

## The Ottawa Field Naturalists' Club Awards for 2023, presented April 2024

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The 2023 Ottawa Field Naturalists' Club (OFNC) awards were presented at the Club's Awards Night on 13 April 2024. Awards are given to members or non-members who have distinguished themselves by accomplishments in the field of natural history and conservation or by extraordinary activity within the Club. Five awards were conferred for 2023, for

topics ranging from activities to keep the Club running smoothly, to community conservation efforts for local nesting turtles, wild bird education, and lifetime achievements in Canadian natural history and long-time service with *The Canadian Field-Naturalist* (CFN).

### Member of the Year Award: Bob Bergquist

Bob Bergquist is a retired business professor at Nipissing University. He is responsible for the fact that donations to OFNC are recorded electronically and receipts are sent out electronically. Accurate donation records and receipts are critical to maintaining charitable status. The conversion to electronic donation receipts is a notable contribution saving countless hours of volunteer labour. It was no slight undertaking.

When Bob started helping the treasurer in 2017, OFNC issued hand-written receipts to donors. Bob developed a computer system for donation records and assigning receipt numbers. A mail merge program generated about 300 receipts and thank-you letters each year for the Treasurer to print, sign, fold, and put in an envelope to mail.

In 2023, Bob looked for a way to issue charitable receipts electronically. His first step was to find compatible software that could be modified to our existing record keeping and accounting software. It had to be reasonably priced and relatively easy to use. After an initial review, he focussed on the program called Software4Nonprofits.

Unfortunately, it is never enough to just subscribe to a software program and then input data. It took many hours to determine what it would and would not do. Bob got a trial subscription in March, watched tutorials, engaged with their tech support people, and generally twisted inside out. He wrote macros to allow data to move from our bi-weekly deposit records over

to the donation receipt software. He tested the whole process with fake receipts to some Board members.

Another challenge was getting the software to run on both his computer and the Treasurer's computer so data can be transferred, reports created, and the proper checks and balances maintained.

On 25 May 2023, Bob sent out the first batch of electronic receipts. Since then, members get their receipts while they can still remember donating. The receipt states if the donation was for the General Fund, the Fletcher Wildlife Garden, Safe Wings or Seedathon, or if it was to more than one of them. Those who set up a monthly payment to the Club get a year-end list showing the date and amount of their contributions over the calendar year. With the new process, OFNC's charitable receipts are more timely and better documented.

Bob also volunteered his computer skills a few years ago, writing macros to translate payment reports from PayPal into the OFNC Deposit Record with account codes. This automated a task that had previously been done manually.

Bob has tirelessly gone above and beyond in enabling electronic receipts and in searching for workable solutions to OFNC's administrative issues. He has quietly operated behind the scenes but his impact is sizeable. It is for these reasons that we recognize Bob Bergquist as Member of the Year for 2023.

*(Prepared by Ann MacKenzie and Lynn Ovenden)*

### George McGee Service Award: Elizabeth Moore

*In recognition of a member who has contributed significantly to the smooth running of the Club over several years.*

Elizabeth Moore has been a member of the OFNC for close to 15 years during which time her expertise, energy, and enthusiasm have helped keep the Club running smoothly. Elizabeth has served as Recording Secretary since 2019, keeping track of the goings on at Board meetings, dealing with correspondence, and writing up the minutes. This somewhat unglamorous but absolutely essential job is expertly done by Elizabeth, with minutes that are always very thorough and accurate, as well as on schedule. She takes the time to check on details or seek clarification on certain points so that there are rarely changes to be made in the minutes as presented at each meeting. Having someone doing the minutes both reliably and well is an incredible asset to the Club.

Elizabeth was also Recording Secretary on the Fletcher Wildlife Garden Committee from 2016 until 2018. At the Garden, she did much more than just take notes. From 2010 to 2016, she enthusiastically participated as a volunteer working to improve the Butterfly Meadow, planting flowers, pulling Dog-strangling Vine, weeding, sifting soil, and performing many other gardening tasks. She also got her daughter, Sarah (a teenager at the time), to join in the work. Elizabeth also helped with the pond project (again with Sarah), weeding the path along the pond and planting.

