

# THE SPOTTED TURTLE

Volume 19 Issue 2

May 2013

American Robin at  
Point Pelee

Photo- Carole  
Lupton



## Park Superintendent's Report

Here at MacGregor Point we enjoyed a 'real' winter again with plenty of snow and cold temperatures. Our winter campers welcomed this return to winter. The staff were able to get the ice oval and ski trails up and going, and they attracted a good number of day users throughout the winter.

As we move into spring we look forward to a very busy camping season. We welcomed Scott Davidson to our MacGregor Point Team on a full time basis as our Assistant Park Superintendent. Scott has worked at Inverhuron Provincial Park for a number of years prior to moving over to MacGregor Point. Bill Thorne, our Maintenance Foreman has moved down to Inverhuron for 2013 as the Assistant Park Superintendent. We wish them both success in their new roles.

We look forward to working with the Friends on a number of projects this year, including the viewing deck at Watersnake Pond, new trail markers and way point signs for our trails, and continuing our support of the Huron Fringe Birding Festival. I thank Matt and the NHE, Maintenance and Gate staff for their contributions in support of the Festival.

### Huron Fringe Gift-Shop Hours for the 2013 Season are:

- **May 10 - June 20** = 11:00am to 3:00pm daily (Extended hours during the Huron Fringe Birding Festival)
- **June 21 - September 2** = 11:00am to 5:00pm daily
- **September 3 - October 20** = 11:00am to 3:00pm daily (Check posted hours for changes)



Friends and birders Judith Buxton, Norma Nanni, Norah Toth, Arlene Richards and Margaret Anderton at a recent trip to Point Pelee.

Photo—Carole Lupton

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

### COMING

#### EVENTS

**May 24-27 & May**

**30—June 2—**

**Huron Fringe**

**Birding Festival**

**Saturday, June 22—**

**ANNUAL GENERAL  
MEETING**

**3:00PM Visitor**

**Centre 7:00PM-**

**Justin Peter, Pro-  
gram Director**

**For Quest Nature**

**Tours, presents**

**“What Darwin Didn’t  
see: A Voyage to the  
Galapagos”**

**July 25—Deadline**

**for Spotted Turtle**

**Sept. 20—22—**

**Youth Summit for**

**Biodiversity**

**September 21 &**

**22—WILD FOR**

**THE ARTS**

The weather finally seems to have given us a break and lots of people are jumping at the chance to get out of doors for spring activities. In the last week there has been a big increase in the number of people shedding their heavier clothes to get out walking and cycling. The Friends board has continued to be active over the last few months with a variety of planning activities. In particular we have updated the Friends Strategic Plan as described elsewhere. This is the blueprint for our on-going efforts on behalf of the park and we would appreciate your thoughts on it. The Huron Fringe Shop is now open on a limited schedule with a range of new and interesting items. Due to the popularity of Wild for the Arts clothing last fall we have added a number of items with that beautiful logo.

The Huron Fringe Birding Festival program has been set for some time and registrations on-line have been very successful. As noted last time we are looking forward to having Bradley Fauteux, Managing Director of Ontario Parks, as a special visitor at this year's event. In addition to birding this issue contains a number of interesting articles on wildlife found in and around the park.

The Annual General Meeting of the Friends of MacGregor Point Park is being held on June 22<sup>nd</sup> this year and we hope that you will be able to join us to hear more about where we have been and where we are going.

Enjoy the sunshine.

Peter Harrison

## MacGregor Point - the "Pelee of the North"

Many members of the Huron Fringe Birding Festival committee took a break the week before Mothers Day to experience the spring bird migration at Point Pelee National Park. It was great, and we met a number of our festival leaders doing the same thing!

There are advantages to going to Point Pelee before the spring migration comes to MacGregor Point. Point Pelee is the most southern point on the mainland of Canada and acts as a funnel for birds migrating across Lake Erie at what might be considered its most narrow point. When migrating birds arrive on the Canadian side of the lake, they are often exhausted and will feed heavily along the point until they are ready to move further north. This provides the first chance each spring for people from southwestern Ontario to see some of the bird species who have spent their winter in Central America. Many of these species will continue to travel north and we will see them at MacGregor Point Provincial Park.

