

# The Canadian Field-Naturalist

## The Ottawa Field Naturalists' Club Awards for 2025, presented April 2026

BEV MCBRIDE, CHRIS ARCHIBALD, BETHANY ARMSTRONG, CHRISTINE HANRAHAN, RITA KLOOSTERMAN, KAREN MCLACHLAN HAMILTON, LYNN OVENDEN, and ELEANOR ZURBRIGG

The Ottawa Field Naturalists' Club (OFNC) recognized recipients in seven award categories for 2025. Club members, friends, and family gathered to celebrate them at the Ottawa Field Naturalists' Club's Awards Night on 11 April 2026. Club members and

non-members alike distinguished themselves in topics ranging from dragonfly natural history and local moth biodiversity to native wildflower seed sharing and pollinator gardening to outstanding service in education and nature organization leadership.

### Member of the Year: The OFNC Events Committee

*The Member of the Year award is given in recognition of the member (or members) judged to have contributed the most to the Club in the previous year. Members of the Executive are excluded from consideration.*

The 2025 Member of the Year award goes to the OFNC Events Committee, recognizing a successful year of teamwork. With field trips, hikes, bioblitzes, and speakers, this committee gave OFNC members over 60 events in 2025.

OFNC members count on the Events Committee to deliver, every month, all year long. Events are what draw many members to the Club in the first place and are, along with publications, among the major benefits of membership.

To deliver such a program, a committee must be well-organized, bold and creative, and must know what would appeal to OFNC members. The Events Committee meets regularly to plan. They recruit field trip leaders and speakers. Then they keep in touch to ensure the event goes as planned, introducing them if

they're a speaker, or going along with them on field trips. They also coordinate events publicity.

Events Committee members themselves led or co-led about one third of the 2025 events. For some, they collaborated with other organizations. The Macnamara Field Naturalists' Club, the Friends of Stittsville Wetlands, the Canadian Museum of Nature, the Rideau Valley Conservation Authority, and the Rideau Trail Association are but a few examples.

Events bring OFNC members together, for learning, fun, fresh air, and friendship.

Thank you for delivering a year of great events! Committee members receiving the award are Tamara Bloom, Cindy Burrell, Catherine Crosier, Diane Lepage, Shawna Lucey, Susan O'Connor, and Lynn Ovenden. (Two additional members were also members of the OFNC executive offices in 2025. Their contributions are highly valued, but awards policy excludes them from being recipients.)

*Prepared by Bev McBride*

### Conservation Award, Members: Diane Lepage and Peter Butler

*This award is given in recognition of an outstanding contribution by a member (or group of members) in the cause of natural history conservation in the Ottawa Valley.*

We are pleased to award Diane Lepage and Peter Butler for their comprehensive inventory of moths at the MacSkimming Outdoor Education Centre, which is in Cumberland just east of Ottawa.

From mid-May to mid-October of 2025, on 11 different nights, moths and other insects were attracted to glowing sheets hung from lines across various trails

in the 31-ha (77-acre) forest at MacSkimming Centre. Diane and Peter set up their lights and sheets before dusk and waited for darkness (Christine Hanrahan accompanied Diane on two nights when Peter was away). Over the next 4–7 hours, they photographed the insects that rested on the sheets.

Peter built a spreadsheet to organize, sort, and filter the data arising from their moth identifications. Diane, Peter, and Christine referred to field guides, several websites, and local entomologists to identify the moths in their own photos. Peter's spreadsheet

enabled them to consolidate their conclusions, recognize photos of unidentified taxa, and seek advice. So far, they have identified over 420 moth taxa to species. Several more remain to be identified, including some micromoths and others that require DNA sequencing to distinguish species.

Their observations and identifications have been posted to iNaturalist, in the MacSkimming Centre's Biodiversity Project. This project was originally created by Michael Leveille in 2017 and now has a species count of 1846 across all taxa. Over half of them are insects, and almost half of the insect taxa in the project were only added to the project in 2025 as a result of the moth inventory. The MacSkimming Centre uses its iNaturalist project with attending students,

in particular Grade 6 classes, that come for the Biodiversity program.

