



The Peninsula Naturalist

Volume 239

Newsletter of the Peninsula Field Naturalists Club

May-June 2015

President's Observations

It does not seem that long ago that I was leading PFN members on snow-covered trails during the Maple Syrup Walk through Short Hills Provincial Park in March. Counting migrating raptors in Grimsby will soon conclude for another year and leaves at the Irish Grove Woodlot should be out, making tree identification much easier for me. Unfortunately, I could not attend the Spring birding trips in mid-May but I heard that many warblers and other migrants were spotted in Malcolmson Eco-Park. On the Long Point Provincial Park trip, the group enjoyed viewing the reported White-faced Ibis, a species I have observed only once.

I plan on attending the PFN excursion to Rock Point Provincial Park to work on adding shorebirds to my year list. Previously, this outing was the last before the summer, but we have been working hard to add more trips for our members to attend and I hope to see you at the Enjoying Nature in the City outing on June 18. It will involve an evening walk looking for wildlife along Martindale Pond followed by everyone's favourite treat. Yes, ice cream!

For the Fall, look for the return of the annual excursions to Port Weller East and Mud Lake Conservation Area, as well as a new walk planned at the Glenridge Naturalization site. If you have any ideas for Fall walks, please let me know and we'll work it into the schedule. We have a great group of people and they make every single outing a pleasure to attend.

By Bob

Upcoming: Two events early in June may interest some of our PFN members; the details follow:

Locally: "**Enjoying Nature in the City**" - June 18, 7:00 pm

Join us as we walk through Jaycee Park looking for resident birds. In the past we have located Orchard Oriole, Great Crested Flycatcher and Brown Thrasher, among others in this park in June. We will cross to Rennie Park using the pedestrian bridge while observing the Cliff Swallows and Barn Swallows nesting underneath. Don't forget to bring some money so we can stop for ice cream in Port Dalhousie.

Meet at the Jaycee Park Parking lot at 7:00 pm, 543 Ontario Street (beside Robertsons Rentals), St. Catharines. Contact: Jean Hampson 905 688 1260; bob.jean@sympatico.ca

We are invited to the **Vinemount Meadows Sanctuary Opening Celebration**, on Thursday, June 11, 4:00 pm. Hamilton Naturalists Club and Waterford Sand and Gravel are celebrating a new partnership to protect 65 acres of conservation lands through a unique lease agreement. This special event will explain the partnership, will talk about rare birds in the area, and will offer a tour of an active quarry.

Directions: Meet at 10th Road East, Stoney Creek, and park on the east side of the road and on the south side of the railway tracks.

More Information?? Contact Jen Baker at land@hamiltonnature.org or 905-524-3339.

"Exploring in the 21st Century"

This phrase was the topic for the presentation by Adam Shoalts on the February 2015 PFN meeting. As many of the members knew from past presentations, Adam has had a penchant for exploring, preferably alone, in uncharted places of this country. He is also a Fellow of the Royal Geological Society and is working on his Ph.D at McMaster University.

For his latest foray, which he called 'Nameless Arctic River Expedition 2014', he traveled with a friend, Travis Hill, in August and September 2014. The location was in the area of Cambridge Bay on Victoria Island, north of the Northwest Passage, and specifically involved an unnamed river which flows north toward the Arctic.

As Adam explained about his exploring, when canoeing on unknown extreme rivers a person can find waterfalls and hidden rocks. Consequently, he said that he takes lots of duck-tape for patching. He and Travis took a 16-ft. canoe, and supplies for two months, much of it from Mountain Equipment Coop and Outdoors Oriented - also an American Explorers Club flag. They flew in to a place called Nanook River on Victoria Island, and began their trip ('Nanook' means 'polar bear' in Inuit).

Adam mentioned that he has seen bears (grizzlies, blacks, polars) plus caribou, foxes, arctic lemmings, and many muskox - the latter being not aggressive and easy to get fairly close to. The arctic wolves were particularly of concern because of their size, which can be over 175 pounds, and the fact that they can take down a muskox. He also mentioned that on overland trips he and Travis would find many skeletons of muskox. They found that they could gather muskox fur and pack it into their clothing, which made excellent insulation.

They found that the 'nameless' river was rather shallow and required some portages. When portaging, they might make three trips, each of 4 km, and the last being their canoe, which was too heavy to carry and was usually dragged. Generally the water was crystal-clear, and occasional fast rapids would require checking out the river by land before canoeing down it. Along the way, they found some places where there were old native campsites which they considered as perhaps being 1000 years old. These were sometimes distinguished by the rocks which had been arranged as 'tent rings'.

