

## ANNUAL REPORT 2020-2021



**MISSISSIPPI VALLEY  
FIELD  
NATURALISTS**





## TABLE OF CONTENTS

PRESIDENT'S REMARKS	1
IN MEMORIAM	3
PROGRAM COMMITTEE	4
BIRDING COMMITTEE	5
PADDLING (CANOE/KAYAK) COMMITTEE	6
CONSERVATION AND HABITAT RESTORATION	7
NATURE PROTECTION COMMITTEE	8
ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION	9
CLIFF BENNETT NATURE BURSARY	10
MEMBERSHIP	11
REVENUE AND EXPENSE	12



### PRESIDENT'S REMARKS

Looking back over the last year and forward to the next, I am awed by the success we have had using technology, as well as our members' willingness to embrace it as a way to come together.

Starting with "Not A Spring Gathering," our Zoom meetings have been bustling with a great deal of interaction and engagement. People who wouldn't normally be able to physically come out to the Nature Talks have been able to attend. Without the limitations of travel, we have hosted some fantastic speakers, like Toby Thorne from the Toronto Zoo. This talk was a great example of how Zoom can be used to expand our roster of guest speakers.

The Program Committee experimented with the first virtual presentation following an offer by James Raffin to "test" out a new platform. And, as they say at the track, "They're Off!" The committee swiftly adapted to the new format, providing tutorials to speakers when necessary, testing presentations ahead of time, and schooling members on how to mute their computer microphones. So encouraged were they with the format that they are researching what we need to do to introduce a dual format of in-person and virtual presentations. The Board sees this as a great way to broaden our reach to members who cannot attend, owing to overlapping time commitments or weather — always a factor during a Canadian winter.

Denis Gallant launched our "nature sightings" program into the digital world, creating the Biodiversity in Lanark County project on iNaturalist. He developed the informative guide to "Turtle Watch," as well as tutorials to help members get started with this new citizen-science initiative. The MVFN will continue to use the project in tandem with our speaker series to document nature in Lanark County.

Paddling Committee Chair Art Solomonian bore the brunt of marrying our procedures for outings with COVID protocols. He was able to use technology to manage the number of participants, collect contact-tracing information [and] waivers, and administer a COVID questionnaire. These trips were pretty much the only in-person events we have been able to enjoy in the past year, so thanks Art for persevering. We also celebrated National Canoe Day by creating a virtual tour of waterways in Lanark County. For this initiative, members and the public uploaded photos of their various outings to a [Google map](#).

I sincerely thank Barbara Carroll and Glenda Jones for conceiving and delivering the Birdhouse Blowout Auction. Their unstinting efforts began as an attempt to fill the winter gap and ended up raising \$6,900 for the bursary. I would also like to thank the birdhouse creators for their thoughtful and generous gifts, the enthusiastic bidders who have taken home prized pieces of local art and, finally, the community. An event like this couldn't happen without the support of our incredible community.

## MISSISSIPPI VALLEY FIELD NATURALISTS

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In the end, the Mississippi Valley Field Naturalists is a social group who band together to share what they know and to learn from each other. We all contribute to the goals of increasing public interest in, and knowledge and understanding of, the natural world. We come from a variety of backgrounds and working lives to bond over our shared wonder and enjoyment of the natural world. This last year has proven that we can do this, even while maintaining social distance.

*Well done and thank you everyone!*

Linda McCormick  
President

On behalf of the 2020-2021 Board of Directors and Committee Chairs

First Vice President: Val Wilkinson  
Second Vice President: George Yaremchuk  
Past President: Patricia Enright  
Treasurer: John Blais  
Chair of Programs: Denis Gallant  
Chair of Finance: Jim Atack  
Chair of Environmental Education: Bob Smith  
Chair of Conservation and Habitat: Paul Frigon  
Chair of Membership: Sylvia Miller  
Chair of Nature Protection: Tineke Kuiper  
Director at Large: Cliff Bennett  
Director at Large: Stan Holloway  
Chair of Paddling Committee: Art Solomonian



### IN MEMORIAM

Several of our members who generously shared their time and experience with other members passed away in the last year. They are remembered fondly, and we wish their families peace.