In the past few years, Peter ran multiple surveys to sample moths at Petrie Island. Diane has organized mothing nights at many locations in the region for several years, including a moth workshop at the MacSkimming Centre in 2016 for Nature Canada's NatureBlitz event. These surveys add significantly to our awareness of insect diversity in the Ottawa region. The fabulous diversity of moths at the MacSkimming Outdoor Education Centre is an inspiration to consider detailed full-season inventories on other insect groups.

*Prepared by Lynn Ovenden*

### **Conservation Award, Non-member: Ottawa Wildflower Seed Library and its Board**

*This award recognizes an outstanding contribution by a non-member (or group of non-members) in the cause of natural history conservation in the Ottawa Valley, with particular emphasis on activities within the Ottawa District (the area within 50 km of the Peace Tower).*

Native plant gardens play an important role in natural history conservation. They provide support to native wildlife, especially pollinators; help preserve biodiversity; strengthen ecosystem health and climate resilience; and serve as living examples of local natural history, encouraging stewardship of the land.

The Ottawa Wildflower Seed Library (OWSL) is a grassroots organization, created in 2020, that promotes gardening with native plants to provide food and habitat for bees, butterflies, insects, birds, and other wildlife. The organization's vision is to inspire communities to build interconnected, ecologically robust native plant habitats—one plant, one person at a time.

It is both a lending library—providing free access to seeds and plants that people can use to grow in their own gardens—and a receiving library, allowing people to “return” some seeds once the plants have flowered and gone to seed.

In 2024–2025, OWSL provided almost 5000 community projects, schools, and individuals with free native seeds, the majority in the Ottawa area, but also in Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia. Over 100 000 seed packages were donated, from

265 different species. In addition, more than 2500 people attended their workshops, presentations, and outreach events over the same time period.

Indigenous reconciliation is a core value for OWSL, with policies to ensure the ongoing involvement of Indigenous individuals and communities in the organization. In 2025, the OWSL created and delivered 2008 Red Columbine (*Aquilegia canadensis*) seed packets for the Ottawa public libraries to distribute across the city for National Truth and Reconciliation Day.

The organization's website allows individuals to order seeds online, as well as provides significant information and resources on how to prepare, design, and plant a native plant garden.

Many people who have started a native garden report seeing more birds, pollinators, moths, frogs, toads, etc. in their gardens, even in very urban settings. These gardens act as small but powerful conservation spaces that protect nature, support wildlife, and promote sustainable relationships between people and their local environments.

For their ongoing work to provide free seeds, knowledge, and encouragement of responsible gardening, the OFNC is proud to present its Conservation Non-Member Award to the Ottawa Wildflower Seed Library and its Board.

*Prepared by Rita Kloosterman*

### **George McGee Service Award: Diane Lepage**

*The George McGee Service Award recognizes Club members (excluding the board's executive members) for significant contributions to the smooth running of the Club and related activities over several years. The award commemorates George McGee who was a very active leader and educator for the Club for three decades. He was Club president from 1964 to 1966.*

The OFNC is very pleased to recognize Diane Lepage with the George McGee Service Award, for long service to the Club.

Diane needs little introduction. Having joined the OFNC in 1980 she is well-known to many fellow members through her involvement in numerous Club activities. She has contributed to many natural

history projects, led OFNC walks, written articles, and provided photographs for *Trail & Landscape*, participated in various committees, was the OFNC representative to Ontario Nature, and served as Club President for four years.

Perhaps Diane is best known for her decades-long passion for, and work on, moths. She has regularly led mothing outings, both for the OFNC and other organizations, introducing people to these fascinating insects. She has also given talks on moths illustrated by her extraordinary photographs (for example, to the Mississippi Madawaska Land Trust), written informative articles on the subject and, in 2012, received the Anne Hanes Natural History Award for her work on the moths of Larose Forest, work that is ongoing. Diane also participates as a sector leader in the annual Ottawa area Butterfly Count.

