching others about the natural world. Through stories, fact, myth and personal experience you will begin to see the world through the eyes of the 'wild canines'

Contact Jeremy St. Onge at 705 497-7785 if you have speaker or trip suggestions. He'll get things moving!

Photo Contest

Have you decided which of your great shots you are going to submit to the Photo Contest? Better hurry if you haven't. The deadline for submittals is Nov. 30th.

There are four categories - Flora, Fauna, Landscapes, and People Enjoying Nature. Pictures must have been taken within the same area as is designated for the Christmas Bird Count - a 50 mile radius from North Bay

Important changes for this year:

- Pictures entered in "People Enjoying Nature" must have a person in them.
- A 'single" membership is allowed four (4) entries. A family membership can submit up to eight (8) entries total, spread between two or more persons.
- Send your entries to Christine at nipnats@gmail.com or bring your photographs on a CD to the November 8th meeting.

At the Dec. meeting, there will be a slide show with all entries, and the members present will vote for the pictures they think are best. Winners will be announced at the January AGM!

Tuesday, December 13, 2011

Topic: Nature around Iqaluit and Cambridge Bay, Nunavut

Speaker: Dan Strickland, retired Chief Naturalist of Algonquin Provincial Park and researcher on gray jays.

Monthly Bird-Bash

Saturday & Sunday:

Oct. 1 & 2; Nov. 5 & 6; Dec. 3 & 4

Spend some time observing our local birds and report on how many species of birds you saw. Submit reports to Dick Tafel, rtafel@sympatico.ca or 705 472-7907.

Birdwing Meeting

Fourth Tuesday of each month at 7:00 p.m.

Bird watching topics will be discussed. For this month only, meet at the Bull and Quench. Contact Dick Tafel, rtafel@sympatico.ca or 472-7907 for more information.

Flooded Jellyskin - The Quest Continues - Mashkinonge Provincial Park, Wednesday August 24, 2011

By Kandyd Szuba, PhD; Biologist, EACOM Timber Corporation, Nairn Centre
A Grateful Guest of the Friends of Maskinonge Park

Undaunted by the grey skies and rainy forecast and inspired by the success of the group the day before, a dozen people met at the Loudon Peatland access point in Mashkinonge Provincial Park on August 24 to continue the search for the flooded jellyskin and to learn more about black ash. Park superintendent Chuck Miller and Friends of Maskinonge member Angela Martin welcomed everyone to the Park. Researcher Dr. Jeff Dech of Nipissing University introduced his student Elisha Townshend who would describe their study of black ash stand dynamics in Maskinonge.

Although black ash stands are common but rather sparsely distributed across the landscapes of Ontario, little is known about how the stands develop and the factors that influence them. Elisha and Jeff will add a great deal to what is known currently about black ash stand dynamics when they finish their research project. But research is almost never done as one question leads to another, and the group wished Jeff and Elisha the best of luck with their fascinating work which will most likely turn into a larger research program.

Famous jellyskin experts Shaun and Susan Thompson of Kemptville brought their enthusiasm and knowledge of the flooded jellyskin to the black ash swamps of Maskinonge. Black ash swamps are habitat for wood frogs, a host of birds, and blue-spotted salamanders, like the black one Susan spotted miraculously on the black soil that dark day. But to Shaun and Susan the real appeal of black ash is as potential habitat for the flooded jellyskin. However, we soon found out that not any black ash swamp will do for this lichen, which seems to be very discriminating.

We learned from these experts, who spent many days bending and crouching in swamps to check tree trunks, if you are planning to search for the rare, diminutive flooded jellyskin, it is best to try to narrow down the list of candidate swamps before setting out. As Fred Pinto explained in his account of Day 1, not only does the flooded jellyskin need temporary pools that flood to the right depth, it seems to require the pools to be on calcium-rich substrates (dolomite, marble, limestone, till), not granite. Shaun and Susan, who have found many spots where this lichen occurs in Ontario, use sugar maple as a clue to the possible location of the richer soils that might have the right calcium content. Any black ash swamp or temporary pool that floods to the right depth and is surrounded by maple stands is a good choice for a search in their opinion.

