



# The Peninsula Naturalist

Volume 244

Newsletter of the Peninsula Field Naturalists Club

February 2017

## PRESIDENT'S COMMENTS

On January 11, 2017, the Province Of Ontario released its final report on the Greenbelt Review and it was the decision we all wanted to see. The Greenbelt boundaries in Niagara will stay the same.

This was great news for the Save The Woodlot campaign. All of the land surrounding The Irish Grove Woodlot would remain in the Greenbelt. The extension of Livingstone Avenue cannot take place and the magnificent oaks and pines will continue to stand without the imminent threat of development.

It is encouraging to see that protecting the natural environment and farmland was favoured over urban sprawl. The Save The Woodlot group did a fantastic job in educating the public of the significance of the 26 acre woodland. To our members that sent a post card or letter to the Province during the Greenbelt Review, Thanks very much. Best regards, Bob.

## MUD LAKE CONSERVATION AREA OUTING, 2016

On Sunday, October 23, Jean Hampson and Bob Highcock led the outing at Mud Lake Conservation Area. Members of the PFN were treated to a hike along the Blue Heron Trail, which is a 3 km loop around the perimeter of Mud Lake.

Sunny skies and warm fall weather made the walk all the more enjoyable, and the variety of birds did not disappoint. Woodpeckers, sparrows and a few other notables were observed at numerous stops during the outing. A highlight was a female Purple Finch perched on the top of a tree in the north end of the conservation area. A total of 19 species were seen.

The following is the complete list:

Mallard, Mourning Dove, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Blue Jay, Black-capped Chickadee, White-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, Golden-crowned Kinglet, American Robin, Cedar Waxwing, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Dark-eyed Junco, White-crowned Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Song Sparrow, Red-winged Blackbird and Purple Finch.

## A NEW CHRISTMAS BIRD- COUNTING GROUP

The Grimsby Peach Tree CBC held its second count on January 2, 2017. Last year (2016) 16 counters counted 73 species and 35239 birds. We will be curious about their tally for this year's PT CBC ....

## **CENTENNIAL GARDENS OUTING, SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 6, 2016**

**In the past, ships moved through the locks of the First and Second Welland Canals as they travelled south to Thorold. Years later, the section below Westchester Crescent became a municipal park to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Canada's Confederation. Recently, the City of St. Catharines has taken steps to improve the park with better maintenance and even adding an 18-hole disc golf course. With all these improvements, it seemed the perfect time for a club outing to this park.**

**The group walked along the trail loop through the park on Sunday, November 6, 2016. In addition to viewing the flora and fauna, we took our time to look at the totem pole that was a gift to the city, the remains of the stone locks and the columns that were most likely from the former St. Catharines Public Library. Some of the PFN members were quite interested in the plants growing in the community garden at the south end of the park. A repeat visit will be planned.**

**A Merlin flyby was a highlight for our group. Other birds observed during the 2 km hike included Downy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Blue Jay, American Crow, Black-capped Chickadee, White-breasted Nuthatch, Golden-crowned Kinglet, American Robin, Dark-eyed Junco, House Finch, and American Goldfinch.**

## **IN SEARCH OF THE PURPLE SANDPIPER, SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 13, 2016**

**John Black led the 5th annual walk along the east pier in Port Weller on Sunday, November 8, 2016. It was a beautiful sunny day and 18 participants had hopes of viewing a Purple Sandpiper on the rocks of the east spit. It was promising. One was photographed at this birding hotspot by a member of our group two days prior.**

**We did not find many birds while walking along the canal path. Once at the lake, the birds appeared. Waterfowl observed along the shoreline and in the bay included Canada Goose, Gadwall, Mallard, Long-tailed Duck, Bufflehead, Red-breasted Merganser. Horned Grebe and Common Loon were seen as well.**

**Snow Buntings flew over the Welland Canal as we walked toward the beacon. For those in our group that had their backs turned and missed the small flock, a few more of the species that are a regular winter visitor to the Niagara Region appeared on the gravel path and provided great looks for all and some photo opportunities for those with cameras.**

**We checked every rock along the spit for the shorebird the outing is named after, but the Purple Sandpiper seen approximately 48 hours earlier had moved on. No sighting this year. Our group continued the outing on the west pier where we found a pair of Bald Eagles, a large raptor that many never grow tired of observing. It is great to see this species return to Niagara. With a bit of luck, Purple Sandpipers will pass through Niagara during the November 2017 outing.**

## **The Importance of Composting**

**If you are one of the folks in Niagara who have a Green Bin at your home, and know what it is for, Good For You! At the PFN's November 2016 monthly meeting, we were enlightened about Waste Management, by a presentation by Rachel MacMeekin and Samantha Shulman, both Waste Management Interns working with the Niagara Region Waste Management Service. Their jobs as Interns focus on education and outreach to the community, for which they are well trained. Samantha has a Masters degree in environmental sustainability from the University of Ottawa, and Rachel has an educational background in environmental studies.**

Their talk to the PFN was primarily about the Niagara Region's Green Bin program, and the benefits of composting. Partly the process of composting is useful for converting the appropriate organic materials into compost which is useful for mulching and plant growth. Partly also, composting removes a lot of organic material from cluttering the garbage sites unnecessarily. I was surprised that grass clippings from lawns are not acceptable to be in the Green Bin, but the Interns stated that grass clippings are too bulky and do not decompose well in the Green system. The Interns came with a number of information booklets and pamphlets which explained all the benefits of the composting program, and with contact information such as their phone line 905-356-4141 or niagararegion.ca/waste for those who might wish to find more information by e-mail.

