



November Newsletter 2017

# Ruthven Park

National Historic Site

## October Events in Pictures

Ruthven Park staff are proud to have held several successful events last month. We couldn't have done it without the support of our many volunteers and dedicated partners. Here are a collection of photos from each event.



Cars in the Park 2017 drew 80 vintage vehicles on Thanksgiving Monday in spite of the grey weather.



A Great Horned Owl stares down the cameras pointed at it during the Canadian Raptor Conservancy's presentation at the "Ruthven's For The Birds" Fall Migration Festival on October 21, 2017.



Robert Land Academy students did a fantastic job during the special Drum Head Service of Remembrance that was a highlight during the Centenary of Passchendaele Commemoration event on October 22, 2017. They were joined by representatives from the Canadian Great War Society. A life-sized trench replica built by the tireless Tim Gillies was another standout feature of the event.



Military Historian Andy Robertshaw spoke to a captive audience on October 26, 2017 for his presentation entitled "Eye Deep in Hell: The Experience of Passchendaele."

## Motus Tower Starting to Detect Birds Flying Overhead at Ruthven

If you read our July 2017 newsletter, you will know that thanks to funding contributions from the Hal-dimand Bird Observatory and the Lower Grand River Land Trust Inc., a Motus Wildlife Tracking System Tower was installed in the field area to the South of the main parking lot at Ruthven Park. Motus allows researchers to track the movements of radio-tagged birds, bats, and insects with amazing precision. This technology is a program of Bird Studies Canada (BSC) in partnership with collaborating researchers and organizations. Of course, Ruthven Park birders are most keen on Motus for its ability to monitor migratory birds moving through the landscape.

After presenting on the future of ornithology in Canada at the 2017 “Ruthven’s For the Birds” Fall Migration Festival on October 21, 2017, Stuart Mackenzie, Migration Program Manager at BSC, sent Ruthven’s Chief Bird Bander Rick Ludkin preliminary data from our Motus Tower. Since it was deployed on July 10, 2017, the station has detected approximately 20 different tagged birds. Most were Barn Swallows, but there were 4 or 5 birds that had identical tags that need to be sorted. An exciting data point from September 8, 2017 showed a Loggerhead Shrike from either Carden or Napanee passing by. Loggerheads are songbirds with the hunting behaviours of raptors.



A Loggerhead Shrike perched on a chain link fence.

We look forward to continuing to benefit from the data the Motus Tower provides the birding program!

## Team from Environment and Climate Change Canada Study Mussels Along The Grand River

In July, August, and October 2017, a team of scientists and students from Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) and the Universities of Trent, Guelph, and Waterloo visited Ruthven Park and other areas along the Grand River to assess freshwater mussel populations from Caledonia to Cayuga and at sites in Boston Creek. Because freshwater mussels are sensitive to water quality, their abundance and species diversity can be used as an indicator of ecosystem health, so they’re important to monitor.



A Wabash Pigtoe freshwater mussel, which is a Species At Risk.



Aug 10, 2017. L to R: Dr. Ryan Prosser (ECCC, University of Guelph) holding a Wabash Pigtoe collected on the Grand River adjacent to Ruthven Park. Joseph Salerno (ECCC, University of Guelph Graduate Student), Erika Burton and Hufsa Khan (ECCC, Co-op students from the University of Waterloo) are shown in the background searching for mussels.

## PhD Student “Learns From The Experts” During Two Intense Weeks at Ruthven Park’s Bird Banding Station

By: Lauren Witterick



This fall, I had the opportunity to volunteer at the Ruthven Park Banding Station. I had first met Rick when working on my Mas-

ters Degree at the University of Western Ontario, when he helped me to acquire the Brown-headed Cowbirds needed for my research. I kicked off my PhD studies at UWO by returning to Ruthven to learn from the experts, with the goal of learning how to extract birds from mist nets. However, over the course of two weeks of “banding immersion” I learned so much more. I was lucky enough to experience the whole range of banding days, from a slow day where we banded only 8 new birds to setting a new daily record for Ruthven on Oct 12, where we banded 379 new birds! Being immersed at the banding station full time allowed me to acquire new skills quite quickly, and to gain a better appreciation for all of the work that goes on everyday at the Ruthven Park Banding Station. Rick, Nancy, and Mike were all fantastic teachers, always answering my many questions with a smile, when they themselves were very busy. I would also like to give a shout-out to Karen, Marnie, and Nancy for keeping things fun when we were drowning in birds on the record setting day – it was definitely overwhelming at times, but working with such an awesome team made it a memorable experience for me! I would like to thank everyone at Ruthven for making this learning opportunity so wonderful, and a special thanks to all of the volunteers who brought in baked goods, keeping us well fed and working hard.