They succeeded in reaching the sea coast and found ice on the Arctic Ocean, so had to go back from the nameless river to Nanook River to be flown out by plane. As a souvenir of their trip, they have a photo of themselves with the American Explorers Club flag and the Six-Nations Flag flying at a campsite. Adam mentioned that on one occasion they had spent 36 hours in a tent during a severe snowstorm, but he and Travis "still are good friends". That might be partly because of having a tasty arctic char for food. *By Editor*

Malcolmson Eco-Park Birding

Tuesday, May 12, was a good birding day at Malcolmson Eco-Park (formerly Malcolmson Park), as we saw many different bird species. These included: Baltimore Oriole, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, House Wren, Carolina Wren, Cardinal, Catbird, Downy Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Flicker, Chickadee, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Robins, and Mallard Ducks on the pond.

Not all of us saw all of the following warbler species, but these were the ones that were spotted: Tennessee Warbler, Northern Parula, Nashville, Yellow Warbler, Yellow-rumped, Chestnut-sided, Magnolia, Black-throated Blue, Black-throated Green, Blackburnian, Palm Warbler, Black-and-white Warbler, and American Redstart. All of us were very pleased with the number of birds that we saw. *By Barb West*

Maple Syrup Walk

On Saturday, March 14, the Peninsula Field Naturalists met at the Roland Road entrance to Short Hills Provincial Park for the annual Maple Syrup Walk. Thirteen members from the Club hiked the snow-covered trails to Swayze Falls looking for birds and identifying trees.

Even though we searched twice in the pines on the Palaeozoic Path Trail, the Golden-crowned Kinglets I promised proved elusive. Bird species observed included American Crow, Blue Jay, Downy Woodpecker, White-breasted Nuthatch, and Cooper's Hawk. Swayze Falls was frozen and provided the opportunity to take many photographs. A pancake lunch at White Meadows Farm was enjoyed by all after the hike through the Provincial Park.



(Thanks to photographer Margaret Pickles and to Pres. Bob Highcock for leading the walk!)

Fall 2015 PFN Meetings

September: Speaker: Lev Frid - Topic - A Naturalist's Perspective

October: Speaker: Paul Kelly - Topic - Honey Bees - what's causing the decline and how it affects you

November: Speaker: Paul O'Hara - Topic - Native Plant Gardening in the Golden Horseshoe

"Flowers For Feathered Friends"

By Editor

That was the title that Sean James, our March speaker, gave to his talk - with the sub-title "Cover for Critters". Along with his sense of humour, Sean is a very knowledgeable horticulturist, being a 1991 graduate from the Niagara Parks School of Horticulture, and a Master Gardener. He chairs the Environmental Stewardship Committee for Landscape Ontario, owns Fern Ridge Landscaping and Eco-Consulting, and writes a gardening column "View of Sustainability" in the Niagara Escarpment News magazine. His talk to the PFN dwelt on how our gardening practices and choices of plant species can benefit birds on our properties.

Shelter was his opening topic. He suggests that having 30% of the property to provide cover is necessary for birds to feel safe. Juniper species offer bird-cover and also edible berries, and other berry-providers include Viburnum, Serviceberry, Chokeberry, Witch-hazel, Elderberry, and Grey Dogwood. Sean mentioned that Black Chokeberry is also a local native species in the Carolinian zone. He noted that the general term 'nativar' refers to many native plants which have been developed into commercial cultivars. He suggests that generally native species or 'nativars' are best to plant, and stated that the USDA have maps that show what species of plants are "native" in an area. Sean suggested avoiding planting invasive species such as Bittersweet, Porcelainberry, and Buckthorn, which is a host for the nuisance Asian Ladybird Beetle.

Sean advised having as many native species as possible, because birds will take care of most 'bug' species on all kinds of plants. Canada Columbine, Anise-root and Hyssop are all good for birds. As examples of plants that attract insects which will be bird-feed, he suggested Peach-leaf Willow, which has beetles which Sean has seen being eaten by seven bird species. He mentioned that Oaks are hosts to over 500 species of insects, which baby birds eat as a protein source. His observation has been that tree species that don't support many insects are also not frequented by many birds. Referring to bird nesting sites, Sean suggested that any site will do as long as a plant or plants are there. Trees with snags or holes provide nesting spots and promote bird diversity. He mentioned a dwarf Elm as having provided a House Wren nesting site, and that Wrens and Chickadees have used his bat-house for nesting.

In summarizing, Sean indicated three essentials for supporting birds in the average garden situation: 1. Cover, shelter, and nesting sites; 2. Berries and Seeds (food); 3. Plants that attract insects as food for birds. An after-thought was that protecting wetlands ensures a good bird population nearby, and is great for plant diversity.