Diane is interested in all aspects of natural history and to that end has been a longtime volunteer with the Fletcher Wildlife Garden (FWG). For some years she was manager of the Butterfly Meadow, significantly

increasing the value of the site for butterflies and other insects. Diane also proposed, and oversaw, the rehabilitation of the FWG's Amphibian Pond, and continues working with others on cattail and invasive plant species removal in the pond.

Diane has served on the Events Committee, lending expertise to planning outings and events. She helped find a new venue for the OFNC's Annual Awards Night, as well as a new location for monthly Club meetings, a task that required extensive time commitments.

For some time, Diane served as the OFNC's representative to Ontario Nature's Ontario East Regional Meetings where she shared OFNC issues and perspectives. As OFNC President she was an enthusiastic proponent of the Club, elevating its profile and attracting new members.

For her tireless work for the Club and for promoting the cause of natural history in the Ottawa region, Diane is more than deserving of this award.

*Prepared by Christine Hanrahan*

### **Mary Stuart Education Award: Berit Erickson**

*The Mary Stuart Education Award is for members, non-members, or organizations, in recognition for outstanding achievements in the field of natural history education in the Ottawa Region.*

Berit Erickson is recognized for her work to educate and motivate people to plant pollinator gardens.

Berit's story begins in 2017 with a newly-empty front yard after her tree was blown down in a storm. After reading newer gardening books about habitat loss and its effect on birds, bees, and other wildlife, she saw an opportunity to compensate for habitat loss by planting native plants in her front yard. This started her on a journey to help other urban dwellers to provide pollinators and other wildlife with chemical-free gardens using native plants. She extended the garden to her full back yard and added a stream, which has become a sanctuary for many species of birds. Her demonstration garden quickly became a neighbourhood attraction, and she started talking to and educating passers-by about pollinator gardens. She also created educational brochures and placed them in the garden for times when she was not there—hundreds have been taken so far!

Berit expanded her educational work by devel-

oping a website that covers topics such as garden design, assessing light and soil conditions, planting for the different seasons, sourcing native seeds and seedlings, and improving habitat for bees, butterflies, and other pollinators. She has given many talks at pollinator gatherings, including at FWG and OFNC, and has even brought the message to the younger generation by helping to create a butterfly garden at her son's school. Berit has been a regular volunteer at the Pinhey Sand Dunes, guiding visiting groups in the planting and pulling work that maintains the dune habitat. Her extensive knowledge and skill as an educator have been recognized by the Canadian Wildlife Federation which made a video of Berit describing how to create a pollinator garden. Her educational efforts have also been recognized by local newspapers (*Kitchissippi Times*), news outlets (CBC), and gardening newsletters (*The Edible Gardener*). Berit is always teaching!

For her enthusiastic and persistent work educating people about pollinator gardens, the OFNC is very proud to present the Mary Stuart Education Award to Berit Erickson.

*Prepared by Chris Archibald*

### **Anne Hanes Natural History Award: Chris Traynor and Gillian Mastromatteo**

*The Anne Hanes Natural History Award recognizes a member or members who, through independent study or investigation, have made a worthwhile contribution to our knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of the natural history of the Ottawa Valley. The award is designed to recognize work that is done by*

*amateur naturalists.*

With the intent of introducing others to the fascinating world of dragonflies and damselflies, Chris Traynor began his mission to produce a series of "Species Profiles" for *Trail & Landscape*. He wanted to highlight dragonflies and damselflies (odonates)

found in the Ottawa Field Naturalists' Club's study area regardless of whether they were commonly found or extremely rare.

It began in late 2019 with *Stylurus scudderi*, also known as Zebra Clubtail. Chris chose this species partly because of its striking colour pattern and distinctive clubbed tail, and partly for the thrill of the hunt. After all, it took four years after his first sighting for him to successfully find and document it in our region.

