

fred & Aleta's annual letter – 25 Dec 2012 – Bishops Mills, Ontario

For organic beings, there's no news as big as descendents, making the naisance, on 15 May 2012, of **Samuel John Tanner**, followed by his triumphant progression in natural infant hygiene &



“executive control,” the highpoint, and turning point, of our year. His mother sang the Messiah through her labour, leading to the reflection that we'd merely prenatally taken her to a performance of this work, and leading us to anticipate that in coming years we're going to be watching more & more refinements & elaborations of the radical thoughtfulness we imagined we'd employed in her upbringing.

Singing the Messiah was just the start – we did *Sphagnum*-filled diapers, while Jenn & Rory are giving Sam the 3-month mud-hut cognitive advantage of natural infant hygiene, and are teaching him to sign his preferences & plans before he's able to articulate. We're all entranced by watching him refrain from

grabbing the electrical cables which fill his environment, but which he's not supposed to handle, and all agree he's the happiest baby we've known – recently equipt with a tooth – and almost always either smiling or thoughtful.

Here's the first painting of the year, a view of the Long Swamp Fen, painted as Fred chased down invasive aliens on the 1st of January. From <http://aletakarstad.com> you can scroll through this year's 51 posts of paintings, for profuse details of journeys & work which will be barely hinted at here.

Aleta suggested that we edit this annual letter down from the 359 departure and 99 arrival records in the database (6466 total records, 3302 GPS waypoints, something like 2600 e-mails sent by us & retained on Fred's computer). Some classes of departures that give an idea of the year are those to the Spencerville co-op gallery,¹ South Nation Conservation Fish & Wildlife Committee,² the Kemptville Faith and Science group,³ Sunday and Wednesday meetings (60 departures), Mudpuppy Night in Oxford Mills,⁴ doing the streets,⁵ and business (80 records) – these come to 96 pages, which we can send to any who want to reflect on our details, and enjoy numerous nice turns of phrase.

Among organized antics, we (in strictly chronological database order) addressed the *Mississippi Field Naturalists* as a stand-in for a snow-bound presenter, hung paintings in the *Spencerville Gallery* art show, participated in the *EOMF Woodlot Conference, National Invasive Species Forum, Eastern Ontario Species-At-Risk Meeting, Burritts Rapids Renewable Energy Association* AGM,



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- 1) 36 departures - <http://artscenespencerville.blogspot.ca/>
 - 2) 3 departures - <http://nation.on.ca/en/your-fish-and-wildlife/>
 - 3) 10 departures - <http://www.stjameskemptville.com/index.php?page=faith-science>
 - 4) 20 departures - <http://pinicola.ca/mudpup1.htm>
 - 5) 342 records - http://www.torontozoo.com/Adoptapond/pdfs/r&e_Tues6.FSchueller.pdf

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Trivalley Conservation Awards, Ottawa Field Naturalists Soiree, & North Grenville Earth Day Fair. We tarped a pile of scrap lumber for the North Grenville by-law enforcement officer, “did” frogs at the *Elbow Lake Environmental Education Centre* Herp Workshop, prepared an electrocuted Snapping Turtle for the *Canadian Museum of Nature*, were amazed by the *National Wildlife Congress*, presented macro-invertebrates to the *Ontario Nature* AGM, continued to futilely advise *Lakeland Estates*, attended the *OARA* barbeque, launched our new book at the *Russell House Pub*, and pitched our books to the *Osgoode Twp Historical Society & Museum*. We did the *Eco-Kare International* Leeds/Grenville road ecology circuit, the *Otty Lake Bioblitz*, the *Winchester Mystery Snail Snagaroo*, the *New Brunswick Museum's* Caledonia Gorge Bioblitz, and Mary Majka's Marys Point. We were sidelined in an abortive attempt to found an environmental committee for *North Grenville*, and pitched a climate change museum to *Cochrane*. We attended the refounding of the *OFNC Conservation Committee*, and annual meetings of the *Ontario Rivers Alliance, Ottawa Botanical Artists, Ontario Road Ecology Group, & Ottawa Invasive Plants Group*. The *Raisin Region Conservation Authority* recently received our views on Turtle mitigation.

And in a narrative: January & February were mostly spent in painting wintery forest interiors, and such futzing as cat-neutering and worrying about money. **March** exploded with premature warmth, which sent us around the auditory monitoring circuit, and then north to the range limits of Chorus Frogs in Renfrew County, before coming home to help quite-pregnant Jenn & Rory move into Weirs House, which they'd been working on refurbishing. **April** saw us again on the road across the northern limit of the range of Chorus Frogs from the Bruce Peninsula to home, and then doing the range limits in eastern Ontario in day- (= night-) trips from home.

We'd been working since March on the Red Shale Hill, north of Russell, Ontario, and **May**, and early **June**, was devoted to this area, where it's proposed to infuse health-giving landfill leachate into aquifers. As noted above, Samuel was sung into the world in mid-May, with Karstad Great-grandparents and a Great Aunt driving out from British Columbia for the event. By mid-June the Red Shale work had come together in the book *Island of Biodiversity*,⁶ coauthored with Candice Vetter, which was launched at the end of the month, leaving **July** free for ordinary scamperings-about, grandparenting, and observing the onset of the Drought of 2012.