#### Jim Bendell



Dr. Jim Bendell, retired Biology Professor from the University of Toronto and co- author of the award-winning book: *Blue Grouse: Their Biology and Natural History*. Jim's contributions to the MVFN have overwhelmed our record keeping. He was a member of the Board of Directors and a long-standing outings guide and leader of show and tells whose fascination with nature was contagious!

#### Strom Eedy



A long-time member of the MVFN's paddle crew, Strom was a teacher, friend, and photographer who loved to share his enthusiasm for the outdoors.

## MISSISSIPPI VALLEY FIELD NATURALISTS

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### PROGRAM COMMITTEE

The Program Committee started the 2020-21 year by pivoting to virtual Nature Talks, owing to the COVID pandemic. The March 2020 talk had to be cancelled, but we got started in April by hosting the MVFN's first Zoom presentation (James Raffan). We then continued the year with nine more successful Nature Talks using the Zoom platform.

April 2020: James Raffan (Marshall Islands, Climate Change)

May 2020: David Seburn, CWF (Turtle Conservation)

June 2020: James Raffan (Canadian Canoe Museum)

September 2020: Ian Douglas (Water Wise, City of Ottawa)

October 2020: James Raffan (Circling the Midnight Sun)

November 2020: Tom Sherratt (Camouflage in Nature)

#### ***New Theme: Eye Wonder—The Magic and the Mystery of Our Natural World***

January 2021: Michael Runtz (Algonquin Park, Four Seasons)

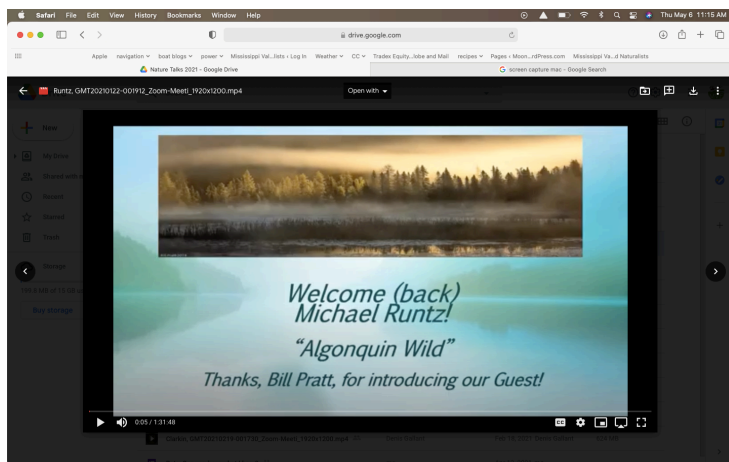
February 2021: Owen Clarkin (What's Happening with Our Trees?)

March 2021: Dr. Paul Keddy (Wonder of Wetlands)

April 2021: Toby Thorne (Bat Research, Toronto Zoo)

The virtual Nature Talks have been well received and attended by the MVFN membership. We hope to continue with that program for the coming fiscal year, with more quality speakers and exciting topics.

The Program Committee is currently in the planning stage of the Nature Talk series for 2021-22, entitled "Eye Wonder: The Magic and The Mystery of Our Natural World." The Nature Talk series will still be virtual/Zoom for the Fall of 2021, but hopefully we will be back to in-person meetings starting in 2022, as well as some hybrid form (in-person plus a virtual option).



The Program Committee consisted of: Cliff Bennett, Victoria Miller, Ron Williamson, Chris Baburek, Bill Pratt, and Denis Gallant (Chair).

### BIRDING COMMITTEE

The Committee met in February 2020 and planned a number of birding events for MVFN members during the year. Unfortunately, by March it was obvious that the plans needed to be modified or cancelled, owing to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Although the traditional early-morning bird walks in April were not open to MVFN members, the walks still went ahead in a modified fashion. On each Wednesday in April, Ken Allison or Michel and Blanche Gauthier observed and recorded the number of species and birds at the planned sites. The statistics maintained annually by the MVFN for the April bird walks were captured for 2020 and recorded in eBird, the online data capture system maintained by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Interestingly, the numbers of birds and species did not deviate significantly from previous years, although fewer birders were involved in the observations.