### **The Rise and Fall of Ontario's SSSSnakes: By Anne Yagi**

Our January speaker, Anne Yagi, is a biologist holding a BSc from Guelph in 1984 who has had a career with the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry. Recently retired from the MNRF, she is currently working on a MSc at Brock University, and also is President of Trees Inc. She acknowledges having a longtime interest in Canadian snakes, her topic for this meeting

To begin, Anne stated that there are approximately 3500 species of snakes in the world, about 27 species in Canada, and about 15 species in Ontario. One species called the Kirtland Snake is considered to be extirpated. Generally snakes can be found in forests, mountain areas, and grasslands, and may either hibernate in winter or remain active, depending on the temperature where they live. Over time, some species have moved southward, where they find warmer sites.

Venomous snakes are not common in Ontario, although the Massasauga Rattlesnake does exist in some places. A few live in the bog in the Port Colborne area, and others are still in the Lake Huron area where they live around rocky areas.

Anne noted that many animal species have evolved and various species developed at different geological times, and this is also true with snakes. As example, she suggested that Garter-snakes were around in Ontario around 9000 years ago in open grasslands and then some species evolved to live in forests and other species like Fox-snakes and Racers preferred, and thus developed, in grasslands. The Timber Rattlesnakes obviously would be examples of snakes preferring woodlands. Currently there are 5 sub-species of Garter-snakes, which indicates their preferred living-places.

In her talk, Anne demonstrated interesting aspects of various snake species, as follows: the Red-bellied Snake gives birth to live young, while most snakes lay eggs; the Eastern Ribbon Snake can be identified by a light-coloured ring around the eyes; the Northern Watersnake lives mainly in the water, but hibernates on land; the Milk-Snake has markings vaguely like a Rattlesnake and will act like a Rattlesnake for defense, so often people see it and kill it; the Gray Ratsnake can be 2.5 metres long and the Eastern Fox-Snake can be up to 1.7 metres long; the Queen Snake, a species with a striped underbelly, eats crayfish; the Eastern Hog-nosed Snake eats toads; and the Timber Rattlesnake is mainly in the forests in New York State.

Although the snake species in Ontario have had their preference of their habitats, they are being seriously affected by the development of land by human activities. Fragmentation of their preferred habitats is probably their most serious threat. Also, road-kill is a problem. The Government is trying to reduce the losses by doing road surveys, and providing signs to indicate problem sites, to try to reduce the road-kill losses, for example where snakes occupy warm spots on roads.

## St. Catharines Christmas Bird Count, December 18, 2016

By Jean Hampson and Bob Highcock

The Peninsula Field Naturalists held their Christmas Bird Count on Sunday, December 18, 2016. The temperature remained below freezing throughout the day and flurries in the afternoon were encountered by some groups.

Thanks to all the participants who assisted with this year's count. Many thanks to Mary and John Potter for organizing the round-up party and everyone that brought main courses and treats for all to enjoy. You all made our first year as compilers a rewarding experience.

A special thank-you to Marcie Jacklin for acting as St. Catharines Christmas Bird Count compiler for 20 years! That's a lot of data and birds. We wish Marcie well as she takes on the duties as the Niagara Falls Christmas Bird Compiler for the next 20 years.

New high counts were recorded for Canada Goose (5,363), Gadwall (18), Ruddy Duck (2), Bald Eagle (3), Horned Lark (304) and White-crowned Sparrow (81). For only the third SC CBC, a Fox Sparrow was recorded.

For this year's count, we had 40 participants (listed below).

Brian Ahara, Rhonda Armstrong, John Black, Peter BonEnfant, Lorraine Brown, Paul Chapman, Sue Chapman, Barb Charlton, Paula Clark, Noah Cole, Trevor Comfield, Carl Damude, Janet Damude, Maddie Davies, Rob Dobos, Chris Escott, Julie Falsetti, Steve Gillis, Lynn Glover, Peter Graham, Jean Hampson, Carol Horvat, Bob Highcock, Marcie Jacklin, Nabil Khairallah, Nabila Khairallah, Kara Kristjanson, Bob Manson, Dan Riley, Judy Robins, Kayo Roy, Marlene Sanders, Joyce Sankey, Karin Schneider, Tim Seburn, Dave Smith, Nancy Smith, John Stevens, Josh Vandermeulen, Rick Young.