The fact that we will be seeing these same species at MacGregor Point as they fly north, is also important to our committee. It is a fun way to hone our skills - in a natural setting with other people whose company you enjoy! As the birds move further north, and get closer to their nesting territories, they will become more vocal and Pelee provides us the chance to bird by both sight and ear for the first time in the season. In fact, we like to think of MacGregor Point and the fringe of land which abuts Lake Huron in Bruce County, the Huron Fringe, as the "Pelee of the North". Here birds are also funneled along the shore of the lake; providing great viewing and learning experiences.

While at Point Pelee, we also take the time to promote our festival in person to the many international and local visitors to Point Pelee and try to figure out how we could make ourselves more attractive to people who may not come to MacGregor Point and the Huron Fringe Birding Festival.

Once Mothers Day is past, it is back to work for the committee. Registration packages need to be put together, last minute details worked out, silent auction items gathered together and the final registrations processed. However, the final flurry of activity occurs on the Thursday before the festival when the registration tent is set up, signs are put into place and we do our final organization to ensure that each of our registrants will have a positive experience. We all anticipate seeing our registrants, many of whom have returned to the festival for over 12 years. And why do they return? We are a friendly and welcoming group who want to meet people at their level of experience and help them improve their skills.

Our committee works hard each year to create a quality experience for everyone. Within a month of the Festival, we will meet to review the comments we have received; by September we will have started to work on the program for 2014.

As Co-chair, I would like to thank each member of the Huron Fringe Birding Festival committee - Jim Duncan, Co-chair; Fred Jazvac, Publicity; Norma Nanni and Carole Lupton, Volunteer Coordinators; Bette Jean Martin and Anne Cathrae, Registration; Norah Toth, Margaret Anderton, Doug Pedwell, Liz Addison, Program; Judy Duncan, Meals; Mike Pickup, Stew Nutt and Arlene Richards, Members at Large and Matt Cunliffe, Site Setup. Each of them has contributed to ensure that each person who attends the festival has a great time!

We are ready!

Norah Toth Co-Chair Huron Fringe Birding Festival Committee

## **Biodiversity Helps Protect Nature Against Human Impacts**

Feb. 6, 2013 — "You don't know what you've got 'til it's collapsed." That's how University of Guelph integrative biologists might recast a line from an iconic folk tune for their new research paper warning about the perils of ecosystem breakdown.

Their research, published February 6 as the cover story in *Nature*, suggests farmers and resource managers should not rely on seemingly stable but vulnerable single-crop monocultures. Instead they should encourage more kinds of plants in fields and woods as a buffer against sudden ecosystem disturbance.

Based on a 10-year study, their paper also lends scientific weight to esthetic and moral arguments for maintaining species biodiversity.

The study was written by Profs. Andrew MacDougall and Kevin McCann, graduate student Gabriel Gellner and Roy Turkington, a botany professor and member of the Biodiversity Research Centre at the University of British Columbia.

Their research confirms that having lots of species in an area helps ecosystems avoid irreversible collapse after human disturbances such as climate change or pest invasion.

"Species are more important than we think," said MacDougall. "We need to protect biodiversity."

Unlike other scientists usually relying on short-term, artificial study plots, the researchers studied long-standing pasture grasslands on southern Vancouver Island for 10 years. The 10-hectare site owned by the Nature Conservancy of Canada consists of oak savannah where fires have been suppressed for about 150 years.

The team selectively burned plots to compare areas of mostly grasses with areas of mixed grasses and diverse native plants.

They found that seemingly stable grassland plots collapsed in one growing season and were subsequently invaded by trees. More diverse sites resisted woody plant invasion.

Diversity also affected fire itself. More diverse areas had less persistent ground litter, making high-intensity fires less likely to recur than in single-species grasslands with more litter serving as fuel.

MacDougall said the study supports resource management strategies that increase biodiversity on land and in aquatic ecosystems. A monoculture stand of trees or crops might appear stable and productive, for example -- but it's an ecosystem that is more vulnerable to collapse, he said, adding that this study helps explain why species diversity matters.

