Otter Ponds Demonstration Forest

Field observation report | Pooja Vijayaraj

Site details

Item	Detail
Date	Sunday, October 25, 2026
Location	Otter Ponds Demonstration Forest, Mooseland, Nova Scotia
Weather	Sunny, 17 °C, very pleasant
Participants	20 (11 were HFN members and 9 were YNC participants)
Hike leaders	Karen McKendry (Halifax Field Naturalists, HFN / Young Naturalists Club, YNC) and Dan Hutt (Nova Scotia Woodlot Owners and Operators Association, NSWOOA, representative)
Route	Visitor shelter, treed bog and boardwalk, German Lake Hill Trail

Site background

Otter Ponds Demonstration Forest (OPDF) is Crown land within the native Acadian/Wabanaki Forest. The demonstration forest is a collaborative venture organized by the Nova Scotia Woodlot Owners and Operators Association (NSWOOA), which began about 15 years ago. It is managed as a working forest to demonstrate sustainable forestry, support research and welcome visitors. The hike leaders estimated its area at approximately 600 ha.

Harvesting: The leaders described selection harvesting, in which mature trees are selected and removed individually using the smallest practical equipment. They noted that clear-cutting is not practiced at Otter Ponds.

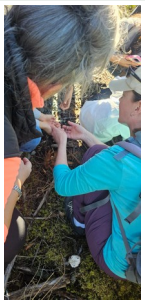
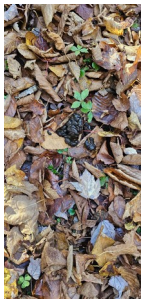
Hurricane damage: Post-tropical storms Dorian and Fiona flattened much of the trail network and destroyed the original visitor shelter. The flattened stands we crossed were areas of storm blowdown, not harvested areas. Fallen trees are being salvaged. Volunteers built the replacement shelter using wood from the tree that destroyed the original.

What we saw	Photo
Storm blowdown along the trail, with surviving spruce beyond.	
An uprooted tree beside the trail.	
The rebuilt visitor shelter, built by volunteers with wood salvaged from the fallen tree.	

Observations

Wildlife

Few birds were observed: one Canada Jay, one Ruffed Grouse and two American Crows. The leaders noted that most migratory birds had departed by late October.

Observation	Photo
A Redbelly snake, briefly handled by members of the group.	
Several scat samples, including one identified as white-tailed deer.	

Fungi, lichen and plants

A wide variety of mushrooms was present. Moss carpeted the forest floor, and tamarack trees were turning golden along the edge of the bog.

Slash: Karen explained that tree branches left on the ground after harvesting (slash) do two things: (1) they return nutrients to the soil, enriching it, and (2) they cushion the effect of heavy harvesters travelling over the soil.

Observation	Photo
Witch's butter (orange jelly fungus) on a cut stump, among moss and ferns.	
Turkey tail (likely *Trametes versicolor*) in dense tiers on a fallen birch log.	
Lungwort lichen growing on a tree trunk.	
Ferns growing on the forest floor beside a fallen birch log.	
German Lake Hill Trail (700 m, east entrance), explored by a few participants: thick beech and maple leaf litter and a brook alongside. This is where the white-tailed deer scat was found.	

Treed bog

The boardwalk crosses a treed bog that was designated a Treasured Wetland of Nova Scotia in 2023. The leaders described it as a textbook example of this wetland type and noted that it is one of five bogs on the property. The bog likely began as a pond after the last ice age and has gradually been filling with peat. Its soil is highly acidic and low in minerals, which limits plant growth. The bog was dry during our visit, although beaver activity had flooded part of the area in recent years. Biologists from Ducks Unlimited had previously collected soil and water samples for study and research. On the boardwalk we also found unidentified carnivore scat, most likely fox judging by its size and content.

Observation	Photo
Treasured Wetlands sign: Otter Ponds was designated in 2023.	
The boardwalk crossing the treed bog.	
Open water at the edge of the bog.	

Activities

Activity	Photos
Bat boxes. Volunteers Bernie McKenna, Dan Hutt and Yusuf Malik (a YNC parent) mounted two bat boxes on the posts of the open-sided visitor shelter. OPDF will monitor and maintain the bat boxes. If bats take them up, they may be used in future years.	 

Echolocation demonstration: One participant held a large steel bowl while another approached, making vocal sounds. The sound changed with distance and position. The demonstration illustrated how bats use reflected sound to navigate and locate prey, even in complete darkness.

Safety notes and conclusion

- Ticks occur even in late October; the leaders advised tucking pants into socks, using repellent and doing tick checks.
- Hunting is permitted on this Crown land, and a muzzleloader season was open. The leaders recommended wearing bright orange.
- Trails are not always marked, so the group stayed together.

The walk offered a close look at a forest recovering from the effects of two hurricanes, alongside its approach to selection harvesting. The treed bog was a particular highlight, while bird activity was relatively quiet for late October.

Thank you to Karen McKendry of the Halifax Field Naturalists/Young Naturalists Club and Dan Hutt, NSWOOA representative, for leading the walk and sharing clear, accessible information about the demonstration forest. Thanks also to Christie Verstraten of the NSWOOA for helping Karen set up this event.