In September, MVFN members were invited to four Wednesday afternoon Open Houses at the Almonte Lagoon. Ken and Michel were on-site as expert birders with their spotting scopes set up for visitors to view waterfowl, shorebirds, and other species. Strict COVID protocols and compliance with Health regulations were followed, including social distancing, masks, disinfectant, and hand sanitizers. As well, a maximum of only four people was permitted in the Mike McPhail Bird-Viewing Shelter at one time. The Open Houses were well attended, considering the pandemic. The number of birds counted by species was significantly lower than in previous years, but the number of species noted was higher. Michel submitted the stats to eBird. At the end of the year, Michel compiled and submitted to the Board a report regarding the number of people who visited the lagoon in 2020.

In December, several members of the Birding Committee participated in one or more of the annual Christmas Bird Counts held in the Rideau Ferry, Carleton Place, and Lanark Highlands areas. Again, strict COVID protocols were maintained, and the traditional social get-togethers after the bird counts were not held.

The Birding Committee consists of: Ken Allison, Cliff Bennett, Linda Bennett, Blanche Gauthier, Michel Gauthier, David Hinks, Tim Pullen and Mary Robinson. Tim Pullen withdrew as Chair of the committee following the death of his wife in December 2020. Val Wilkinson kindly stepped in.



### **PADDLING (CANOE/KAYAK) COMMITTEE**

The first trip of the season was planned for May. It was, however, cancelled in keeping with the recommendations of Public Health on group size in place at the time. After discussions, we determined that the program could go ahead if we took the following steps to keep within Public Health guidelines.

- The registration form was changed to include the standard waiver that all members sign before a trip. An “agree” button was added in lieu of a signature. This eliminated the need to pass around a clipboard and pen prior to the event.
- A COVID-19 questionnaire was designed and emailed to each participant just prior to the events. If members were not able to pass the questionnaire, they were asked not to attend.
- Each participant was asked to file a separate registration form so that we had an electronic signature from each, and contact-tracing information in the event we needed it.
- And, finally, trip leaders were asked to ensure that all participants respected social distancing rules and wore masks when close to one another.

The second trip was planned for June 20 on Long Lake with Cliff Bennett as the leader. With group size limited to 10 for outdoor gatherings, Cliff broke the registrations into two groups. The groups met and departed from the launch site a half-hour apart. Art led the first group around the lake, and Cliff’s group followed. In all, 18 members attended.

Art Solomonian led a trip on July 25 on the Mississippi River. Seven members paddled from Ferguson’s Falls to the bridge at Mal’s Campground. Although the campground was locked down, the owners were kind enough to allow us to sit in the shade under a row of trees beside the office. They even opened up to sell us ice cream to sustain us for the hot trip back upriver.

Simon Lunn led the next trip on August 22 on the Tay River toward Beveridge Locks. This was an out-and-back trip because COVID rules made it impossible to shuttle participants back to their cars in Perth. It was a very informative trip, with Simon commenting on the history of the waterway, the vegetation along the river, and the birds that inhabited the area.

Two trips were rained out—one on July 12 and the other on August 9. In addition, participants in the summer paddles and attendees at previous Paddle Camps were polled regarding the camp planned for the weekend of September 11-13. Although permitted group sizes had been increased, the group camp areas at the Provincial Parks were closed, forcing us to camp with the general public. As the parks were very heavily booked, a general consensus was reached to cancel the camp for the year.

## MISSISSIPPI VALLEY FIELD NATURALISTS

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Instead, we booked an “extra” day-trip on September 12, when John Willis led a group of 12 on Clayton Lake. We were hoping to harvest some wild rice, but somebody beat us to it. There were very few ripe kernels on the plants.

The Fall Colours tour saw Art leading a group of 14 on White Lake. It was a very windy trip, but everyone kept their gunwales up and made it back safely. We were welcomed at Jan Mansfield’s family cottage for our lunch stop. In addition to the bird report, we were treated to a family of otters slipping into the water, and a young bull moose watching the launch area.

In total we completed five day-trips. They were all well attended.