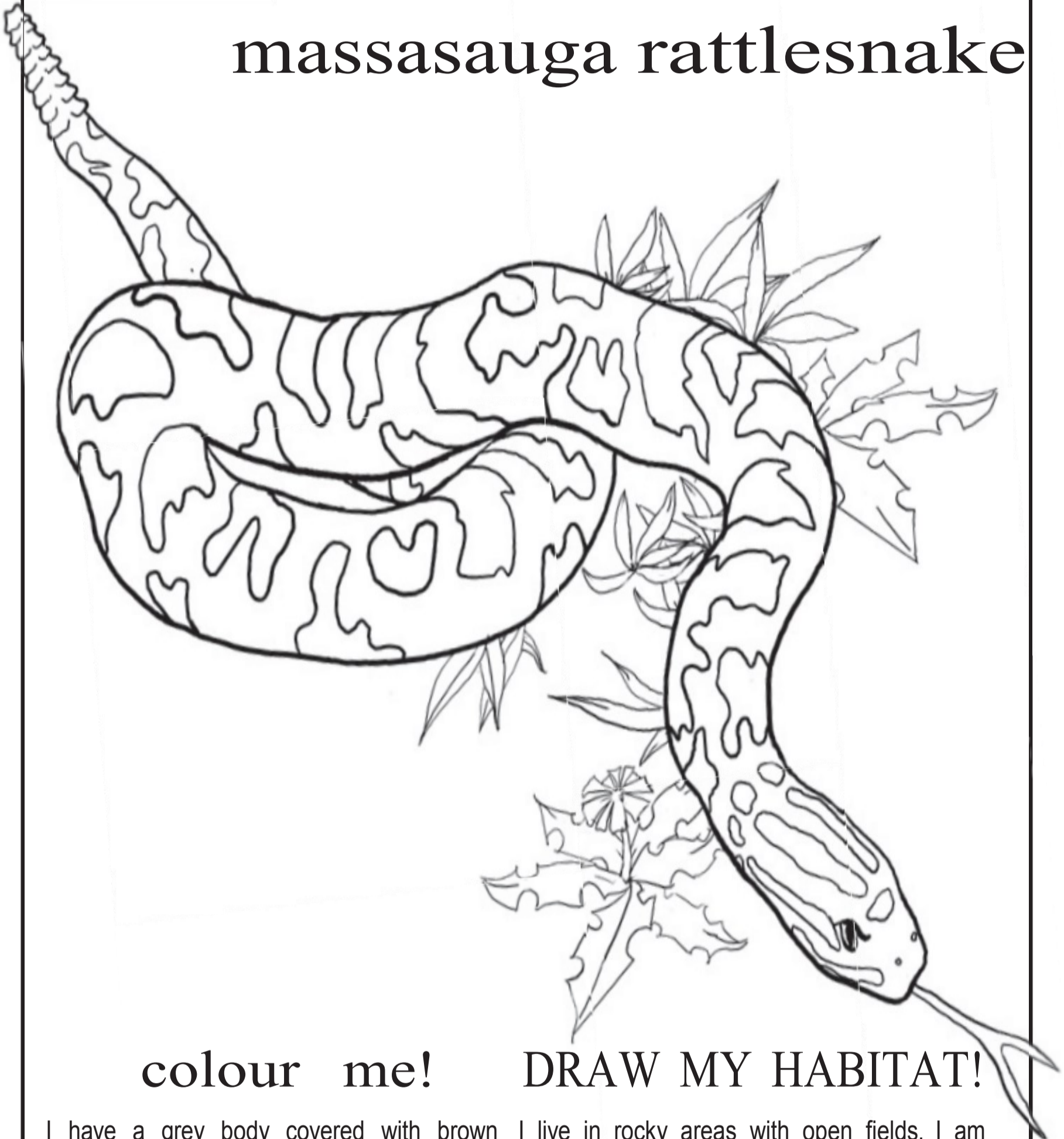
McCann, who studies food webs and ecosystem stability, said many ecosystems are at a "tipping point," including grasslands that may easily become either woodlands or deserts.

