



Snails in Harness: the Schueleremic Annual Letter, 2008

24 December 2008

(if you're reading this in hard copy, you'll see that the original format is blue-peppered with remote hyperlinks. For a more in-depth appreciation of our life than the simple text of this letter provides, download the electronic version of it from <http://pinicola.ca/2008letter.pdf> and click on the links).

Everyone,

Last year, our epistolary themes were: "worrying about money, Crayfish, Chickens & Rabbits, support from our friends, Marigold the Dog, vehicles, conservation struggles, incessant communication, Rory Tanner, ...late nights," and the Snail Book (["Identifying Introduced Land Snails and Slugs in Canada, with a guide to native genera"](#)). So, on the grounds that *'Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose,'* we'll classify this year on the same criteria:

worrying about money: The Snail Book contract could not include provision for operational costs for the BMNHC, so the barely-adequate money comes & goes, and the process of keeping track of it consumes a great deal of Aleta's time, since she has no aptitude for figures. In May, long-time friend Lorraine Leader moved into our "Piper's House." She fixed up the house in the summer, gardened in the fall, and has been painting commissioned portraits through November & December. In January she plans to set up as our bookkeeper, which should free up a lot of Aleta's time for painting & writing.

Crayfish: Under the direction and collaboration of a group of crayfish specialists, Aleta designed a [pictorial identification guide to Crayfish in Ontario](#), that was published by the Toronto Zoo. We were "the crayfish experts" on two [Volunteer for Nature](#) trips [this summer](#), and are booked for three trips next summer to monitor salamanders, urban snails, and more Crayfish.

Chickens & Rabbits: The old buck Buster, who joined us in 2001, having been spared what would have been a short career as Python food at Little Ray's Reptile Zoo, passed away after fathering the last of a great many litters of bunnies. In July, the generous resolution of an administrative hiccup at [Burnbrae Farms](#) provided us with 8 friendly pullets, who soon proved to be a cornucopia of eggs. This year's news, for both Rabbits and hens, was a summer so wet that we never had to switch to the "summer mode" of feeding: grass and weeds were lush and growing right up until frost.

support from our friends: Aleta recently wrote to her Mother: *"I am in the lovely position now of having NO friends or relatives (or tenants!) who treat me badly or who are a problem to relate to."* Many of you have provided the logistical support that has made this year's far-flung antics possible, ranging from animal care at home, to accommodation at critical points across southern Ontario. When things slow down enough for us to contemplate this, we're profoundly grateful for all your help. Judy Courteau & Matt Keevil have been the biggest help, labouring effectively in the cause of alien Gastropods, despite receiving direction that was often sporadic or confused.

Vehicles: Once we'd finished paying for the Ford Focus, we sent its multiple ailments back into the great anonymity, and took on a flat little thing called a "Cougar." Fred's inability to recognize this as a sports car, or to be put off by this classification of what to him appeared to be just another "watermelon seed car,"

occasioned much merriment, but it won him over with its capacious cargo capacity (especially with the back seats down) and fuel economy. Over the course of the year, various hoses have burst on the Villager van, and have been promptly replaced by Bo Skowronnek, so our larger field vehicle is still in service.

Marigold the Dog: Through 2008, Marigold has matured and calmed down quite a lot, and has established nonfrantic relationships with several of the neighbours.



conservation struggles: Aleta wrenched her knee in [climbing out of an Oak tree she later portrayed](#), but [the struggle for Manotick](#) has passed into the realm of the OMB, where Fred was too shy to participate as an “expert” witness. In May, before the heavy summer-long rains had begun, a team came from Guelph to collect gravid females from “our” endangered population of *Ligumia nasuta* clams, in order to determine the species' larval host fish – the first conservation action taken on their behalf. Much of our conservation work this year was spent advising an “estate” community which decided to scorn both our findings, and the entire science of limnology, in order to [poison their lakes](#), and then enjoy the (resulting?) toxicity of a bubbling Cyanobacterial bloom.

incessant communication: The old NatureList slowly died of server indifference, and has been replaced by a [Google group of the same name](#), which anyone interested in the natural history of eastern Ontario, or in our antics, will join. The incessance of our communication is shown by the retention, on the present computer alone, of 3790 messages by Fred, and 1071 by Aleta that reached Fred, from 2008. The database stands at >81K records, with >5K added this year. *We'd better get cracking to do something to justify the efforts of future biographers for which we're laying down such a treasure trove of information!*