The Paddle Committee is planning for a regular season in the summer of 2021. We expect to keep using the processes put in place last season. However, we are in dire need of leaders. Over the past couple of years, we have lost three of our regular leaders. Ideally, the committee would like to have at least seven leaders—one for each trip. The MVFN reimburses the course fee for First Aid training for anyone who leads a trip or acts as the designated “first aider” on an outing.

The committee consists of: Cliff Bennett, Brenda Boyd, Denis Gallant and Art Solomonian (Chair).

## CONSERVATION AND HABITAT RESTORATION

The Conservation and Habitat (CH) Committee initiated several projects this past year to document biodiversity in Lanark County on the iNaturalist Project. The first project was “What’s in Your Backyard,” followed by “Spring Ephemerals,” Turtle Watch,” and the “Conifer Countdown.”



Turtle Watch was inspired by David Seburn’s presentation to the MVFN in April on “Identifying and Conserving Freshwater Turtles” that provided a great overview of his continuing work with the Canadian Wildlife Federation on turtle rehabilitation. The “watch” ran from June through August and was well received, with over 60 observations provided by more than 15 individuals identifying 5 different turtle species. One observation resulted in Dave retrieving and incubating eggs and releasing more than 100 baby snapping turtles.

The other three challenges were designed to give members something to focus on while they were isolating, either on their own property or on the trails and waterways in

## MISSISSIPPI VALLEY FIELD NATURALISTS

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Lanark County. Challenges will continue to be developed on a seasonal basis to draw attention to various species.

Other citizen-science projects included the continuation of a long-standing relationship with the Mississippi Lake Association (MLA). This relationship is reflected by MVFN support of the MLA Annual Loon Survey and Invasive Species Survey through volunteer and financial efforts. Owing to COVID restrictions, 2020 was a difficult year to be able to provide volunteer survey support, and it looks as if 2021 might be difficult as well.

Ongoing activities at the Almonte Lagoons birding site involved maintenance of the access trail to the Potvin Observation Tower and the development of a Purple Martin and Bluebird housing complex near the Mike McPhail Viewing Shelter. Many thanks to committee members Nick de Boer for ongoing development of the site; Bob Smith for his refurbishment of the Purple Martin house; and to Cliff Bennett, the guru of all things MVFN, for providing additional background.

A new project assesses the tools and issues around the development of an MVFN Trails Guide that would provide information on adjacent flora and fauna specific to the route. Concerns about overuse have slowed the development of this project and may end it all together. The Board of Directors has struck a sub-committee to review the issues involved in the project.

The committee consists of: Cliff Bennett, Nick de Boer, Denis Gallant and Paul Frigon (Chair).

### NATURE PROTECTION COMMITTEE

The Nature Protection Committee evolved from the previous Natural Heritage System Committee and the former Environmental Issues Committee. Its principal mandate is to deal with the protection of important Natural Areas (wetlands, woodlands, Areas of Natural and Scientific Interest (ANSIs), etc.) from unacceptable development. On these matters, the committee may be involved with the Nature Conservancy of Canada, Ontario Nature, the Mississippi Madawaska Land Trust (MMLT), and Algonquin to Adirondacks Collaborative. The committee may also interact with the Mississippi Valley Conservation Authority and local municipalities, as well as the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry.

To celebrate the high biodiversity within the Burnt Lands ANSI, 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.

## MISSISSIPPI VALLEY FIELD NATURALISTS

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The purpose of the website will be to increase public awareness of this entire ANSI, as well as to provide information on its geology, habitats for various species (flora and fauna), maps of the Park, and policies from the two jurisdictions (Ottawa and Mississippi Mills) within which the Alvar is located. The website will also draw on numerous studies and information available on various aspects of the Alvar. It is hoped that this increased awareness of the ANSI will lead to enhanced protection going forward.

Earlier last 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. We are looking for members or the public to help us describe several characteristics of the area and also to provide us with high-quality photographs.

Once COVID restrictions have been lifted, we are planning various outings (including some 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 Burnt Lands 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.

The Nature Protection Committee also normally selects one or two high school students to attend the annual Ontario Nature Youth Summit in Orillia. The MVFN did not sponsor students to attend the virtual event held in September 2020.

The committee consists of: Ken Allison, Tom Coleman, Nick de Boer and Tineke Kuiper (Chair).

### ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

Patty McLaughlin saw her popular Young Naturalists Program put on hold last winter (2020). She adjusted and reframed the program to launch a Google classroom in the Spring. The classroom is still available for everyone to use. She also planned a series of Family Days for this winter, but the plans were challenged by the oft-changing COVID restrictions. One family day was successfully held in March 2021, with attendance limited to 25. Participants enjoyed the workshops in winter sheltering, fire building and other various winter activities. Similar events in May and June have been tentatively planned, but at this time, it looks doubtful that the program will return until the Fall or Winter of 2021-22.

The long-running Monarch Release Program has survived, but in a much-altered format. It was originally conceived as a highly interactive event: with Spring milkweed gathering, planting and transplanting (i.e., Monarch habitat restoration), and Fall nurturing, hatching and releasing Monarchs to start their migration south. However, these past months have restricted contact to the extent that seeds are now dropped off at the schools in Spring, as well as the Monarch-release kits in the Fall. As a result, the

## MISSISSIPPI VALLEY FIELD NATURALISTS

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onus for learning about the life cycle of the Monarch butterfly is now largely in the hands of teachers already overburdened with COVID demands. In spite of this, however, all of our 19 schools remain enthusiastic participants in the program.

As we have done for the past two years, the MVFN assisted the Almonte Youth Centre in planning a summer weekly Nature Day by recommending experts in various nature-oriented activities. This past summer, for example, Patty McLaughlin did a presentation on wild birds, the youth went on a nature walk looking for Monarch pupae, a short canoe trip was offered, and a nature photography workshop was presented. During the past few weeks, some club members worked on creating birdhouses to be auctioned at the MVFN Birdhouse Blowout, with profits going to the Cliff Bennett Nature Bursary Fund.

The Children's Water Festival, an interactive program for elementary students, which focused on proper treatment of our water, both drinking and waste water (with secondary students acting as interpreters at each of about 15 stations), has been postponed for the third time, until either the MVCA gets the go-ahead or this pandemic is over.

The committee consists of: Catherine Arbour, Brenda Boyd, Joanne Clayton, Scott Hortop, Karen Thompson and Bob Smith (Chair).

### CLIFF BENNETT NATURE BURSARY

The Cliff Bennett Nature Bursary is offered annually to assist graduating high school students who will pursue post-secondary studies in a field related to the natural environment. One or more bursaries of \$1,000 will be awarded each year to deserving students from our area. The fund received a marvelous top-up this year thanks to the Birdhouse Auction and the excellent efforts of Barbara Carroll, Glenda Jones and Linda McCormick.

In 2020, the Committee awarded two \$1000 bursaries: Alexa Button, Honours Geography and Environmental Management, University of Waterloo; and Trevor Mills, Urban Forestry – Arboriculture, Algonquin College.

In some years the Bursary Committee is able to offer returning students a small additional financial contribution towards their second year of studies. We were able to offer \$100 to 2019 recipients Hazel Cobus, Natalika Culhane, Kea McKay, and Jasper Nault in 2020. In return, the Bursary Committee asked for a short letter to bring us up to date on how their studies are going, including any reflections regarding their chosen program, other activities over the past year, and future plans. The Committee really enjoys hearing from previous recipients; their letters are a joy to read.

In January Mike MacPherson resigned from his role on the Bursary Committee. Thank you Mike for your years of service and leadership.



The committee consists of: Robert Barnett, Cliff Bennett, Jan Jones, Rudi Mueller and Patricia Larkin (Chair).

### **MEMBERSHIP**

The MVFN's membership year begins on April 1 and ends on March 31. As of April 1, 2021, there are 128 MVFN memberships (including 19 new memberships), representing 214 members and two corporate memberships. Membership fees remain at \$35 per family; \$25 per individual; \$20 for seniors (65+); and \$10 for students.

This unusual year brought a number of changes to some MVFN programs, including Young Naturalists. "Trial" memberships have been granted to (6) families who registered for the modified program.

The online membership form with integrated PayPal function is now the most popular choice for membership application and renewal and for donations to the Club. Next, we are looking at automating membership confirmations, as well as printable membership cards and donation receipts.

