

# localnews

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## LIVING

# The cycle: birth, death, survival

## Chicks leave the nest, loons disappear and a single turtle outlives its siblings

As 2009 draws to a close, I'd like to conclude my list of interesting sightings and anecdotes that readers have sent along over the past year. I have again included a selection of interesting photographs, as well.



**Drew Monkman**  
OUR CHANGING SEASONS

### JUNE

- My article on heritage trees in the city generated a lot of interest. One reader wrote to tell me about a tulip tree in his front yard at 160 Langton St. that produces gorgeous, tulip-like flowers each year. The tulip tree is native to southwestern Ontario but is only found as a rare ornamental this far north. Apparently it was planted by the previous owner about 1960. Another reader wrote: "I was sure you wouldn't mention the big red oak hidden in Kawartha Heights Park and was pleasantly surprised to see it on your list. When my kids and I visit that tree the first thing we do is all join hands and see if we can reach completely around the base. It takes all four of us to get the job done!"

- June is egg-laying month for turtles, so it was nice to receive the following email from a reader who lives on the Indian River near Warsaw. "Six to eight snapping turtles have laid eggs in our driveway and in my vegetable garden. Last week there was a turtle in the same patch of beans three mornings in a row!"

### JULY

- Gordon Young wrote to say that he's curious about how to get a nesting platform for a pair of ospreys that have come back for a second year in a row to fish along the Otonabee River near Water St. north. "They were here last spring and last fall. Where they went in the summer, we do not know . . . There is plenty of publicly owned land on the west side of the Otonabee for a pole and platform. It would be nice for the osprey to have a house near their 'McDonalds' since they seem to enjoy the carp that gather at the bottom of the dam in the spring."

- Ulrike Kullik found a rare eastern milk snake curled up in her woodshed (attached to the house) underneath a garbage can. She said the shed seems to be a favourite spot for snakes.

- Riley Young reported an interesting encounter at Jackson Park. "Today, my family and I saw a red-tailed hawk perched near a nest. A blue jay flew towards the nest and then attacked the hawk by grabbing at its neck and head. The hawk was unhurt and did not seem to care."

- Derry and Nancy Fairweather sent a video of a male and female imperial moth (*Eacles imperialis*) that turned up on Upper Buckhorn Lake. This large, yellow moth has pinkish-brown patches and is a member of the silk moth family. The female, which is larger than the male, can have a wingspan of as much as seven inches!

### AUGUST

- Brian Wales, of London St., was paid a visit by a white-winged dove for several days. This species' normal range extends from Peru to the southwestern U.S.. However, some stray northward, such as the individual that turned up in



DAVID FRANK photo



MARTIN HALME photo



DEB NICHOLS photo

A pair of young phoebes (top) were photographed by David Frank just before they left their nest; an albino black-capped chickadee (above) has been coming to Deb Nichol's feeder on Clear Lake since November; the American avocet (above left) is rarely seen in Ontario but Martin Halme photographed this one when it is spent about a week in June in a pond on Johnston Dr.; this newly-hatched snapping turtle (bottom left) might have been the only survivor from a clutch of eggs laid in Peter and Stephanie Armstrong's driveway.



PETER ARMSTRONG photo

Peterborough. As far as I know, this is the first record of this species in our area.

- Anne and Gary Corke wrote: "We have a cedar arbour over the deck and have noticed recently what appear to be some sort of bees or wasps chewing off the outer layer of the cedar. We think they are probably using it to build a nest or whatever. They only seem to be eating the outer grey layer of the wood at the moment." It is quite common for many species of wasps to chew on wood. Referred to as "girdling," the wasp's saliva turns the chewed wood fibres into a form of paper for their nests.

### SEPTEMBER

- On Sept. 27, Peter and Stephanie Armstrong saw their first snapping turtle hatchling of the year. "It may have been from a clutch that we saw deposited in our gravel driveway on June 19, though it was raided by (presumably) a raccoon. We protected what was left of the nest with some wire netting over the top, but the area shows no obvious sign of turtle emergence. Our first encounter with newly hatched snapping turtles

understand or truly appreciate the wonder of the natural world without first of all understanding the tested and confirmed fact that evolution is. One reader wrote: "Your comments about the universe reflecting upon itself through the human mind in your column about the Andromeda Galaxy made me smile. Thanks for doing your bit to make the case for a rational reverence for our place in this universe!"