## Ruthven Park In The News: Let’s Discover ON, Toronto Life, and Narcity Toronto

Three popular online blogs published stories that featured Ruthven Park for various reasons over the last few weeks. We encourage you to check them out by copying and pasting the links into your web browser.

### Let’s Discover ON

“A Grand time in Haldimand County” recaps Tony and Petula Fera’s trip to various highlights in our beautiful County, including Ruthven Park.

Online Link: <https://letsdiscoveron.com/2017/10/23/a-grand-time-in-haldimand-county/>

*Bonus: Includes a video with footage from Ruthven.*

### Toronto Life

“All the GTA locations that show up in CBC’s latest Atwood adaptation, *Alias Grace*” helps watchers learn about the historic places where many of the series’ scenes were filmed.

Online Link: <https://torontolife.com/culture/movies-and-tv/gta-locations-cbc-margaret-atwood-alias-grace/>

*Bonus: Includes insider details about Alias Grace.*

### Narcity Toronto

“You Can Go On Haunted Ghost Walks After Dark At This Abandoned Town In Ontario” highlights the Ghost Town of Indiana at Ruthven Park and luckily came out on the day of our last ghost walk of the season with Niagara’s Ghost Walks company.

Online Link: <https://www.narcity.com/ca/on/toronto/travel/this-abandoned-town-in-ontario-is-hosting-haunted-ghost-walks-this-fall>

*Bonus: Includes links to ghost tour companies.*

## Northern Saw-whet Owl Banding 2016 at Ruthven Park Banding Station: Reflections One Year Later

By: Nancy Furber, Bird Bander



The fall of 2016 marked our 6th season of Northern Saw-whet Owl (*Aegolius acadicus*) banding at the Ruthven Park Banding Station. What started as a vision six years ago with the anticipation of banding the first owl has developed into a dedicated program. This season marked a new banding record for Ruthven Park! (Please check out the Ruthven Park Nature Blog article from November 17, 2016 – *Finishing With A Flair*) A total of 90 Northern Saw-whet Owls were banded, surpassing the old record of 88 owls banded in 2012. In total, this brings our six-year banding total to 365 birds.

In the park, there were two study areas where an array of mist nets and sound systems (male Saw-whet territorial vocalization on a continuous loop) were established. One site was located along the Grand River with a series of five nets using the main sound system and the second, smaller sound system, was placed among six passerine banding nets, 200

meters inland from the river. On twenty evenings, between October 8th and November 16th (Figure 1), these areas were operational between 8 p.m. and 1 a.m., with net checks occurring every hour. We adjusted our hours based on weather conditions and to maximize our time to take advantage of peak Saw-whet Owl migration. The busiest night was October 30th, when a total of 17 owls were caught and processed – 16 Northern Saw-whet Owls and 1 Eastern Screech Owl. Owls were trapped on sixteen of the twenty evenings the nets were opened.

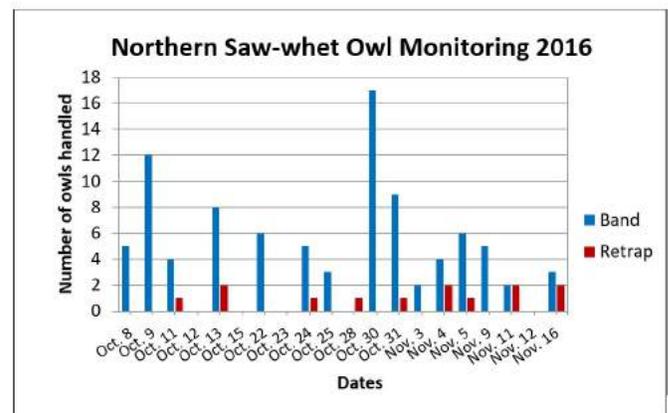


Figure 1.



