

Surviving the Spring Flood

By Rick Stronks

As many visitors know, central Ontario witnessed unprecedented flooding this spring. Towns such as Huntsville, Bracebridge, Minden and Bancroft reported record high water levels causing significant flooding and damage. Algonquin Park also observed record water levels and, unfortunately, witnessed the damaging power of water as well.



Washout on the Lake Travers Road on April 22, 2013.

On April 19 and 20, the park received approximately 60 mm of rain. These heavy rains combined with melting snow and partially frozen and/or saturated soil caused creeks, ponds, rivers and lakes to overflow. On the east side of Algonquin Park on Lake Travers road near the Sand Lake Gate, a beaver dam



Washout on the Opeongo Road on April 20, 2013.

broke and washed away a major section of the road. On Opeongo and Arowhon roads, culverts were unable to handle the volume of water causing washouts of the roads. All of this happened just a week before the opening of trout season in the park!

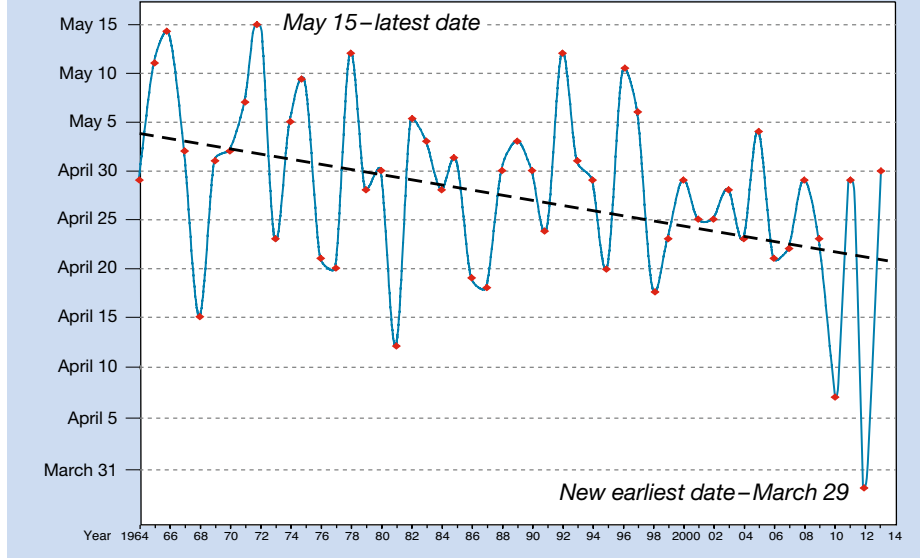
Park staff along with various contractors and Algonquin Forestry Authority staff worked hard to get all the roads operational in a timely fashion. The Friends of Algonquin Park was posting daily updates on their website and Facebook pages. By early May, most roads and trails were re-opened.

But there are still some challenges. Whiskey Rapids Trail lost all of the boardwalks along the river and park staff are working on a plan to rebuild this section. In the short term, this trail remains closed.

The Spruce Bog Trail also received some damage. The large bridge crossing the Sunday Creek near the highway has shifted and is no longer sitting safely on the piers. Park staff are in the process of looking for options at this site including replacing the bridge with a new 80 foot single span bridge. Unfortunately, until this happens, the bridge is closed. However, the trail remains open as a one-way trail up to the bridge and visitors can double back to the parking lot the way they came in.

It has been a challenging spring but we have survived!

Lake Opeongo Ice-out Dates Since 1964 Showing Trend



Compiled by Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources: Algonquin Fisheries Assessment Unit

Be FishingSmart...

Here are a few rules, regulations* and reminders while fishing in Algonquin:

- Trout fishing season opens April 27, 2013.
- No live baitfish are permitted.
- No fishing within 100 metres of a water control dam.
- No fishing within 300 metres downstream of Lake Opeongo's Annie Bay dam.
- Daily catch and possession limit for Lake Trout is 2 per person (1 per person with a Conservation Licence).
- Daily catch and possession limit for trout is 5 per person, no more than two of which can be Lake Trout (2 per person with not more than one Lake Trout with a Conservation Licence).
- Be aware some lakes have slot limits. Check the Algonquin Information Guide for a list.
- Worms are not native to Algonquin and remaining worms should be taken home or thrown in the trash—not on the ground!

* refer to the Ontario Recreational Fishing Regulations Summary for complete details

www.algonquinpark.on.ca

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The Visitor Centre offers free Wi-Fi internet access... and while there, don't forget to check out The Friends of Algonquin Park bookstore, or enjoy a light snack or meal at the Sunday Creek Café.