- In response to my July 9 column on invasive plants, I received these comments. "A friend pointed out dog-strangling vine to me in the cedar woods on our property. We dutifully dug up the plants. Next, we noticed it on the fringes of our meadow and making inroads onto the meadow itself. Soon after this, we found it at the back of our maple and beech woods. It's daunting to realize that we seem to have lost the war with this insidious invader before we knew it had started. Riding my bike around the back roads of Cavan, I also see it growing in patches big and small along many a roadside ditch."

### DECEMBER

- Keeping me up-to-date with goings-on around Stony Lake, Rob Welsh reported: "Today there are two common loons trapped in a very small area of open water near the centre of Stony. Two bald eagles are on the ice edge and are repeatedly trying to catch them. The loons quickly dive but I expect this will end badly for the loons." A week later, Rob wrote: "I skated out to the loon location which is now a three-metre circle of newly-formed ice. There are no feathers but my guess is that the eagles plucked the loons from the water and flew away with them."

- Cathy Hooke had a bird's-eye-view of a pileated woodpecker hard at work near the corner of Barnardo Ave. and Cluxton St.. Flocks of winter robins also continued to turn up throughout the city and area, such as those that visited crabapple trees both in Gerry Goselin's yard on Howden St. in Peterborough and Esther Ross's yard on Rice Lake near Bailieboro.

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In addition to those readers whose names already appear in today's column and from two weeks ago, I am also grateful to the many other people who have reported sightings, sent along their photographs, provided me with nature-related newspaper clippings, or simply called or emailed me with their thoughts over the past years. I would especially like to express thanks to Darienne McAuley, Susan Brook, Mitch Brownstein, Jim Cashmore, Kelly Dodge, Clare Harrison, Doug Kirk, Leo Koski, Doug Lawson, Brian and Karin Laine, Murray Palmer, Lena Powell, Barbara Simone, Catriona Sinclair, Lucille Strath, Hedy van Laren, and Horst and Elke Vauth.

This column would also be much more demanding if not for the help of the many expert naturalists we have in Peterborough. Thanks once again to Wasył Bakowsky, Jerry Ball, Tony Bigg, Cathy Dueck, Tim Dyson, Colin Jones, Roger Jones, Erica Nol, Mike Oldham, Chris Risley, and especially Don Sutherland. Finally, it is a true pleasure to be able to use the wonderful photographs of Karl Egressy, Rick Stankiewicz, and Terry Carpenter in my columns.

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the one-crop fields."

- Barry Cross reported what is only the second ever confirmed sighting of an opossum in Peterborough. "We trapped a live opossum in Peterborough this month near Lansdowne Street. We had the trap set to catch skunks and we caught the opossum instead. I let it go where we trapped it, because the animal didn't seem to be a threat of any kind."

### OCTOBER

- On Oct. 25, Luke Berg found a cackling goose with a flock of Canada geese. It was swimming under the Inverlea Bridge. Thanks to recent genetic work, the cackling goose is now recognized as a full species and not simply a smaller version of the Canada goose.

- Whenever I write about evolution, I get letters from readers who believe that this cornerstone principle of modern science contradicts the tenets of their religion. However, most of the calls and emails I receive concur that you cannot

was two years ago when we saw seven over a few days safely making their way to the river. Inevitably they were recorded in my wife's journal as Dopey, Grumpy, Happy, Sneezy, Sleepy, Bashful and Doc!"

- Ed and Darienne McAuley wrote: "Thank you for the photo and commentary on the bobolink. He's my favorite bird and one doesn't find a lot of press about him. To me his song is magical and thrilling. Before we became a hemp/cow corn farm a few years ago we pastured our neighbour's cows on our acreage. Then we had a great mixture of this and that in the fields and each spring I waited for the bobolinks to reappear with their wonderful song. Now we don't see too many of them in