Elizabeth has been particularly active in the Events Committee, doing all the arrangements for

the annual Awards Night for five years, 2016 through 2020, pausing only when the COVID pandemic made it necessary to switch to Zoom events for 2021 and 2022. This important job involves renting the room, setting it up (including tables, chairs, the screen, etc.), getting a sound system, arranging for food preparation and kitchen cleanup, getting someone to manage the auction and someone to run the photo contest, finding people to serve the wine who are certified with Smart Serve Ontario, and finding a suitable Master of Ceremony. Elizabeth either enlisted people to do the various jobs or did the work herself. She also ensured Awards Night was promoted and advertised in advance.

Elizabeth has also taken charge of preparing, dispensing, and collecting name tags at monthly meetings and has done so for many years. This involves keeping the name tags up-to-date after annual elections and new committee affiliations and, of course, obliges her to be at every meeting or find a replacement.

All those working with Elizabeth attest to her being self-reliant and competent as well as being funny and agreeable, quick to say ‘yes’ whenever she is asked for help. These are all attributes of selfless volunteers that make an organization like the OFNC function, and function smoothly. For her years of service, Elizabeth is much deserving of the 2023 George McGee Service Award.

*(Prepared by Irwin M. Brodo, with thanks to Lynn Ovenden, Diane Lepage, and Jakob Mueller)*

### Conservation Award—Non-Member: Turtles of Old Ottawa East and South

*In recognition of an outstanding contribution by a non-member in the cause of natural history conservation in the Ottawa Valley.*

This year the award is presented to Turtles of Old Ottawa East and South for their innovative work in helping to preserve and protect turtles in Ottawa.

Canada has eight species of freshwater turtles, all of which are listed as Species at Risk by the Federal Government. Experts say this makes turtles one of the most at-risk groups of wildlife in Canada. While protecting critical habitat for these creatures is paramount, there are other ways to help them. Turtle nests are exceptionally vulnerable to predation, and any turtles that do survive to emerge from the nest, must then navigate their way to the nearest body of water. A daunting task for such tiny creatures.

Putting into practice the mantra of “thinking globally but acting locally”, in 2021 a group of residents in the Brewer Park to Brantwood Park area along the Rideau River banded together to help the turtles.

Aware that many turtle nests were being destroyed by predators in this corridor, they built nest protectors to keep eggs safe from predation. A Facebook group (now at over 900 members) linked concerned people together. With so many looking out for turtle nesting sites, word spreads swiftly and volunteers are able to quickly install nest protectors.

Once nest protectors are installed, community members routinely check on them and remove tall plants shading the nest area. Too much shade can reduce the soil temperature and keep the eggs from hatching. In late summer once nests start to hatch, volunteers put up signs and write chalk messages on sidewalks to alert walkers and cyclists to keep an eye out for hatchlings that may be on the move, and possibly crossing sidewalks. If hatchlings are found wandering away from the river, they are carried down to the river and released close to water. In 2023 the group installed 40 nest protectors, thus helping ensure more eggs hatch, and the hatchlings

make it to water, with a fighting chance of survival. This committed group is taking care of their neighbours—only this time their neighbours are Painted and Snapping Turtles.

This engaged and committed group saw a problem, developed a solution, and is helping to preserve local Species at Risk. They are an excellent example

of community conservation at work. For their dedication to protecting local turtle populations, Turtles of Old Ottawa East and South is a worthy recipient of the OFNC's Conservation Non-Member Award for 2023.

*(Prepared by Christine Hanrahan and David Seburn)*

### **Mary Stuart Education Award: Patty McLaughlin**

*Presented to members, non-members, or organizations, in recognition of outstanding achievements in the field of natural history education in the Ottawa Region.*

This year the Mary Stuart Education Award goes to Patty McLaughlin, Education Program Manager, at the Ottawa Valley Wild Bird Care Centre (OVWBCC). The Mission of the OVWBCC is to provide care to injured, sick, or orphaned wild birds with the goal of releasing them back into their natural habitat ... and to provide people of all ages an opportunity to learn about wild birds, their habitats, and conservation.

Patty is an outstanding educator who has been with the OVWBCC for over 20 years, beginning as a 16-year-old volunteer caring for injured birds. She continued work as a summer and high school co-op student and throughout her undergraduate degree in biology. In 2010, after completing her Master's in Biology at Carleton University, she returned on contract to the Centre. Whenever she could break away from bird care, she worked on creating the education program, starting with the Junior Avian Ambassador Program, which encourages and rewards small actions to help wild birds in backyards and communities.