"They're a really productive ecosystem that produces year in and year out and seems stable and then suddenly a major perturbation happens, and all of that biodiversity that was lost earlier is important now," said McCann.

MacDougall has studied the Vancouver Island site since 2000. European settlers planted grasslands there in the mid-1800s.

# REPTILES

## massasauga rattlesnake



**colour me!**

**DRAW MY HABITAT!**

I have a grey body covered with brown blotches and a rattle on the tip of my tail. I am a species at risk – I am threatened.

I live in rocky areas with open fields. I am Ontario's only venomous snake. I usually hunt for rodents at night and rest during the day.



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## Friends of MacGregor Point Park

### Strategic Plan Update

On April 15 the FOM Board and representatives of the Huron Fringe Birding Festival and Wild for the Arts Festival committees spent a day reviewing and revising the FOM Strategic Plan originally generated in 2006. Clive Card, former principal of the Bluewater Bd. of Ed. Outdoor Education Centre acted as facilitator.

The exercise began with a review of the **Core Values and Mandate** of the Friends of MacGregor Point Park within the general areas of Stewardship, Communication, Education & Interpretation, and Sustainability. The Core Values defined what the FOM believes its goals should be and the Mandate more specific and immediate objectives. These basic directives have not changed significantly since they were originally defined.

The next step was to review the accomplishments of the FOM since the last Strategic Plan was developed. **Achievements** included the development of a stable funding program through direct fundraising activities, partnerships with commercial and private donors, and accessing government grant funding opportunities. This has led to the ability provide new equipment, increased summer staff and improved programming. Capital improvements achieved have included the new Bird Blind, the Rotary Trail link to the Saugeen Shores trail system and the bridge at the south end of the old shore road. Communications have been significantly improved with the institution of a regular newsletter 4 times a year, implementation of an upgraded website and the capability for on-line registration and payment for special events and activities. The Huron Fringe Shop has been significantly expanded and improved during this timeframe. Special events activities have also expanded and thrived including the Huron Fringe Birding Festival, Wild for the Arts Festival and support for the Ontario Youth Summit.

The last component of the Strategic Planning exercise was to develop specific **Action Plans** for each of the Core Value areas. The Action Plan was developed on the basis of identifying specific action items to be achieved, desired objectives of the action item, activities to be undertaken, available resources, responsibilities and timelines to carry out the action item.

**Stewardship Action Items** include shoreline & trails clean-up, reduction of the park's environmental footprint, viewing window/shelter at or near the visitor centre, a gazebo, trail way point signs, invasive species education and reduction, and research into the impact of changing water levels.

**Communications Action Items** include continued production of the newsletter, on-going management and improvement of the website, enhanced publicity of FOM activities through the creation of storyboards and pamphlets, and on-going participation in community events.

**Education & Interpretation Action Items** include continued support of summer employment opportunities through grants and FOM funding, enhancement of nature education series and programs, continued support and growth of the Huron Fringe Birding Festival, Wild for the Arts Festival, Snowfest, butterfly count and Christmas bird count, and the on-going development of interpretive displays.

In order to **Sustain** the activities of the FOM **Action Items** include the on-going management of the Huron Fringe Shop, maintenance of a responsible governance model which includes regular meetings of the board and membership, on-going membership development, promotion of volunteer opportunities and maintenance of financial stability.

This is an ambitious plan which has been successfully accomplished through the dedicated efforts of many people over the past many years and which with the support of our membership we hope to continue to carry on. A copy of the Strategic Plan can be found on the FOM website. Please support the Friends of MacGregor as we go forward with the next phase of our activities and development. Our **Annual General Meeting** is scheduled for **Saturday, June 22** and we would like to see as many members as possible.

**BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2012-2013**

**Peter Harrison (President)**

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**Jim Coles(Vice President)**

**jcoles@gbtel.ca**

**John Cummings (Ontario Nature)**

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**Beverly Carlisle (Treasurer)**

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**Mike Pickup (Projects)**

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**Michael Rea (Fund Raising)**

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**Linda Mason (Newsletter)**

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**Park Staff**

**Keith Early (Park Superintendent)**

**keith.early@ontario.ca**

**Matt Cunliffe (Park Liaison)**

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**Volunteers Providing Board Support**

**Stewart Nutt (Past-president – ex-officio)**

**stewnutt@gmail.com**

**Norah Toth (Recording Secretary)**

**ntoth@rogers.com**



**Please complete your membership renewal and mail to :**

**The Friends of MacGregor Point Park, R. R. 1, Port Elgin, ON N0H 2C5 . The Friends membership extends one year from the month you join. \_**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_

Postal Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_ **\*\*PLEASE PROVIDE YOUR**

**E-MAIL AS IT HELPS DECREASE MAILINGS** E-mail:

**Would you like to be contacted to volunteer at any of the builds or fund-raising functions (i.e. BBQ's) ?**

Payment by: Cheque \_\_\_\_\_ Visa \_\_\_\_\_ Mastercard \_\_\_\_\_

Card Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Expiry: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

**Membership Category:**

Individual - \$20 \_\_\_\_\_

Family - \$30 \_\_\_\_\_

Donation in addition to membership \_\_\_\_\_

Total \_\_\_\_\_

Official Tax receipts will be issued for all donations.

## **Chasing the Great Gray Owl - Michael Pickup**

Birding is a passion of mine, and I can be seen at any time of the day on birding outings. MacGregor Park is my favourite place to bird. As a Birder, I am interested in all species, but especially owls. I have conducted Owl Prowls for the Huron Fringe Birding Festival in past years, conducted owl surveys for the Breeding Bird Atlas Program and presently conduct Nocturnal Owl surveys for Bird Studies Canada each year. So when invasions of Great Grey Owls occur into Southern Ontario, I am especially interested in hunting for them.

**Great Gray Owl - Is considered North Americas largest owl**

**Height - 24" to 30"**

**Wingspan - Approx. 60"**

**Weight - 2 to 3 Lbs**

Even though the Great Gray is the largest, the Great Horned and the Snowy Owl are heavier and stronger. It has a large round head (no ear tufts), large facial discs with bright yellow eyes. It also has a conspicuous white "bow tie" on its throat, and is generally gray all over with long loose feathers on its breast and tail.

It habits the northern forests of Canada from Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia to the North West Territories and the Yukon. It is also found across some Northern United States and Alaska. Its food source is voles but will also capture other small rodents, red squirrels and sometimes horseshoe hares. In its normal northern habitat the owl is nocturnal.

I have taken it upon myself to study this mysterious bird and look forward to seeing it when it appears in Southern Ontario. The Great Gray Owl on occasions invades Southern Ontario. This occurs during the winter when food sources are less in their normal habitat. These eruptions occur every 8 to 12 years. I have been lucky on various occasions to have seen the Great Gray when it has visited Southern Ontario.

My first occasion was in 1984 on a day outing with Martin Parker. As we travelled north on Hwy. #6 to Tobermory we spotted the owl perched on top of a tree. My first Great Gray Owl, a lifer. On the same trip, we located a Varied Thrush that was visiting a feeder in Tobermory. Two lifers in one day. My next opportunity occurred in 1996. This time I was on a FON (now Ontario Nature) on the Bruce Peninsula, again with Martin. We observed owls in various locations, Cape Chin north, Dyer's Bay Rd. and Clarke's Rd.. Birds were perched on fence posts, on tree tops and seen flying, hunting for food. There were probably 10 to 12 birds on the peninsula that year and records of owls were reported all over southern Ontario. Birders and non birders flocked to these areas en masse. Unfortunately as they congregated many owls became distressed and were accidentally killed by passing motorists. Please be careful and respectful of the owls presence when taking photos.

