

Meeting of the Board of Directors of the Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club
Monday April 20, 2020 – 7:00 p.m. Minutes (draft)
held through Zoom video conference
during COVID-19 global pandemic

Chair: Diane Lepage

Present: Ken Young, Anouk Hoedeman, Ted Farnworth, Gord Robertson, Owen Clarkin, Ann MacKenzie, Eleanor Zurbrigg, Fenja Brodo, Annie Belair, Catherine Hessian, Henry Steger, Bob Cermak, Jakob Mueller, Bev McBride, Elizabeth Moore

Absent: Diane Kitching, Diane Holmes

1. Approval of the Agenda – approved as circulated
2. Acceptance of Minutes from March 2020 – **moved** by Elizabeth Moore, seconded by Jakob Mueller, acceptance of the minutes of the January meeting. **CARRIED**
3. Business Arising from Minutes
 - a. Trip Policy – Ken had circulated a revised draft of the policy. Two issues had arisen in response to the first draft, namely, whether non-member family and friends of OFNC members should be permitted to participate and whether a refund policy should be outlined. The revision to the policy states that “Membership in the OFNC, another group affiliated to Ontario Nature, or the Club des Ornithologues de l’Outaouais is a requirement for participation. Non-members can purchase a membership immediately prior to booking a seat on the trip”. No change had been made to the reference to refunds. Appeal to the OFNC BoD would remain an option. In response to a question from Henry, it was agreed that, in the event that a family member of an individual member wished to participate, the membership should be upgraded to a family membership.
Ken Young **moved**, seconded by Ann MacKenzie, that the proposed OFNC policy on financial aspects of out of town trips be accepted. **CARRIED**
 - a. Club des ornithologues de l’Outaouais (COO) - Diane L and Owen had both spoken to Claire Charron regarding the use of *Bacillus thuringiensis israelensis* (Bti), a biological pesticide that is sprayed in areas of the Outaouais and of Ottawa to kill mosquito and black fly larvae. COO has expressed concerns about inadvertent effects, e.g. on other insect larvae and on populations of insectivorous birds. Claire had advised Diane L that Radio Canada’s programme “La semaine verte” on Saturday, April 18 had been devoted to the subject of Bti (a link has subsequently been circulated). CPAWS has said that Bti should not be used. Claire had sent Owen some literature in French that he is reviewing. As previously, concern was expressed by some members of the BoD that alternatives to Bti might be more deleterious. It was noted that one argument that municipalities could use to support the use of Bti would be to prevent West Nile Virus. **Action:** Owen will review this matter further and bring back to the BoD next month.
4. Communications - nil

5. Treasurer's Report – Ann reported that there has been no impact from Covid 19 on the cash flow of the club. OFNC may experience reduced donations or renewals but it is not expected to be significant. The cancellation / postponement of the FWG Plant Sale will be notable and OFNC may have to consider how to handle that. OFNC's investments are in bonds and they do not need to be cashed so will not suffer losses in that regard. In early May, Bob Bergquist will be preparing the next batch of tax receipts for donations. The previous batch was in January for the calendar year end and the subsequent one will be early October to mark OFNC's fiscal year end.

6. Issues for Discussion/Decisions – nil

7. Committee Updates

a) Awards – Annie reported that details of the 2019 OFNC Awards had been forwarded to CFN.

b) Education and Publicity - (Gord)

Mark Brenchley has constructed 3 more storyboard holders. Three posts will be needed before they can be installed. Michelle St-Germain has started selecting images of flowers for one of the storyboards. Catherine Shearer will work on another for the "Gully". The third is a spare.

Dean Beeby has tweeted a number of OFNC/FWG announcements on the OFNC Twitter account.

Gord has made two new "wildlife hunts" for Ottawa-Gatineau and the Bog Trail. The other hunts have been updated to include a section where unlisted wildlife may be added. These were made for people taking their children on nature walks, which are currently not recommended by health professionals. (See them at ofnc.ca/hunts). Gord had felt that the use of the term "scavenger" in scavenger hunt should be avoided as participants should not be encouraged to actually collect items and so had renamed his exercises "wildlife hunts". Annie wondered whether that was also inappropriate language. The use of the term "quest" was suggested.

The Webpage has been updated to panels reporting on various closures and postponements.

Jane's Walk has been postponed. FWG will now hold walks on September 13, 2020.

Birding Global Big Day is coming up on May 9. The planned intercity competitive aspect of this challenge has been removed and the event has been turned into a "backyard bioblitz", reporting sightings to eBird. Gord has put up a link on the webpage.

Gord has completed an upgrade of the website and added a redirect link possibility.

The committee had talked about purchasing a computer for the RC. They have done some research and listed the features they think necessary. Members of the BoD further discussed desirable features.

Gordon Robertson **moved**, seconded by Fenja Brodo, that a laptop computer be purchased for the RC subject to appropriate price and specification. **CARRIED**

The desirability of having an internet connection for the RC was discussed briefly. It was noted that the RC had previously had internet and this had proved unworkable. Some members of the BoD felt that presenters would expect internet but it was generally felt that presenters should expect to bring appropriate material with them.

c) Birds

Bob summarised the discussions that have occurred over the past few weeks among members of the Birds Committee, members of the OFNC and various birding organizations regarding reporting bird sightings under the current circumstances. The current position is that local organisations have agreed that sightings should not be reported. OFO is no longer going to allow posts on OntBird. eBird and organizations such as ABA, however, are accepting reports that are readily accessible.

d) Conservation

Owen expressed the view that meeting by Zoom during the current crisis was very important and suggested that committees should also be meeting this way. He noted that the spring bear hunt has been reinstated by the Ontario government, although the effects of this may be reduced by COVID restrictions. It was not clear whether the plan to liberalize wolf hunting in Northern Ontario had been approved.