August saw us launched into the drought, sampling skeletal fish, Unionid mussels and roadside invasive Plants to the Caledonia Gorge Bioblitz, where Aleta painted whatever folks dragged in, Fred confirmed the absence, the area under study, of the beasts he specializes in, and we watched Peregrine Falcons motivate shorebirds at Marys Point (and were told that the Bay of Fundy is now so fully occupied by Peregrines that there's no place an orphan of the species could be released without being fatally harassed by resident birds).

We were briefly home to make faces at the grandson, despair at the state of the garden, and sample the predated shells of mussels (where we'd sampled the shells of their parents in the 1999 and 2001 droughts), before heading to northeastern Ontario in early **September**. Here we were sampling our traditional sites for Amphibians & invertebrates, and venturing out, with the help of members of the *Ontario Rivers Alliance*,⁷ to sites where anti-rationally-financed hydroelectric dams have been proposed. Aleta fell in love with painting waterfalls. **October** was an orgy of catching up on paintings & curation, and compiling the paintings & results into a 2013 calendar, until we finally whizzed northwest, under the wings of Superstorm Sandy, to launch the calendar⁸ at the ORA AGM in North Bay, and then promptly whizzed back to an *Ottawa Botanical Artists* meeting.

November was again in the field, southwest to Lake Erie, where we prospected sites where the last filaments of Fowler's Toad habitat are threatened by condominiums, and where streams are threatened by the restoration of useless dams. Then **December**, working at winterizing the houses, attending to those festive duties that didn't constitute double bookings, watching Samuel consume the traditional infant diet of pobs, salsa, Goat cheese, & Squash, and cheering Rory on as he marked his way through endless piles of students' essays and fretted that this

6) <http://karstaddailypaintings.blogspot.ca/2012/07/just-published-island-of-biodiversity.html>

7) <http://ontarioriversalliance.ca/>

8) <http://karstaddailypaintings.blogspot.ca/2012/10/precious-wild-rivers-calendar-for-2013.html>

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was keeping him from his thesis.

Like wandering apostles or homeric bards, we depend on invitations from friends and strangers to do our nomadic work. This year those we're indebted to include *Brenda Boyd, Candice Vetter, Tom & Sharon Guntzel, Jill Everest, Joy Povelofskie, Donald McAlpine, Mary Majka & David Christie, Lynn Dixon, Isabelle Picard & Jean-François Desroches, Trudy & Gerry Veaudry, Rey & Carole Brisson, Hugh Currie, Linda & Dave Heron, Ron Basso, Larry & Rosalyn Becks, Jim & Ginny Rook, Otis & Judy Best, Cheryl & Hans Schonewille, Marie Janicke, Bruce & Beatrice Bowyer, and at home Jennifer & Rory Tanner, the Scotts, Clay Shearer, Corey Wood, Matt Keevil, and Adam Zieleman.*



left to right: Pipers House, Thinks-it's-an-Oak (Sugar Maple), Weirs House, the pollarded Manitoba Maples, and neighbours White Spruce - 25 Dec 2012

We have no clear idea what the coming year will hold – for us it will depend on the results of our trolling about for sponsorship for our nomadic inventory and conservation work, and Rory's progress on his thesis and applications for employment.

In 2012 we've seen the collapse of what was regarded as foundational conservation legislation at both the federal and provincial level, denial of the basic facts of planetary ecology, the breakdown of legislative process, and the widespread blackening of “green” endeavours. Fred recently wrote on facebook *“Conventional commercial society has always been incomprehensible, so it's perhaps not surprising that young non-naturalists, with no alternative world view, and no interest in other species, will periodically blow out as a result of the incomprehensibility of their surroundings. The trick is to make the society less incomprehensible by adequately funding natural history museums, and by seeing humanity as being in service to other species and the ecosystem, rather than anthropocentrically not knowing much about what's going on.”*

...of course there are other things to do: marine reserves,⁹ conservation tillage & other actions to keep nutrients out of unbroken streams,¹⁰ democratic schools,¹¹ ecologically benign roads,¹² and rational discourse at all levels of government, so that we'll be able, in the verse of the old song, to

***“...live here in Bishops Mills,
In the Merricksville quadrangle,
In a land that's shared by man and frog,
Garter Snakes, and Blanding's Turtles –
with joint sovereignty acknowledged.”***

all the best to all for 2013,



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9) see Callum Robert's book *Ocean of Life* - <http://www.cbc.ca/books/2012/11/fishing-less-to-get-more-dr-callum-roberts-on-the-ocean-of-life.html>

10) <http://pinicola.ca/nutrffws.pdf> - Schueler, Frederick W. 1989. *Feeding from the clouds: Net ombrotrophy as a measure of the health of landscapes*. *Trail & Landscape* 23(3):122-125.

11) <http://www.sudval.org/> - “through being responsible for themselves and for the school's operation, [students] gain the internal resources needed to lead effective lives.”

12) see Kari Gunson's Eco-Kare - <http://www.eco-kare.com/> - “specializes in translating road ecology science into practical road mitigation solutions.”