

## ANNUAL REPORT 2019-2020



**MISSISSIPPI VALLEY  
FIELD NATURALISTS**

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Cover photographs courtesy of Simon Lunn and Iain Wilkes



## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

As you would probably agree, this past year has been challenging. Poor weather cancelled the Kintail Family Christmas in December and, along with it, our kids craft program. Sadly, two influential and well-loved members passed away in 2019. Our much-anticipated Spring Gathering with Dr. James Raffan had to be cancelled owing to the effects of this horrific virus, which has also caused us to cancel our monthly nature talks and most other activities until further notice. "Social distancing" is now the standard protocol for ongoing efforts to keep us safe and, in the process, some of us are feeling isolated.

On the brighter side, our weather this spring is far better than last year, (remember all the flooding?), and many of us have taken the opportunity to go outside and walk, cycle, and bird watch. The Trans-Canada Trail is very busy! People are reaching out and keeping in touch with family and friends. Communication through social media has proven a God-send in many ways.

With time on our hands, members have embraced social media and technology to provide continuity in some of our activities. A new Facebook Group allows members to share their sightings directly with others. Denis Gallant launched an iNaturalist project, "Spring in Lanark County," that challenges us to document what we see in our backyards. This project has already identified an incredible rarity— a Tropical King Bird was spotted by Denis Gallant.

Patty McLaughlin had to cancel the Young Naturalist program for the spring but has replaced it with a Google classroom containing a wealth of nature-based activities. She is well on her way to becoming a YouTube star. The Program Committee sponsored a Zoom presentation by Dr. James Raffan. The Committee will continue to explore this platform with at least two more presentations this spring.

Thus, despite the current circumstances, the Board of Directors and committee members are continuing their efforts to engage the membership in many nature-

based activities. In the near future, when it is safe to do so, our outdoor activities, such as canoeing and nature walks, will resume. We have a Fall Gathering planned with Dr. Raffan and, hopefully, our monthly nature talks will be up and running by then.

Our AGM has been postponed to a tentative date in September. In the meantime, I encourage you to consider donating your time and talents to ensure the future success of the MVFN. We have openings on the Board and several committees. The continued success of this organization relies on its volunteers.

It has been my privilege to hold the title of President for the past year. Thank you to the Board of Directors and all the committee members for their dedication to keeping nature and the environment an important issue in our communities.

Stay strong, stay safe.

Pat Enright



*Selfie: Pat Enright*

## **BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

- President: Patricia Enright
- Vice President: Stan Holloway
- Past President and Publicity Coordinator: Linda McCormick
- Recording Secretary: Beverly Blais
- Treasurer: John Blais
- Programs: Cliff Bennett
- Finance Committee: Jim Attack
- Environmental Education: rotating
- Conservation and Habitat Restoration Committee: Nick de Boer
- Membership: Sylvia Miller
- Nature Protection: Tineke Kuiper

## MEMBERSHIP

The MVFN had 191 memberships, representing 304 members-in-good-standing as at 31 December 2019.

As of 6 May 2020, 40 memberships, representing 66 members, have been received/renewed for the current Membership Year (compared with 98 memberships at the same time period in 2019, and 79 in 2018).

One hundred and sixty-four 2019/2020 memberships have not yet been renewed for 2020/2021.

The auto-fill membership application form with integrated PayPal function, launched on the MVFN website on 25 May 2018, ensures that membership information and deposits are consistently and reliably captured. Modifications to this system, such as automation of membership confirmation, of donation receipts, and reminder emails, as well as print-on-demand features such as receipts or membership cards, are under consideration.

The MVFN membership spreadsheet, the repository of all membership details, is used from time to time to mine information, such as member interests, to assist Committee Chairs in planning projects and in soliciting assistance.

Membership cards indicating Membership Year and Date of Expiry help to identify current members. Cards are issued as soon as possible upon receipt of a membership application.

