

The Wood Duck

JOURNAL OF THE HAMILTON NATURALISTS' CLUB



Volume 59 Number 7

March 2006



*The massive (and threatened) White Oak in Bronte. See Paul O'Hara's article on page 165 for more information.
Photo courtesy of Paul O'Hara.*

Goldfinch Killed by Burdock

by Carl Rothfels and Walter Muma

On September 15, 2004, Jim Pringle was leading an HNC hike on the north shore of Cootes Paradise when the group noticed something odd.

There, caught in the burs of a Great Burdock (*Arctium lappa*), was a dead American Goldfinch. Presumably, the goldfinch had landed on the burdock to eat its seeds, and became entangled.

The phenomenon of North American birds being killed by burdock has been documented since at least 1909 (Needham 1909), but normally involves very small birds. The main victims are kinglets, but also hummingbirds and gnatcatchers (e.g.: Kubisz 1989; Brewer 1994). We were surprised that a bird as large as a goldfinch—which, at around 13 grams, would be twice as heavy as a kinglet or gnatcatcher (Sibley 2000)—could succumb. Sure, burdock is annoying, but outright dangerous?

McNicholl (1994), however, lists 12 species known to have been caught in burdock. As expected, small birds were the most frequent victims (three records of dead Ruby-throated Hummingbirds; thirteen of dead kinglets). However, he noted five records of dead goldfinches, and they weren't even the heaviest species captured. That honour belonged to a Solitary Vireo (which would weigh around 16 grams) found dead in Ottawa sometime around 1985.

Hamilton birders, for better or worse, can even do one better. Barb Charlton and Rob Dobos report finding a dead

Barn Swallow in burdock! A Barn Swallow would top the scales at around 19 grams, over three times as heavy as a kinglet. They are stocky birds, with very strong wing muscles; not the kind of bird one would expect to get stuck on a bur. And then there's the further question of what a swallow would be doing down on burdock to begin with...

The fact that birds as large as swallows and goldfinches can be killed by burdock suggests that the risk to really small birds (especially kinglets) may

be greater than we realize. Even mammals are not safe; Little (1925) found a dead bat in a burdock patch!

We would be very interested in hearing from other HNC members who find dead birds (or bats) on burdock during their outings (send observations to crothfels@yahoo.ca). There certainly is enough burdock—including both Common Burdock (*Arctium minus*) and Great Burdock (*Arctium lappa*)—near our local woodlands for it to be a potentially significant threat.



An American Goldfinch trapped in the burs of Great Burdock (*Arctium lappa*) on the North Shore of Cootes Paradise. Photo: Walter Muma.

Perhaps members who have a big burdock patch in their neighborhood could make a habit of searching it regularly for unfortunate avian victims?

Special thanks to Jim Pringle, Rob Dobos, and Bob Curry for contributing their comments, and assisting with finding literature on this topic.

References:

Brewer, A.D. 1994. Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (*Poliophtila caerulea*) killed by entanglement on burdock (*Arctium minus*). *Ontario Birds* 12:115-116.

Kubisz, M.A. 1989. Burdock as a hazard to Golden-crowned Kinglets and other small birds. *Ontario Birds* 7:112-114.

Little, L. 1925. Birds Caught by Burdocks. *Auk* 42(2):284

McNicholl, M.K. 1994. Additional Records of Birds Caught on Burdock. *Ontario Birds* 12:117-119.

Needham, J.G. 1909. Kinglets captured by burdocks. *Bird-Lore* 11:261-262.

Sibley, D.A. 2000. *The Sibley Guide to Birds*. Chanticleer Press, Inc. New York. 544 pages. ☒

Temporary Closure of Cartwright Nature Sanctuary Trail

To prevent erosion and damage to the trail and stream course, the Cartwright Nature Sanctuary trail will be temporarily closed this spring. The exact timing of the closure will depend on weather and trail conditions, but it is expected to start around mid-March and last into May.

The trail will be closed at the junction with the RBG trail loop on the Berry Tract, with an appropriate notice placed at this location.

This is a one-time seasonal closure. Construction of the bridge and boardwalks this summer should avoid the need for future closures.

Anyone wanting to visit the Sanctuary before the temporary closure is invited to join us for a hike on March 4. Meet at the Nigel Charlong Community Centre, 287 Old Guelph Road at 9:30 a.m. Contact Alan Ernest at (905) 689-9466 or ernest@interlynx.net for details. ☒

Toronto Adopts Guidelines to Prevent Bird Collisions

reprinted with permission from Bird Studies Canada's Latest News

City Council unanimously adopted a resolution on January 31 that will protect migratory birds through controlling light from buildings, public education, and bird rescue. For all new buildings in Toronto, the resolution specifies "that the needs of migratory birds be incorporated into the Site Plan Review process with respect to facilities for lighting, including floodlighting, glass, and other bird-friendly design features."

Councillor Glenn De Baeremaeker states "This is a historic day—The City of Toronto, instead of having 10,000 birds killed downtown each year, is working toward saving 10,000 birds. That's a magnificent thing for the City to do."

The Fatal Light Awareness Program (FLAP), a Toronto-based charitable organization, has been working to address the issue of bird collisions with structures since 1993. It was the first organization of its kind in the world; similar organizations have since sprung up in Chicago and New York.

"FLAP has dreamed of this day. Finally, through policy, a city has recognized the need to address the tragedy of bird collisions with its buildings and is setting an example for other cities around the world to take action." says Michael Mesure of FLAP. ☒

Welcome to the Following New Members!

The board would like to give a special welcome to the follow new members, who joined the Club in January and February. We're glad you found us!

Elliot Noble and family

Don and Bernadette Taylor

David Brewer

Martin Daly and Margo Wilson

Roma Browne. ☒