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Birding at Long Point Provincial Park

By Barb West

On May 16, as soon as the group got to Long Point, we went to an area where a White-faced Ibis had been spotted the day before. Sure enough, there were two of them on a pond. Since it was a life bird for all of us, we were delighted to have seen them. We also saw: Scarlet Tanager, Least Flycatcher, Lincoln Sparrow, Philadelphia Vireo, Phoebe, White-crowned Sparrow, Catbird, Baltimore Oriole, Killdeer, Barn Swallow, Wild Turkey, Warbling Vireo, Great-crested Flycatcher, House Finch, Marsh Wren, Blue Heron, Tree Swallow, Sandhill Crane, Redheaded Duck, Bufflehead, Bald Eagle, and Semi-palmated Plover.

The warblers that we saw were: Blackburnian, Nashville, Chestnut-sided, Baybreasted, Magnolia, Yellow, Yellow-rumped, Common Yellowthroat, Black-throated Blue, and Black and White. It was well worth the effort of getting up early in order to have seen so many birds. (*Eds. note:* The start-off time from Fonthill was 7:30 a.m. and the group had been warned to have breakfast before departure!)

Ramblings:

(inspired by a reference from D. Woodard, and an editorial in the ‘St. Catharines Standard’).

Question: What connection does the University of Colorado have with Lake Erie?

Answer: They both remind us that we can’t continue ruining our food and water sources without producing bad results.

First, the ‘Standard’ item: In 2011, the International Joint Commission (which studies things that will affect both Canada and the United States) reported that a giant algae bloom of about 5000 km² formed in Lake Erie. That algae covered an area nearly as big as PEI. It clogged harbours, fouled beaches, and used up enough oxygen from the water that even zebra-mussels were dying. The algal bloom was partly the result of 12 million people’s sewage going into the lake, partly from farm and industrial run-off, and partly because Lake Erie is a shallow warm-water lake that is a perfect bassinet for algae.

Second, D. Woodard’s reference: Scientists at the University of Colorado have discovered that crop farming on the Prairies has drastically altered the microbiology of the soil. In rare pockets of untilled soil in places like cemeteries and on reservations, ancient tall grasses are growing profusely. Conversely, in farmed land the soil microbia that normally would hold the ecosystem together have collapsed, resulting in erosion of soil fertility. Until now, the erosion of the soil fertility has been masked by fertilizers, which gave a false sense of security.

This result is similar to what scientists believe caused the erosion of soil fertility in places like Madagascar, the Tigris and Euphrates valleys, Iceland, and Easter Island. Where grasslands or tree-covered lands are disturbed and where forests are clear-cut, the water flows are disturbed, and soil nutrients are eroded. Usually the people continue over-cultivating and not preventing soil erosion. A UN Convention to Combat Desertification has projected that world food demand will increase by 50% by 2030, requiring up to 170-220 million hectares of fresh land – but the UN also expects land degradation to cut food output by 12% over the next 25 years. Clearly a non-sustainable situation!

What should be done? There is an estimate that it takes 4-8 kg of grain to produce 1 kg of meat – so feeding livestock is a major consumer of cereal-grains. Those same cereals could directly feed humans instead. But folks in emerging nations, especially in Asia, are developing a greater demand for animal protein. Should we prevent them from doing so? Should we set a global example, by reducing our own meat demands and consuming more grains instead?

Large areas of land in Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, Sudan, Congo, and Mozambique are being bought up by foreign investors, who clear-cut the rain-forests and make short-term profits by ‘farming’ these lands until they become infertile. A global ban on this type of ‘pseudo-agriculture’ is needed, but who will stop the ‘developers’? A global man-made infertile land crisis is developing – what to do next?

To quote an old saying: “In **Nature** there are neither Rewards nor Punishments – there are **Consequences**.”

Just musing..... Cassandra



On Saturday, April 25, a number of PFN members carpoled to 38 Hunter Road, Grimsby, to tour the threatened Carolinian Irish Grove woodlot, which has been in the Irish family for over 100 years, and is an old-growth forest with trees which may be over 200 years old, including some rare Red Hickory (also called Pignut Hickory). This property was explained to the PFN by Bruce Mackenzie on September 22, 2014. The Region of Niagara's Official Plan recognizes this woodlot as an Environmental Conservation Area (Significant Woodland).
(Photo courtesy of Rick Young)



The Peninsula Field Naturalists Club

A non-profit organization started in 1954 with the objectives to preserve wildlife and protect its habitat, to promote public interest in and a knowledge of the natural history of the area, and to promote, encourage and cooperate with organizations and individuals having similar interests and objectives. Affiliated with Ontario Nature and Nature Canada .

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The Editor welcomes written articles or artwork on any natural history topic. Please submit typed reports on paper or by email to: **jmpotter068@gmail.com** Colour photos (jpg) accompanying articles are welcome. All pieces of artwork will be accepted. New ideas and constructive criticism are welcome. Please send submissions by email to e-address above, or by snail-mail to the Club's postal address.

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Deadlines for submissions 2015:
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