The format of each profile has been consistent pretty much from the start. With his stated aim of "not sounding like a field guide", he begins with personal observations with respect to its habitat preference, hunting style as well as other interesting behaviours. He then continues by describing the important morphological characters used for identification, listing similar looking species and how to differentiate them, and describing where and when it may be found. The images are key in each profile. They not only provide a microscopic view of each odonate, but the accompanying arrows indicating what and where to look on the insect are indispensable.

### Honorary Member: Michael Rutz

*Honorary membership is conferred in recognition of outstanding contributions to Canadian natural history or to the successful operation of the Club.*

Michael Runtz is a highly respected Canadian nature photographer, naturalist, and natural history author. Growing up in Arnprior, Ontario, he became hooked on birding at age five. Later he worked at Point Pelee National Park and, for 13 years, as an interpretive naturalist at Algonquin Provincial Park. He conducted biological surveys across Ontario on dragonflies and a variety of birds, including Endangered species such as Peregrine Falcon and King Rail. His many talents include howling with Algonquin Park wolves, finding salamanders under rotting logs, catching dragonflies, and luring rutting Moose. He is frequently invited to speak to audiences ranging from radio listeners to children to professional biologists. His presentations feature stunning photography, scientific detail, clarity, and humour.

At Carleton University, Associate Professor Runtz taught ornithology and natural history courses for over 30 years, retiring in 2025. His video-streamed natural history courses were immensely popular and have reached an estimated 100 000 students over the years. Carleton's faculty biography for Michael described him as "a dynamic communicator, equally at home in a TV or radio studio, lecture hall or classroom". Awarded several times for excellence in teaching, we see his enthusiastic style in his 1998 international television series, *Wild by Nature*, still available on YouTube.

Gillian Mastromatteo has been a keen odonate enthusiast for quite some time. She may not have been on the ground floor of this project, but her contributions occurred early on. Her name first appeared in Profile 4 under an exquisite image of a Dragonhunter with a Widow Skimmer prey (2020), and then again in 2022 under a male Hudsonian Whiteface. In 2023 she was a guest author profiling the Beaverpond and Spiny Baskettails (numbers 15 and 16, respectively) and since then, Gillian authored three others.

Thus far, Chris and Gillian have profiled 27 of the approximately 120 species known from the area, with no desire to stop. They have drawn attention to a further 30 or more species that can be easily confused with the ones profiled. The profiles have proven to be an indispensable teaching tool for identifying dragonflies and damselflies in the Ottawa area. Each entry is not only a joy to read but, judging by the positive feedback it has received, is popular with OFNC members. What a legacy to leave for future generations of entomologists, conservationists, and natural history enthusiasts.

*Prepared by Karen McLachlan Hamilton*

Michael has published 14 natural history books on subjects including Moose, beaver, wolves, birds, wildflowers and, most of all, Algonquin Park. His latest book is *Observing Nature by Canoe and Kayak* (2024). All testify to his expert knowledge, passion, and outstanding photography. His award-winning photographs and natural history columns have appeared in many newspapers and magazines.

Michael's numerous awards include an Outstanding Service Award from the Federation of Ontario Naturalists, a Lifetime Achievement Award from Carleton University, and The Distinguished Public Education Award from the Canadian Council of University Biology Chairs. In 2023, he was a finalist for the Canadian Museum of Nature's Nature Inspiration Award.

A member of the OFNC since 1979, Michael received the OFNC's Anne Hanes Natural History Award for 1991 for extensive contributions to better understanding the natural history of the Ottawa Valley and beyond. He received the OFNC Conservation Award for 1997 for efforts to save Gillies Grove in Arnprior.

He co-founded the Macnamara Field Naturalists' Club of Arnprior in 1984 and is still its President, regaling members at every meeting with fascinating commentary on their recent sightings of local wildlife. It is with great pleasure that OFNC awards Michael Runtz Honorary Membership for inspiring a love of nature for untold thousands of people.

*Prepared by Bethany Armstrong and contributors*