Shaun pronounced August through to snowfall as the best time to look for this lichen because the flooded situations it prefers would be under water (or snow) at other times of year. Water is necessary to plump up the thallus (the main

body of the lichen) and disperse the spores. As Fred reported, water levels that reach a meter or so in the growing season without subsiding until mid July or August are preferred. Shallow vernal pools will not do. Air photos (see Figure 1, below) can help to find pools with the right



Figure 1: Air photo showing "black holes" in a hardwood stand. These holes are temporary pools that could be deep enough to provide good conditions for the flooded jellyskin.

depth - pools with high potential look like small, black holes on such photos. But there are other clues - such as tree trunks without moss at their bases, and trunks with yellowish pollen lines at least a foot or two up showing where the waterline was in spring when conifers were releasing pollen. Look for the jellyskin below the waterline on the swollen (buttressed) bases of black ash, maple, or even elm or dogwood in these situations. Although found in isolated pools, the jellyskin is also reported to occur in quiet spots on rivers and on lakeshores, if flooding happens to the right depth and the action of water and ice doesn't scrape it off.

Since Angela Martin kindly opened her door to the group for a lab session, Shaun was able to get into detail about the microscopic world of the flooded jellyskin. The passion of this very tall man for a very small lichen was a sight to behold. We learned that a lichen is an odd entity that is really more of a partnership or a lifestyle than an organism. In a lichen, a fungus provides the structure (the home) for photosynthetic algae or cyanobacteria that produce food for the partnership. This symbiotic relationship is very tight - the fungus portion of a lichen is never found growing alone.

Shaun explained that the smooth thallus of the flooded jellyskin has MANY pinkish apothecia (dot-like reproductive structures - see Figure 2, on page 5), unlike other jellyskin

Continued on page 5...

The Quest Continues, con't

species possibly in the area which don't sport these glorious pink structures. If there is any doubt about the species, it can be confirmed by microscopic examination of an apothecium - but choose a BIG one! Slice a thin section carefully from a pink apothecium with a razor blade or craft knife (as if slicing mushrooms) and use a microscope to look for 4 spore packets per ascus (an ascus is the "spore mother cell" in this type of sac fungus - see Figure 3, below). Other jellyskin species have 6 to 8 or more spore packets per ascus.

Any sightings of the flooded jellyskin, a threatened species, would add to the meagre catalogue of occupied sites in Ontario and increase our knowledge of this rare, diminutive species. You can find out more about this lichen from the Nipissing Naturalists guide entitled "Species at Risk in the Nipissing Watershed", and from the Nipissing Naturalists web site <http://www.nipissing-naturalist.com/SAR/index.htm>



Figure 2: Flooded jellyskin showing gray thallus and pink apothecia.



Figure 3: Section through an apothecium of the flooded jellyskin showing several asci (spore mother cells). The black arrow points to one ascus that shows clearly the four spores per ascus typical of the flooded jellyskin.

Did You Know...

In order to attain the lift necessary for flight, birds have evolved a number of modifications to their skeletal system, including *pneumatic*, or hollow bones, and reduction of the number of bones by loss or fusion. Hollow, air-filled bones lighten the weight of the skeleton. Skeletal adaptations lend strength to the skeleton so that the thrust (forward force) generated by the wings can lead to maximal lift, and the bird can be propelled through the air with minimal compression to the body cavity.



The hollow inside of a bird's ulna - a bone from the arm - is depicted in the photograph above. In some species of birds, the air-filled skeleton is so lightweight that the bird's feathers weigh more than its entire skeleton!

Ontario Nature - Survey Says...

Are you curious about where the political parties stand on environmental issues? The results are available at www.ontarionature.org

Monitoring Environmental Health and Spread of Disease Through Wildlife

By Fred Pinto

If you wondered how Canada monitors the spread of some human diseases that are dispersed by wildlife you may want to visit the website of the Canadian Cooperative Wildlife Health Centre: <http://www.ccwhc.ca/index.php>

The Centre is a partnership of five Canadian universities plus provincial, territorial and federal governments. Wildlife is also exposed to environmental contaminants and thus serves as a sentinel of environmental health. Reports are prepared each year and posted on the Centre's website.

Send observations, events, stories, trip reviews and pictures for newsletter to: nipnats@gmail.com