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The Great Admiral Invasion of 2012

By Ian Shanahan

“What a difference a year makes”—part of a long list of often over-used phrases that are frequently uttered almost unconsciously these days. It is a phrase, however, that has been heard a lot around Algonquin Park this spring, and for good reason.

To expand on this thought, let's wind the clocks back to March, 2012, specifically its third week. Traditionally, Algonquin in mid-late March remains locked in winter's firm grip and thus continues to offer excellent snow and ice-based recreational opportunities such as skiing, skating and snowshoeing; in 2012, however, a stretch of 5 days beginning on March 18th saw daily highs around or above 20 degrees Celsius, with the peak being an unprecedented 26.5 degrees Celsius at the East Gate on the 21st. Summer activities quickly replaced most winter ones and on that warmest day, a Park

Warden even photographed 3 men swimming off the West Beach of Lake of Two Rivers!

Migratory birds were showing up on record early dates, making some data in the *Birds of Algonquin Park*—the life's work of retired Park Naturalist Ron Tozer, combining 50 years worth of bird record keeping—out-of-date before the book even hit shelves in April of 2012. (See www.algonquinpark.on.ca/bap for updates.)

Records were also broken in the realm of hibernating butterflies as Compton Tortoiseshell, Green Comma and Mourning Cloak were all seen on record early dates.

These species—which hibernate as adults—are known to emerge on warm late-winter or early-spring days, so it was not at all unexpected to see them flying during that warm spell; what did surprise us was catching and photographing an Eastern Pine Elfin at the Visitor



Eastern Pine Elfin
DAWN SHERMAN



Taking a dip in Lake of Two Rivers on March 21st.

Centre driveway on March 22nd, far besting the species’ previous record early emergence date of April 25th. This sighting is particularly remarkable when you consider that elfins spend the winter in the pupa (chrysalis) stage, meaning this individual not only aroused early from its winter slumber, but also completed its complex biochemical transformation from pupa to winged adult more than a month earlier than usual!

Such was the story across southern Ontario: early-arriving birds, early-emerging insects and an explosion of blossoms to go along with high temperatures and warm south winds. These winds are largely to thank for the early arrival of migratory birds; what they also brought was the leading edge of an all-out invasion that was set to hit southern Ontario and become one of the headline stories of the spring. The word “invasion” carries with it connotations of violence and attack—fortunately for us, this particular invasion presented no threat to humans...that is unless you somehow managed to turn yourself into a nettle leaf. Confused? Read on.

Contributing your Records

Butterfly observers can contribute in a meaningful way to the understanding of butterfly distribution, flight seasons and behaviour, and also aid in conservation efforts by submitting records or reporting observations to an organized survey. In Algonquin, visitors are encouraged to submit observations of butterflies to the Algonquin Visitor Centre. In Ontario, butterfly enthusiasts are encouraged to contribute their records to one of the two largest initiatives:

The Toronto Entomologists’ Association (TEA) annual Lepidoptera summary and the Ontario Butterfly Atlas project - www.ontarioinsects.org

eButterfly allows users to add observations and photos using an intuitive data-input system, with drop-down lists of sites, species and dates (see ebutterfly.ca for more information).



While in Toronto on March 21st at the tail end of a 26 degree Celsius day, the author was shocked to catch a brief glimpse of a small orange-and-black butterfly. Others butterflies had been seen in Toronto that week, but all had been hibernators. Though the look was brief, there was no doubt that a Red Admiral had just flown by. Red Admirals are one of the more common butterflies in southern Ontario, with the first sightings each spring being of animals migrating north from the United States. Individuals in the first wave of admirals typically arrive in southern Ontario in late April, with the movement peaking in May. Shocking though the sighting was, this Red Admiral became one of a long list of birds and insects that were seen a month or more ahead of the average schedule during that warm week in March of 2012. It was what followed this initial sighting that really caught our attention...

Both in Algonquin Park and in southern Ontario, temperatures in early April returned to more seasonal levels and butterfly sightings

consequently diminished or stopped altogether. This cooler period can accurately be described as the proverbial “calm before the storm”, for on April 15th, a record-smashing invasion of Red Admirals brought millions of the insects to southern and central Ontario. The admiral invasion was so prolific that it soon became headline news in newspapers and radio broadcasts across the province and had even the least nature-inclined folks wondering what “those little orange-and-black (actually very dark brown) butterflies” were and why there were suddenly so many.

Quantifying just how many more admirals than usual were seen last spring is nearly impossible and most experts are reluctant to place a number value on it as there truly were too many to count. It is widely accepted, however, that numbers were exponentially higher than at any other point in recorded history.