The general MVFN brochure was updated and printed, and will be made available at MVFN events, as well as at key community locations and events.

The committee consists of: Linda McCormick, George Yaremchuk and Sylvia Miller (Chair).

# MISSISSIPPI VALLEY FIELD NATURALISTS

## REVENUE AND EXPENSE

Revenue Expense By Category, Summary Report, Fiscal Year 2020-21				
<b>Period:</b>	4/1/2020 through 3/31/2021 (in Canadian Dollars)			
<b>1-Apr-20</b>	Opening Bank Balance	<b>35,135</b>		
<b>1-Apr-20</b>	Petty Cash	<b>145</b>		
		<b>Category Totals</b>	<b>Sub-Category</b>	<b>Budget</b>
<b>INCOME</b>		<b>12,720</b>		<b>18,555</b>
<b>11R - Membership Sales</b>		<b>6,760</b>		<b>5,700</b>
<b>12R - Program Committee</b>				<b>350</b>
<b>12RA - Birding Committee</b>		<b>136</b>		
	Birdathon		80	
	Sales, Bird Lists		56	
<b>13R - Canoeing &amp; Kayaking</b>				<b>1,000</b>
<b>15R - Nature Protection</b>		<b>20</b>		
	Donations, Nature Protection		20	
<b>16R - Environmental Education</b>		<b>100</b>		
	Donations, Environmental Education		100	
<b>17R - Young Naturalists</b>		<b>(540)</b>		<b>4,125</b>
	Donations, Young Naturalists		340	
	Fees, Young Naturalists		(25)	
	Refund of fees - Covid-19		(855)	
<b>18R - Conservation &amp; Habitat</b>		<b>765</b>		<b>200</b>
	Donations, Conservation & Habitat		625	
	Sales, Bird Houses - Cons. & Hab.		140	
<b>19R - Other Programs</b>				<b>60</b>
<b>20R - Spring Gathering</b>				<b>4,720</b>
<b>22R - Miscellaneous</b>		<b>323</b>		<b>900</b>
	HST Rebate		277	
	Miscellaneous		46	
<b>23R - General Donations</b>		<b>3,299</b>		<b>1,000</b>
	General Donations		3,279	
	In Memoriam Donations		20	
<b>24R- Cliff Bennett Nature Bursary Fund</b>		<b>1,857</b>		<b>500</b>
	Donations, Bursary Fund		1,180	
	Miscellaneous		60	
	OCCU Interest		617	

## MISSISSIPPI VALLEY FIELD NATURALISTS

		Category Totals	Sub-Category	Budget
<b>EXPENSES</b>		<b>(10,002)</b>		<b>(27,419)</b>
11E - Membership Expenses		(783)		1,535
	Postage		(215)	
	Publicity		(429)	
	Supplies		(139)	
12E - Program Committee		(885)		(2,610)
	Cards & Gifts		(152)	
	Honorarium		(650)	
	Online Conference		(20)	
	Supplies		(62)	
13E - Canoeing & Kayaking				(1,000)
15E - Nature Protection				(3,150)
16E - Environmental Education		(1,669)		(3,850)
	Monarch Program		(1,454)	
	Other		(215)	
17E - Young Naturalists		(1,325)		(4,924)
	Stipend		(1,325)	
18E - Conservation and Habitat		(240)		(680)
	Loon Lake Survey		(240)	
19E - Other Programs				(600)
20E - Spring Gathering		(226)		(4,470)
	Guest Speaker		(226)	
21E - Administration		(2,287)		(3,990)
	Facility Rent		(15)	
	Insurance		(1,241)	
	Memberships - Other Orgs		(83)	
	Paypal Fees		(210)	
	Postage & Box Rental		(299)	
	Website		(280)	
	Zoom Meetings		(158)	
24E - Cliff Bennett Nature Bursary Fund		(2,587)		(2,500)
	Bursaries		(2,400)	
	Supplies & Postage		(187)	
33E Publicity Committee				(780)
99E Contingency				(400)
31-Mar-21	Income Minus Expenses	2,717		(8,864)
31-Mar-21	Outstanding Transactions at Year End	180		
31-Mar-21	Closing Bank Balance	38,032		
31-Mar-21	Petty Cash	145		