

Readers & Viewers

In *Escarpment Views* [Summer 2011] on page 35 you have the headline “Ontario Election 2011: Vote on Oct. 25!” The provincial election is scheduled for **Oct 6, 2011**. This could be confusing for many people.

Penny Hambly, email

Editor's response: You are correct, Penny, we made a mistake, probably because of having last year's municipal election and then the spring federal election on the brain. Now we're headed for a provincial election on Oct. 6. See page 24 for how the political parties respond to our readers' questions. Everyone, get out and vote on Oct. 6!



I just received *Escarpment Views* [Summer 2011] in my mail box: your article on page 36 is a really nice piece. A novel idea to feature the 'local naturalist club' and thanks for promoting dance flies as well! I'll send a copy on to the photographer Heather Proctor. She will be pleased.

Darryl Gwynne, Georgetown



Incredible issue of *Escarpment Views* this month... Did you ever wonder who put the flags on top on the hill in Erin? Yup, my friend and I try to do this every week before Canada Day....our flags got stolen last year a few weeks after Canada Day...but we have more!!!!!!

Name Withheld by Request, Erin

Editor's Note: And then we received comments on the Turkey Vultures feature by Chris Hamilton:

I cottaged for over 20 years on a small land-locked lake not far from Cape Chin North and learned very quickly to co-exist with bears and rattlesnakes. Turkey Vultures could always be seen on a hot summer's day looking so graceful almost floating in the sky. I loved your magazine!

Carol Sharples, Oshawa

The Summer 2011 issue has arrived. I liked and enjoyed the entire magazine. You do good work! And I thank Ken Haigh for his article. By one of the many coincidences that occur in my life, Chris Hamilton's article on Turkey Vultures is relevant to

Ken's because Turkey Vultures are prolific around the rock Ekareniondi, and I have a question to ask anyone with a knowledge of Turkey Vultures: “When did Turkey Vultures commence breeding on the Niagara Escarpment in the vicinity of the Scenic Caves?” The reason for my question is the several references in the Ojibwa literature to mythic Thunderbirds and a Thunderbird's Nest on the Blue Mountain. I would appreciate Chris Hamilton's views.

Charlie Garrad, North York

Chris Hamilton replies:

I've done some research and I found out that Turkey Vultures were rare in Ontario until the late 19th century. From the book *Birds of Ontario* (1894) I was able to

pull this excerpt: “the Turkey Buzzard has been observed in Ontario only in the south-western portion of the Province.” The bird was first described by “modern man,” or European settlers in Canada in 1758, formally described by Linnaeus in *Systema Naturae* in 1758. Since European settlers arrived in Ontario in the mid 1600s, but were limited to the shorelines of Ontario (Kingston) until after 1660, we would have to look to legends or accounts from our native peoples for any information before that time.

Chris Hamilton, Burlington

Chris shares a letter he received:

In my opinion, Turkey Vultures were not here in the 15th and 16th centuries. The first modern

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records of them were in the Point Pelee area in the early 1900s. These were very rare individual site records. They really only

repopulated Ontario when we started defining our road networks - the last 50 to 80 years. They are originally more of a rainforest spe-

cies that worked their way north after the last ice age, then really going north with road development. Two other birds that might fit your criteria are the immature Bald Eagle which in its first year is entirely black and has longer feathers than the adult so appears larger (nine-foot wingspan for females). The obvious other bird would be the Golden Eagle. It used to populate along the Escarpment in southern Ontario but has since pushed north.

**James Cowan, Director,
Canadian Raptor Conservancy**

Charlie responds:

The archaeological evidence suggests there were no Turkey Vultures at all in the Scenic Caves area of the Niagara Escarpment in the 1600s. Today they are there fairly plentifully. Therefore they first arrived, then settled and increased sometime during the 17th, 18th, 19th and 20th centuries. Can we get more precise than this? If it

was “a rare visitor to the southwest of Ontario” as late as 1894 it would seem to have spread after forest clearance began to warm the land temperatures. At the Caves they ride the thermals created by the sun warming the rock, so the question is when did the rock become exposed. There were fires along the Blue Mountain in pioneer days. It seems to me that the suggested probability is not before the early 1800s. My thought that the sight of the first Turkey Vultures was the substance behind Peter York’s Ojibwa Thunderbird story will have to remain an unproven possibility!

Charlie Garrad

Chris concludes:

It looks like the first early record is 1758 and they were rare, so the Thunderbird legend likely comes from one of the two eagles as James Cowan from the Raptor Conservancy said.

Chris Hamilton