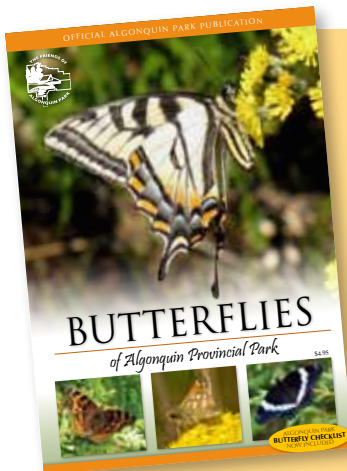
As for why there were so many more, several factors likely came into play: In any year, Red Admirals winter in southern Texas and Florida and then move north on masse to their breeding grounds. The record-breaking warm spring in Ontario was also felt across the eastern United States, making breeding conditions ideal for Red Admirals. This warm weather persisted as the admirals moved north, meaning mortality due to cold snaps—typically experienced in most years—was limited. The catalyst for the sudden influx into Ontario on April 15th was a

drastic switch in wind direction from north to south. All factors combined, Red Admirals and other migratory species such as Painted Lady and Question Mark seemingly had a “free ride” to their northern breeding grounds.

Upon arrival, the admirals set about laying eggs on nettles—the plants fed upon by Red Admiral caterpillars (larvae). Unfortunately for the bulk of this Ontario-born generation of admiral larvae, there was not nearly enough nettle around to support the suddenly massive number of hungry caterpillars. Consequently, comparatively few of these larvae made it to adulthood. In fact, on the annual Algonquin Park Highway 60 Butterfly Count on July 4th, a platry 19 Red Admirals were observed—18 fresh individuals of the aforementioned Ontario-born generation and one beaten-and-battered individual from the now legendary group of migrants that made that epic northbound movement in the spring.

Whether or not this memorable event is a sign of things to come in an age of climate-warming and extreme weather events remains to be seen. For now, we can enjoy the fact that we witnessed such a phenomenal natural event and marvel at how unique that warm spring was in comparison to the cooler, flood-filled spring of 2013—what a difference a year makes indeed.

A special thank-you goes out to the various contacts who contributed their knowledge and expertise during the development of this article.



The revised Butterflies of Algonquin Provincial Park is here!

The long awaited, revised edition of Butterflies of Algonquin Provincial Park will hit the shelves this spring! In Algonquin, 88 butterfly species have been identified representing most of the North American butterfly families. The real strength of this book lies in an overview of the biology of butterflies that is generally lacking in most field guides. The new edition now includes the Checklist and Seasonal Status of the Butterflies of Algonquin Provincial Park. The book is available for \$4.95 at the Algonquin Visitor Centre Bookstore, the East Gate and West Gate, and on-line at www.algonquipark.on.ca.

Moose Viewing Tips

In spring, Moose can be seen regularly along Highway 60, attracted to the slightly salty water left in roadside ditches after winter road maintenance. Unfortunately, the proximity of Moose to Highway 60 can create a serious hazard for motorists. Stay alert as Moose can be on the road or standing in the ditches and are often surprisingly hard to see. Each year too many Moose and other wildlife are killed in vehicle collisions. Reduce your speed (especially at night) and help save the lives of Algonquin Park’s Moose and possibly even your own.

If you see a Moose, pull safely off the traveled portion of the road and turn on your hazard lights to warn other drivers. If possible, park in a nearby parking lot. If drivers flash their vehicle headlights at you in Algonquin Park, there’s a good chance a Moose is ahead or maybe even a “Moose Jam” (a traffic jam caused by Moose watchers). If you exit the vehicle, watch for traffic and ensure you keep a safe distance and respectful distance from wildlife.



Bull Moose in spring.

PETER FERGUSON

WINTER TICK IN SPRING

The winter tick is one of many parasites that affect moose. The aggressive engorgement of the female winter ticks causes moose to obsessively groom, scratch with their hind hooves, and rub furiously against trees to relieve the irritation. This vigorous grooming results in damage to their protective coat of hair leading to premature winter hair loss (McLaughlin and Addison 1986). Severe hair loss in individual moose, coupled with low spring temperatures, may result in increased risk of hypothermia and subsequent death. Die-offs of moose associated with winter tick have been documented in Algonquin Park previously.

The 2013 Moose Hair Loss Survey was conducted in Algonquin Provincial Park on March 23 and 24. A total of 137 moose were assessed for severity of hair loss. The results were slightly lower than average over the history of the survey (1984-2012) and therefore winter tick related mortality was unlikely this year.



Bull Moose showing moderate hair loss due to winter tick.

DAWN SHERMAN

Remember: Moose are large and powerful animals. Please show them respect.