The Membership Committee maintains name-tags for members and makes them available at indoor MVFN functions. Name-tags also identify MFVN directors and new members.

The Welcome Wagon contract to include MVFN brochures and a free coupon for an MVFN Nature Talk for new residents in Almonte and Carleton Place has not been renewed.

An updated MVFN brochure is under development, and will be made available at MVFN events and at key locations such as the Heritage Court mall on Mill Street in Almonte, Mississippi Mills Town Offices, and the Carleton Place Chamber of Commerce and Visitors Centre.

In 2019, the Membership Committee consisted of Sylvia Miller (Chair) and Georgina Wigley, with assistance from Linda McCormick and Pat Enright.

## **PROGRAM COMMITTEE**

The 2019/2020 Speaker Series, entitled “Over, Under, and Through – A Closer Look at Nature,” was off to a very interesting start in September with Pamela Stagg presenting on the New Science of Bird Migration. In October, Lynn Scott gave a passionate talk on her amazing journey of moth discovery from her home in Dunrobin, Ontario. For our last speaker of 2019 (November), Dr. Jeff Bowman provided us with a solid scientific view of how climate change is affecting the territorial range of bobcats and lynx in Ontario. All three Fall speaker events were well attended, but the November presentation on Ontario’s wildcats was especially popular--attracting more than 120 members and visitors!

In January 2020, the Speaker Series continued with Tobi Kieswater (from Ontario Parks) giving us a detailed review of the efforts and progress in preserving habitats for the endangered Gray Ratsnake. A bonus for the attendees was a chance to see and touch a Gray Ratsnake specimen that Tobi had brought along in a bag! In February, it was a pleasure to have our own Almonte native scientist, Dr. Trina Rytwinski, present a few of her projects on tracking urban wildlife relative to urban development and density.

As of the first week of March, the COVID-19 physical distancing and large-gathering advisories came into effect, and the remainder of our program had to be postponed, including our last Speaker Series event (Ian Douglas, Drinking Water) and the Spring Gala (Dr. James Raffan, Circling the Midnight Sun). We are hoping that these events will be able to take place in the Fall of 2020.



The COVID gathering restrictions over the past few months have encouraged the Program team to try some new technologies to engage with the membership. On 16 April, we held our first virtual event using the Zoom platform, featuring a presentation by James Raffan on the Marshall Islands and climate change. And on 21 April, we launched a Lanark County citizen science project based on the popular iNaturalist global platform.

The Program Committee is currently in the planning stages of the Speaker Series for 2020-21, tentatively entitled “Eye Wonder: The Magic and The Mystery of Our Natural World.”

In 2019, new members were added to the Program Committee, which now consists of Chris Baburek, Cliff Bennett, Denis Gallant (Chair), Victoria Miller, Bill Pratt, and Ron Williamson.

## **PUBLICITY COMMITTEE**

The committee is beginning to use more digital and social media tools that are available free of charge. For example, we began using Google forms to register for trips. The forms are easy to set up and have the benefit of keeping track of participants, thereby reducing the amount of work required by the trip leader or organizer.

The “Mississippi Valley Field Naturalists Group” Facebook Group was launched in early February. This group allows all members to share nature sightings, pictures, relevant information, and other items of interest to the group. Moderators from the Publicity Committee make sure all postings are appropriate, relevant, and follow the rules set out by the Board.

Two seasonal newsletters were published during the year. Emails sent to members announcing events are drafted by the various committees and formatted by the Publicity team. Announcements are also cross-posted to Facebook, the website, and are often sent to local newspapers as well.

The generic MVFN brochure has been redesigned and will be printed shortly.

In 2019, the members of the Publicity Committee were: Linda McCormick (Chair) Brenda Boyd, Georgina Wigley, Chris Barlow, and Iain Wilkes

## **BIRDING COMMITTEE**

With the aim of encouraging birding and helping MVFN members and the public to increase their birding skills, the MVFN Birding Committee organized or participated in the following activities during 2019/2020.