Another opportunity arose in 2004 as owls again were reported from Ottawa, Orillia, Midland and Bruce County. With the technology getting better and with the advent of "Ont birds" the OFO list serve, where rare birds are reported, it was no wonder that the owls were being distressed as people flocked to many of the areas. So on a sunny winters day in March, with my grandson Jordan in tow, we set out to find Great Grays. On arrival in Midland we were able to locate an owl perched on a hydro pole. As we studied the bird, it flew to ground and then up into a tree. Being careful not to distress the bird, we took photos and left. On further sorties we found 3 other owls in various locations. On another occasion in 2004 on a birding excursion with Fred Jazvac and a couple of other birders, we went in search of the owl on the Bruce Peninsula. On this trip we located a single owl on Warner Bay Rd. in Tobermory.

In 2012 a single a Great Gray was reported near Kingsville, Ontario. I was unable to see this bird because of my health, but it made headlines. Newspaper reporters and TV media personnel reported the bird in daily news reports. Many people were lucky as this was the furthest south any owl had ever ventured in Ontario.

So in 2013, as owls were again reported across southern Ontario, my wife Vicky and I set out to see if we could find any. The day was the 10<sup>th</sup> Mar on a pleasant winters day we set out for Tobermory and searched areas where birds had been seen other years. We had heard reports of Great Grays being seen on the Bruce Peninsula in certain areas, but we had no luck in finding any. On our way home I decided to try one last spot, Clarke's Rd.. As we slowly drove along the road I spotted an Owl perched on a tree top approx. 5` from the edge of the road. Being careful, we studied the bird noting its appearance for my wife, took some photos and then left the area. This bird was resplendent in appearance as it posed for us. It is a very mysterious and beautiful bird. It is not usually seen during the day, only when it ventures south in search of food.

As the owls erupt into the south their habits change from being Nocturnal to Diurnal, hunting during daylight hours. The owls may become distressed as people show up and disturb them. As previously stated, please respect their presence, and be careful not to disturb them. Take your photos from a distance. Leave them to their domain.

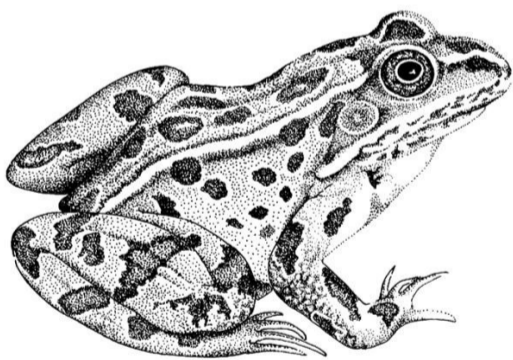
The following photo was taken by me, on the Bruce Peninsula this past March, 2013



Mike Pickup

## Northern Leopard Frog

Karen King



As the name suggests, leopard frogs are marked on the back, sides and legs with numerous dark, rounded spots that usually have light borders around them. The spot pattern and colour are quite variable for these frogs, as the base colour ranges from brown to green. These frogs are generally slender, long-legged frogs with two ridges on its back. Leopard frogs grow to about 5 – 10 cm in body length. The common call of this frog is a low “snore” that can be heard echoing around the wetlands at MacGregor Point Park. A tadpole will eat plants and algae, while the adult frogs will feast on large insects, worms and even smaller frogs. The range of the Northern Leopard Frog is most of North America except for the Pacific Coast. They generally live near ponds and marshes, but will often venture into well-covered grasslands as well, earning them their other common name, the meadow frog. They were once the most common and widespread frog in North America, but their numbers have been massively declining from the early 1970’s. Scientists have not determined the cause of the declines, but it is likely a combination of ecological factors: pollution, deforestation, and water acidity.

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**Red Headed Woodpecker at Point Pelee National Park this May**

**Photo— Carole Lupton**



TO HELP CELEBRATE THE 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF FRIENDS OF  
MACGREGOR POINT PARK A COLLECTION OF RECIPES ARE BE-  
ING GATHERED AND WILL BE SOLD AT THE HURON FRINGE GIFT  
SHOP NEXT SEASON.

IF YOU HAVE A CAMPFIRE OR OTHER RECIPE THAT YOU WOULD  
LIKE TO SHARE, PLEASE submit to the Friends email address,  
[fompp@bmts.com](mailto:fompp@bmts.com) or give THEM to the staff at the Visitor Center.