In 2018, a Trillium Grant enabled Patty to focus on program development which now includes:

- a curriculum linked education outreach program for Kindergarten–Grade 6 with presentations and teacher resources for each grade. It has been delivered to schools in Ottawa's three English area school boards;
- over 100 presentations delivered annually to schools, Scouts, Guides, daycares, City run sum-

mer day camps, and other independent summer camps;

- a Naturehood program in Ottawa offering after school programs in three "priority neighborhoods" focussing on how to appreciate and coexist with wild birds in our urban environment.

In addition to the formal education program, Patty is also responsible for presentations at seniors/retirement homes, museums, local area field naturalist groups, and World Migratory Bird Day events. Behind the scenes, Patty creates the social media content for the OVWBCC with fun-filled, educational bird stories used at events and in informational products such as:

- webinar chats hosted by Wild Birds Unlimited,
- the OVWBCC yearly calendar and Baby Bird Posters,
- "Fun Fact Fridays" on Facebook,
- a feature on OWL TV,
- an episode for TVO Kids "The Green Squad".

Patty has a unique ability to communicate with all ages about the dangers facing wild birds (for example, window collisions, cats) and how we all can help minimize the numerous threats to their survival (such as proper feeding techniques, citizen science programs). Patty's care and passion for wild birds is evident in every interaction she has with the public, from her emails to people concerned about an injured bird at the OVWBCC, to the media events about the OVWBCC work. Thanks to Patty, many more people—young and old—know how they can "Help Save Ottawa's Birds".

*(Prepared by Bethany Armstrong, Deborah Doherty, and Susan Phillips)*

### **Honorary Member: Dr. Donald McAlpine**

*This award is given in recognition of outstanding contributions by a member, or non-member, to Canadian natural history or to the successful operation of the Club.*

It is believed that Donald's love for the natural world began early in life, while spending summers at the family cottage along the Saint John River in New Brunswick, observing amphibians and reptiles.

Then, as a young teen, he was volunteering at the New Brunswick Museum (NBM) after school and on weekends. Here he was introduced to the museum's natural history collections, its curators, and people passionate about natural history research. Over the years his interest and expertise has grown exponentially. Today he is Research Curator of Zoology, Department Head of the NBM, and a renowned

naturalist throughout Canada and beyond.

Donald's breadth of knowledge and expertise is enormous. It spans the gamut from small invertebrates such as nematodes, earthworms, insects, and jellyfish, to large vertebrates including wolves, sea turtles, sharks, and whales. He is familiar with freshwater, marine, and terrestrial environments and the wildlife inhabiting them. His publications include studies in mammalogy, ornithology, parasitology, malacology, herpetology, museology ... the list goes on. A large portion of his research involves sightings of new species found regionally, provincially, and/or nationally.

His interest in conservation, biodiversity research, and public education are apparent through some of his numerous projects. He is a leading advocate for the role natural history museums play in fostering public awareness of Canada's incredible biodiversity and the importance of protecting natural areas. One project, conceived by Don, included the life-size model of a Northern Right Whale found dead after a nearby ship strike. This NBM exhibit heightened public awareness of the threats that large marine animals face in Canadian waterways and, most likely, contributed to the rerouting of a major shipping lane away from an important whale resting site. Then there's his BiotaNB project. Initiated in 2009, this annual event

brings groups of biologists, students, artists, and volunteers together for a two-week intensive field study session at one of New Brunswick's larger protected areas. Its purpose is to not only enhance the understanding of the province's biodiversity and the need for its continued conservation, but also to engage local residents and to inspire future natural history enthusiasts and conservationists.

What are Donald's direct contributions to the OFNC? For more than 40 years, he has contributed to the OFNC through his support of CFN. He has been a prolific contributor to the CFN with more than 40 papers published where he is listed as author or co-author. His first publication, in 1976, described a shark sighting in the Bay of Fundy. As for his last, who knows, he continues to contribute his findings. Since 2003, he has served as one of CFN's Associate Editors. In this role he has reviewed submitted papers by other researchers on a wide variety of subjects. His knowledge and broad experience in many areas make him an invaluable asset to the CFN and to the OFNC—just check out CFN's volume 137. The first two issues were dedicated to him and his work.

Donald's lifetime achievements in Canadian natural history and his long-time service with CFN make him worthy of Honorary Membership to the Club.

*(Prepared by Karen McLachlan Hamilton)*