Five early-morning bird walks took place on Wednesdays (6 a.m. to 8 a.m.) from 3 April to 1 May 2019, at different locations in the area. Birds were identified by sight or sound, and the results were recorded in eBird, an online citizen-science tool. The MVFN has an account on eBird, where lists from club outings are recorded. The number of species observed ranged from 20 to 33, and the number of participants ranged from 7 to 12 for each morning event.

Although birding was not the primary focus, during three MVFN canoe/kayak outings in May, June, and July, the bird species seen or heard were recorded in eBird as follows: 28 species on Robertson Lake; 23 on Canonto Lake; and 26 in the Swale in Smiths Falls.

Four Wednesday-afternoon Open Houses were held in September for MVFN members and the public at the Mike McPhail Bird-Viewing Shelter and the Al Potvin Observation Tower at the Almonte Lagoons. Assisted by expert birders from the Birding Committee, visitors could view and identify waterfowl, shorebirds, and other species through spotting scopes set up for their use. During the four events, 87 participants observed 52 different species and total sightings of more than 3,000 birds. All sightings were recorded in eBird.

The committee also researched and published an economic impact study of the Almonte Lagoons bird-viewing shelters. The MVFN invested \$8,000 in materials for the shelters, and the study suggested that a conservative estimate of the spin-off revenue generated by non-local visitors was almost \$24,000 in 2019.

In the December/January period, several members of the Birding Committee participated in one or more of the long-standing Christmas Bird Counts, which took place in the Rideau Ferry, Carleton Place, and Lanark Highlands areas. These data are included in the North America data compiled by Birds Canada.

In 2019, the Birding Committee consisted of Ken Alison, Cliff Bennett, Blanche Gauthier, Michel Gauthier, David Hinks, Linda Morgan, Tim Pullen (Chair), and Howard and Mary Robinson.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION COMMITTEE (EEP)**

For the past few years, the EEP has promoted a Monarch Butterfly Rehabilitation Program in the 19 elementary schools in the area. The program includes lessons about the life cycle of the monarch butterfly, establishing butterfly gardens, and providing kits to hatch and release monarch butterflies in the Fall. The plan for Spring 2020 was to plant milkweed seeds with the students on the school grounds, as well as to provide the hatching kits in the Fall. However, with the students at home, this project has been put on hold.

The Young Naturalists program continues to operate extremely well! Patti McLaughlin is the instructor and has 6 volunteers working with her. Two of the volunteers are graduates of the YN program.

Starting in 2010, Patti began by developing 36 lessons and rotates through them. The program is designed for youth 6 to 11 years old. There is one session per month, with approximately 15 children per session. It is self-funding (participants pay a small fee) and very popular! Last year, a donation from **Learning in Almonte**

enabled Patti to buy a tablet and microscope for the children to aid in their explorations around the Mill of Kintail. At last year's AGM, the Young Naturalists provided a display of their broad-ranging program.

For the past two summers, the MVFN has supported the Mississippi Mills Youth Centre by providing speakers and activities as part of the summer program. The plan includes 9 "nature days" at their summer day camp. These nature-oriented programs involved local MVFN experts conducting workshops such as building a bluebird house and nature discovery hikes, including searching for monarch butterfly pupae and larvae in Gemmill Park.

The MVFN co-sponsored a grant application with Carebridge Community Support to Mountain Equipment Co-op for funding to develop the Pakenham Circle Trail. The grant was submitted, but unfortunately was not successful.

There were consultations with the Mississippi Valley Conservation Authority (Shannon Gutoski) concerning the second postponement of the Children's Water Festival until the Fall of 2020, which had been originally planned for Spring 2019, then Fall 2019.

The Environmental Education Committee consists of Cate Arbour, Sally and Scott Hortop, Millie Maloney, Kathleen McIntyre, and Bob Smith.