Anouk advised that she had rekindled discussion about netting birds at Mooney's Bay and Britannia. Netting is used to discourage gulls but birds get caught in it.

Owen discussed the balance that should be struck between active conservation efforts and COVID restrictions. After two years with lots of activity, the committee does not want to see activity cease with loss of gains made. They are hoping that they will be able to do some field work. The committee would like to develop an appropriate policy.

e) Safe Wings

Anouk provided the following report:

"Due to COVID-19, Safe Wings decided not to train any new volunteers for now as this requires in-person training. We contacted the Canadian Wildlife Health Network, who said there is no evidence that birds carry the virus or are susceptible to it. Based on this information and current Ottawa Public Health guidelines, we have told existing volunteers who still wish to monitor buildings that they can do so provided they practise physical distancing and frequent hand-washing. It's seen as a good way to get some exercise and fresh air while staying away from other people. We are also still accepting injured birds for short-term rehab, and taking extra precautions at drop-off to avoid contact with rescuers/drivers.

With migration picking up, we've observed much more aggressive predation by crows downtown — instead of opportunistically grabbing downed birds, they are more often actively chasing them, even working in pairs. We think they're emboldened by the lack of people and traffic that might otherwise get in their way, and more motivated by the lack of other available food sources.

We've also seen a decrease in calls about injured birds. There have hardly any calls from downtown, where building staff and passersby normally contact us frequently about injured or dead birds. We expected a corresponding increase in calls about birds colliding

at residences, but that hasn't materialized. We assume people are more preoccupied with other matters."

f) Fletcher Wildlife Garden

Ted provided the following report:

"The restrictions imposed by the Covid-19 crisis have resulted in the postponement of activities at the Fletcher. A recent newsletter sent out to volunteers announced that our regular volunteer groups (Tuesday afternoon, Wednesday evening and Friday morning) would not be starting work until group activities are allowed by health authorities.

The annual June plant sale has also been postponed, and advertising for the plant sale has been stopped. A strategy is being developed to grow and maintain the plants until it is possible to organize a plant sale, hopefully at the end of the summer season.

AAFC has put up barriers and caution tape to close the parking lot near the baseball diamond. Caution tape has also been put up at the two entrances to the Back Yard Garden as a way to discourage visitors.

It has been decided that the bird feeders on the property will not be maintained until further notice."

More recently AAFC has put up barriers at the entrance road off of Prince of Wales Drive, with notices explaining that they have imposed restrictions to "reduce individuals from potentially congregating." An update message has been posted on the FWG Facebook page describing the status of the Garden and the plant sale.

Ted noted that there had been some pushback on Facebook from individuals who felt they should be allowed to work in the BYG and/or fill the birdfeeder.

Concern was expressed about maintaining the FWG this year. Gord noted that there was no longer any mention of "maintenance" on the CEF website. AAFC is restricting vehicular access but "walk-throughs" are permitted.

Owen had been asked on behalf of another conservation related organisation whether OFNC/FWG would accept a memorial bench. Ted advised that it had proved impossible to maintain such benches and that FWG was no longer prepared to accept memorial benches.

g) Events

Jakob reported that events are cancelled for the foreseeable future. An announcement of cancellation of May events will be made in the first instance. Jakob wondered whether monthly meeting presentations could be made via Zoom. Ken advised that security issues have arisen with large group meetings and Ann noted that the current subscription would not allow hosting such events. Webinars, which allow some interaction, were suggested as a possibility. Ken noted that each person has to be sent the link individually so webinars are more tightly controlled. Annie offered to consult co-workers who have offered webinars. U-tube was also suggested as a possibility. Owen suggested that workshops could possibly be offered from home.

Martha Farkas has suggested that current planning difficulties would make May 2022 a better date than May 2021 for the next Pelee trip. It was further suggested that doing the

trip every three years anyway might be desirable as birders may have a number of other venues that they wish to cover during spring migration.

h) Finance (Ken) – nil to report.

i) Publications

Annie advised that the 2020 grants awardees have been notified.

Nil to report with respect to CFN.

Annie had circulated an email attaching an example of on-line publication of T&L in the event that it needs to be published on-line only. This had received positive feedback.

The latest T&L has been mailed.

8. Future Meetings and activities

- a) Zoom – it was suggested that Zoom might be preferable to email for discussions between meetings.

Before the meeting adjourned Diane advised that it had been reported that there is already an increased amount of tick activity in Ottawa and that appropriate precautions should be taken.

- 9. Adjournment – **moved** by Diane Lepage, seconded by Ann MacKenzie, that the meeting be adjourned. **CARRIED**

Recording Secretary: Elizabeth Moore

Upcoming Meeting Dates

May 11, 2020

June 15, 2020

September 21, 2020

October 19, 2020

November 16, 2020

December 21, 2020