Rory (& Jennifer) Tanner: In March, Jennie switched from her stressful nannying in Stittsville to caring for wonderful twin infants in Ottawa. Rory completed and defended his master's thesis on the Puritan hermit-vegetarian Roger Crab, stepped across the stage at the National Arts Centre to receive his Master's diploma, and then plunged into a heavy course load as he began his Ph.D. work. They're now resident in [a compact apartment on Carling Avenue](#) (the street around so much of our Ottawa history revolves), not far from Britannia Bay.

late nights: The database contains only 99 post-midnight records for 2008, in contrast to 231 for 2007, and 308 for 2006, which suggests that we're gradually either getting to bed earlier, abandoning auditory monitoring, or else just wearing out.

the Snail Book: The bulk of the burden of this project has been borne by 'real malacologist' [Robert Forsyth](#) who has cobbled together the text, identified what we've collected, and drafted publications. Work here has largely consisted of Judy setting files in order, photographing specimens, & searching greenhouses for slugs, Fred scanning up Wayne Grimm's letters & publications, Matt curating through the wilderness of Wayne's incompletely recorded identifications, Aleta struggling up from under the morass of maternal & administrative duties to try to paint slugs, visits from Robert and [Jeff Nekola](#), field trips to Toronto, [Maniwaki](#), [westernmost Manitoulin Island](#) & [Brooklin](#), and then to [Tobermory](#) & [Long Point](#), with curation for Judy & Matt, and data entry for Fred, while Aleta scrambled to paint each species of slug.

Further news: Corey continues as our emergency tech-support, while retaining his Québec residency in Gatineau. This entails occasionally fleeing to Bishops Mills or to a friend's place when portions of his apartment building have been set on fire.

Last year we pointed out how careless we had been to reach our 50s before finding some way of making a living, and we're now carefully studying how we're going to progress into the great "yikes!" at the end of the Snail Book contract (which is really the last obligation left from the EOBM). The summary of our "transition plan document" is appended to this letter, and we can send the entire, not-entirely-unamusing, document to any who would be interested in advising us or in chuckling over our plight.

You'll be pleased to view, as your seasonal gifts, the usual batch of revisions of documents (reviews & additions for these are always welcomed): Our commonplace book <http://pinicola.ca/kitchen.htm>, water-coloured slugs <http://thenaturejournal.com/aletalog/?cat=11>, and "The Devil's Addendum" <http://pinicola.ca/devildic.pdf>. This year's quatrains, and a few poems, may be sampled at <http://pinicola.ca/2008poems.pdf>.

Best wishes, and love to all,



Bishops Mills Natural History Centre

Frederick W. Schueler <bckcdb at istar.ca> & Aleta Karstad <karstad at pinicola.ca>
RR#2 Bishops Mills, Ontario, Canada K0G 1T0, on the Smiths Falls Limestone Plain 44° 52'N 75° 42'W
(613)258-3107 <http://pinicola.ca>

APPENDIX: When we took responsibility for the Bishops Mills General Store building in 2002, we announced an ambitious programme of research and education, which, if fulfilled, would have made the BMNHC a viable enterprise. Failures to establish partnerships that were expected in 2002, and lack of time to pursue further partnerships or personnel, have driven us into confusion and overwork, which, with the unpaid character of so much of what we do, leaves us unsure of how we're to proceed once the Snail Book is completed.

The 'Transition Plan' document traces our idiosyncratic career, describes decisions we've made which have inhibited our smooth integration into the workaday world, lists the diversity of the collections we hold, the status of our proposed "30 years later" program of visits to sites we've visited in the past, and then lists and discusses the options we could choose, exclusively or combined, for a more stable future. Some of these are potential options, some have been officially proposed for funding in collaboration with partners, some are projects we've already begun, and some are ideas we're considering.

These options include: hosting an Ontario Roadkeeper, Invertebrate Awareness, and/or Ontario Herp Atlas database projects; selling the Store building; a board-governed NGO to promote the work we've been doing; working as nature guides with a scientific agenda for 'Volunteers for Nature;' finding funding for our 'Thirty Years Later' project; assessments of the natural history of homesites; painting & selling a painting each day; promoting & doing Drifted Paintings; recording & publishing our songs; publishing & writing Books; publishing poetry & articles for periodicals; promoting theNatureJournal; finding a Business manager for BMNHC; advocating for ecological NIMBYs; Judy Courteau's idea of moving into Apartment One and working with us & Lorraine Leader's habitation of Pipers House & being our accountant; "finding a job;" or emigration to British Columbia.

The document closes with appendices which give a graphic representation of an early draft of the document, and exemplary accounts of activity of the database & e-mail over the course of single days.