## **CONSERVATION AND HABITAT REHABILITATION COMMITTEE**

Nick de Boer reported a very successful afternoon workshop building bluebird boxes at the Mississippi Mills Youth Centre. Nick, Anne Winters, and Bob Smith gave the workshop for a dozen young people who enjoyed assembling nest boxes. It was a great experience for all, and the children learned some basic woodworking skills. The nest box kits were put together by the Naismith Men's Shed with repurposed materials. It is great that the whole community, from the youth through to seniors, contributed to the building of these nest boxes.



This committee works on a project basis, calling on volunteers when a new project is initiated. Michel Gauthier and Howard Robinson led a team of volunteers last June to repair the Al Potvin Observation Tower at the Almonte Lagoons. The tower was lowered by removing one level and redesigned to create a larger viewing platform and a much more stable structure. A plaque dedicated to Al Potvin was installed in August.



The committee also supports our partnership with the Mississippi Lake Association (MLA) to monitor loons on Mississippi Lake as part of a [Birds Canada project](#). The MVFN volunteers take part in a training session in the Spring, then make three visits over the Summer; the last week of June, July, and August. Pairs of MVFN volunteers with MLA boat drivers visit sections of the lake searching for loons and recording the findings, which are then forwarded to Birds Canada. The Lake association provides boats and drivers who know the section to be

monitored. This is a very popular MVFN citizen-science activity, and the training is open to any individuals who wish to adopt a lake to monitor.

In 2019, Nick du Boer was Chair of this committee and called on Anne Winters and Bob Smith to help organize projects.

## **CLIFF BENNETT NATURE BURSARY**

Thanks to the fundraising contributions of MVFN members and other members of the community, the Committee met in April to learn that the MVFN had funds in 2019 to provide four \$1,000 bursaries to local students graduating from high school. These bursaries were awarded to: Hazel Cobus, Natalika Culhane, Kea McKay, and Jasper Nault.

Presentations of the bursaries were made at the June AGM, at which time, we also had the pleasure to hear from a past recipient, Laura Symon. Laura spoke about her academic journey, which led to a rewarding career in integrating the natural environment into landscape architecture. She highlighted how important it was for her to receive the bursary, as it validated her interest in the natural world.

In June, Mike MacPherson resigned from his role as Chair of the Bursary Committee and was replaced by Patricia Larkin. The other Committee members this year were Jan Johns, Andrea Roper, and Cliff Bennett, ex officio.

## **PADDLING COMMITTEE**

Once again MVFN's paddling program took advantage of the bounty of lakes, rivers, and streams in our region to see Nature from the Water's Edge. Six day-long trips took place last Summer and Fall.

These outings do not cover wide open water, rough water, or include long portages, but stick to shorelines, creeks, and wetlands. The pace is slow, both to avoid startling wildlife and to ensure good viewing opportunities.

Many thanks to the trip leaders, Cliff Bennett, Art Solomonian, John Willis, Stan Holloway, and Simon Lunn, who guided the trips and went out of their way to ensure that everyone had a great time.

Unfortunately, the annual Fall MVFN Paddling Camp had to be cancelled, owing to insufficient numbers and inclement weather.

## **NATURE PROTECTION COMMITTEE**

The Nature Protection Committee, evolved from the previous Natural Heritage System Committee and the former Environmental Issues Committee. Its major mandate is to deal with the protection of important Natural Areas (wetlands, woodlands, Areas of Natural Scientific Interest (ANSIs), etc.) from unacceptable development. On these matters, the committee may be involved with the Nature Conservancy of Canada, Ontario Nature, Mississippi Madawaska Land Trust (MMLT), and Algonquin to Adirondacks Collaborative (A2A), and may interact with the Mississippi Valley Conservation Authority (MVCA) and local municipalities, as well as the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF). The Nature Protection Committee also selects one or two high school youth candidates to attend the annual Ontario Nature Youth Summit in Orillia.