Photo by Bob Fotheringham.

Of the 104 owls we handled, we banded 90 Northern Saw-whet Owls and 1 Eastern Screech Owl. There were 14 Northern Saw-whet Owl retraps with six foreign (previously banded at another site) and 7 Ruthven 2016 bands. Of the 90 Saw-whet Owls banded, 67% were females, 13% were males, and 20% were unknown. For the age statistics, 64% were hatch year (HY), 16% were second year (SY), 14% were after second year (ASY), and 6% were after hatch year (AHY). The six foreign re-trap owls were initially banded in the United States (Pennsylvania and Michigan), in Ontario (Leamington, Nanticoke, and Dry Lake, Cayuga) and in D'Alembert, Quebec. The owl from Nanticoke was a male and was banded on October 8th, 2012. We handled the same owl last year on October 30th and again on November 11th!



Photo by Bob Fotheringham.

Thanks to Ruthven Park National Historic Site, Rick Ludkin (head bander), and to the many volunteers who helped to make this a new record season. It's an all-volunteer operation for Rick and I, and I'm indebted to Rick for his support with this program and his tireless hours that he contributes. Without him, this new record would not have been possible to achieve. A special thanks to Irene and Bob Fotheringham who were there on many of the busier evenings to help. It would not be the same without Irene's delicious baked goods and hot drinks to feed the many visitors and keep the banding crew going late into the night.



Photo by Bob Fotheringham.

In conclusion, we celebrated a new milestone banding a record number of 90 Northern Saw-whet Owls. There were over 100 visitors during a period of ten evenings and on the evening of October 22nd, there was a new record of over 40 visitors hoping to see these fascinating little raptors. The starlit night at Ruthven is a sight to see and on crisp, clear nights with the stars blazing overhead you may hear the Great Horned Owls hooting, an Eastern Screech winnowing, and coyotes yipping and howling. We look forward to continuing this program in the fall of 2017 and volunteers/visitors are always welcome.

### Call for Grey Rat Snake Box Winterizing Volunteers

Grey Rat Snakes are an endangered species who benefit from humans' help at critical points in the year. There are 8 snake boxes at Ruthven Park that need some winterizing work done to them before they're ready for the snakes to hibernate in them.

If you are interested in receiving some training and lending a hand to Ruthven Park staff in this important endeavour, please email CAO Marilyn Havelka at [marilyn@ruthvenpark.ca](mailto:marilyn@ruthvenpark.ca) to get in touch and a day of training and work with the boxes will be arranged. Thank you in advance!



## UPCOMING EVENTS

### Remembrance Day At Ruthven Park

Saturday, November 11, 2017 @ 1 pm—4 pm

Join us for a special afternoon event focusing on WWI. Mansion tour (regular admission applies) at 1 pm. Talk by Dr. Marty Wood on the Thompson women in the Great War at 2 pm (by donation). Studio Babette Puppet Theatre performance at 3 pm (by donation). Drop in to participate in one, two, or all of the activities, the choice is yours!

**No advance booking required.**



### Christmas at Ruthven Park: Scottish Tea

Sunday, December 10, 2017 @ 2 pm

Ruthven's Scottish Tea for Christmas is back by popular demand for another year. Indulge in tea and locally baked scones, then enjoy a tour of the Thompson Mansion decorated for Christmas. Cost: \$14.00 adults, \$12.00 seniors, \$5.00 children.

**Book tickets in advance.**

### Christmas at Ruthven Park: Tia McGraff Concert

Friday, December 15, 2017 @ 7 pm

Phenomenal country songstress Tia McGraff returns to Ruthven Park for a concert featuring Christmas music. Cost: \$20.00 adults non-members, free for members. Includes a tour of the Thompson Mansion decorated for Christmas.

**Book tickets in advance.**



### Christmas at Ruthven Park: Candlelight Tours

Sunday, December 17, 2017 @ 7 pm

Thursday, December 21, 2017 @ 7 pm

Take in a tour of the Thompson Mansion decorated for Christmas after dark, always a popular treat whether you have taken a tour of the home before or not! Includes holiday refreshments. Cost: \$14.00 adults, \$12.00 seniors, \$5.00 children.

**Book tickets in advance.**