The Nature Protection Committee has taken the lead in developing a website devoted to the Burnt Lands Alvar, in partnership with several other organizations, such as the Ottawa Field Naturalists and the zone ecologist for the Burnt Lands Park. Such partnerships are encouraged by many Ontario parks.

The purpose of the website is to increase public awareness of this entire ANSI, as well as information on its geology, habitats for various species (plants, animals),

maps of the Park, and policies from the two jurisdictions (Ottawa and Mississippi Mills) within which the Alvar is located. The website will also preserve and make publicly available the numerous studies and information available on the Alvar.

Earlier this year, the Committee met with representatives of the Ottawa Field Naturalists, the Nature Conservancy of Canada, the MMLT, Dale Dunning, and others to discuss what types of information to include in the Burnt Lands Alvar ANSI website.

There will also be information on various outings (including those involving youth), as well as information on what to do and not to do in order to ensure that this ANSI will be sustainable in the future. In addition, we plan to publish a short brochure on the ANSI that can be shared with local landowners and residents. The website will also interface with the existing MVFN Facebook page on the Burnt Lands.



**STATEMENT OF ASSETS AND LIABILITIES**  
**as at 31 March 2019 and 2020**

	<u>2019</u>	<u>2020</u>
<u>Current Assets</u>	\$	\$
Balance in Bank per Books*	44,006.47*	35,134.85*
Petty Cash	145.00	<u>145.00</u>
Credit at Levi Home Hardware	<u>507.02</u>	---
Sub-Total	44,658.49	35,279.85
 <u>Long-Term Assets</u>		
Ottawa Community Foundation:		
Cliff Bennett Nature Bursary Fund	<u>14,266.26**</u>	<u>14,065.33**</u>
 Total Assets	58,924.75	49,345.18
 <u>Liabilities</u>	nil	nil

Approved on behalf of the Board of Directors:

.....  
President

.....  
Treasurer

Notes

\*The Balance in Bank per Books is after all cheques issued but not yet redeemed and includes outstanding deposits. As per the operating statement, the bank balance includes \$23,927 at 31 March 2019 and \$17,056 at 31 March 2020 given or raised for particular programs

These amounts include \$564 of earnings redeemed in 2019-2020 and \$617 of earnings to be redeemed in 2020-2021.

**OPERATING STATEMENT****2019-2020**

Funds held for:		
Opening Bank Balance, 1 April 2019		44,006
Environmental Education		1,792
Young Naturalists		1,680**
Nature Protection		1,150
Nature Bursary Fund		2,392
Special Projects		9,842
Uncommitted Reserve, 31 March 2020		18,078
	Reveue	Expenditure
	\$	\$
MVFN Memberships	3,540	488
Speakers Series	150	1,405
Canoeing and Kayaking	—	469
Environmental Education	—	3,458
Young Naturalists	3,780	4812**
Conservation and Habitat	384	343
Nature Protection	800	—
Other Programs	50	165
Spring Gathering	2,640	4,797
Administration	—	3,285
Publicity	—	448
Miscellaneous	936	144
General Donations	1,373	—
CB Nature Bursary Funds	1,863	4,000
Almonte Lagoon Tower	—	575*
TOTALS	15,518	24,390
Cash Surplus (Deficit)		(8,872)
Closing Bank Balance, 31 March 2020		35,134

<b>OPERATING STATEMENT</b>	<b>2019-2020 (CONT)</b>		
Funds held for:			
Environmental Education		1,792	
Young Naturalists		1,680**	
Nature Protection		1,150	
Nature Bursary Fund		2,392	
Howard Robinson ONYS Fund		200	
Special Projects		9,842	
Uncommitted Reserve, 31 March 2020		18,078	
<b>Notes:</b>			
* In addition to this amount paid from the Bank Account, a credit of \$507 for previously returned material at Levi Home Hardware was used to rebuild the tower.			
** Includes fee rebates of \$1,335 resulting from program cancellations			