Total individuals 21807

Total species 80

Canada Goose	5363	Mourning Dove	1053
Mute Swan	5	Eastern Screech-owl	7
Gadwall	18	Great Horned Owl	1
Brown-headed Gull	592	Red-bellied Woodpecker	28
American Wigeon	1	Downy Woodpecker	76
American Black Duck	23	Hairy Woodpecker	10
Mallard	895	Northern Flicker	9
Ruddy Duck	2	American Kestrel	14
Wood Duck	1	Merlin	1
Redhead	30	Winter Wren	3
Ring-necked Duck	27	Blue Jay	190
Lesser Scaup	6	American Crow	98
Greater Scaup	2	Snow Bunting	786
Common Goldeneye	60	Yellow-rumped Warbler	3
Glaucous Gull	1	Fox Sparrow	1
Iceland Gull	1	Horned Lark	304
Surf Scoter	1	American Coot	1
White-winged Scoter	5	Black-capped Chickadee	251
Long-tailed Duck	150	Tufted Titmouse	8
Bufflehead	43	Red-breasted Nuthatch	10
Hooded Merganser	67	White-breasted Nuthatch	44
Common Merganser	76	Brown Creeper	2
Red-breasted Merganser	90	Carolina Wren	8
Ring-necked Pheasant	3	Golden-crowned Kinglet	11
Wild Turkey	55	Eastern Bluebird	63
Common Loon	2	American Robin	634
Red-throated Loon	6	Northern Mockingbird	14
Double-crested Cormorant	110	American Goldfinch	341
Great Blue Heron	6	European Starling	5435
Turkey Vulture	1	Cedar Waxwing	27
Northern Harrier	1	Lapland Longspur	1
Sharp-shinned Hawk	3	American Tree Sparrow	382
Cooper's Hawk	4	Dark-eyed Junco	905
Bald Eagle	3	White-crowned Sparrow	81
Red-tailed Hawk	57	White-throated Sparrow	6
Rough-legged Hawk	3	Song Sparrow	4
Bonaparte's Gull	2	Northern Cardinal	190
Ring-billed Gull	592	Red-winged Blackbird	250
Herring Gull	337	House Sparrow	1415
Great Black-backed Gull	37	Brown-headed Cowbird	42
Gull species	1	House Finch	217
Pied-billed Grebe	1		

## 2017 SPRING OUTINGS

### **Walker's Creek Trail Hot Chocolate Walk**

**Saturday, February 25, 2017 @ 10:00 AM**

**Bring a loonie donation for a cup of hot chocolate.**

**Meet at the Ina Grafton Gage Village parking area near the trail entrance.**

**To reach the parking area, enter Ina Grafton Gage Village at 413 Linwell Road, St. Catharines.**

**Turn left at the first left and turn left one more time. Parking will be at your immediate right.**

**Look for the spots along the fence. Please car pool if possible as parking may be limited.**

**We plan to walk along Walker's Creek Trail to Lake Ontario and return to Walker's Creek Park for hot chocolate and good conversation.**

**Trip Leader: Jean Hampson, 905-688-1260, bob.jean@sympatico.ca**

### **Swayze Falls Hike**

**Saturday, March 11, 10:00 a.m.**

**Meet at the parking lot for Short Hills PP at Roland Rd. Entrance**

**Bob Highcock 905-688-1260**

### **Hawkwatch Open House**

**Good Friday, April 14, All day from 9:00 a.m. to ?**

**Meet PFN and many groups at Beamer Conservation Area on Ridge Road.**

**Beamer is a major migration route; expect to see many species of raptors and other birds.**

**Nature walks, displays and other activities for the whole family.**

**Grounds parking is limited!**

### **Lichens, Mosses and Other Plants of Rockway and Louth C.A.'s**

**Saturday, April 22, 9:30 a.m.**

**Meet Roman Olszewski at the Community building parking lot at the entrance to Rockway C.A. on Eighth Avenue just east of Wessel Drive in Lincoln. After spending some time at Rockway, we may carpool and take the short drive 2km east to Louth C.A. (Staff Avenue) to check it out for lichens and mosses. Bring a hand lens if you have one.**

**Roman Olszewski 935-734-9574 roman.otfa@cogeco.ca**

### **Sandhill Valley (Fonthill Kame) Outing**

**Saturday, May 6, 8:30 a.m.**

**Meet Barb and Marlene at Shoppers Drug Mart Plaza in Fonthill to carpool to the site.**

**Barbara West 905-935-5339 Marlene Sanders 905-414-9233**

### **St. John's C.A. Wildflower Walk**

**Sunday, May 7, 10.00 a.m.**

**Meet at the Conservation Area parking area, 3101 Barron Rd west of Hollow Rd.**

**Jean Hampson & Bob Highcock 905-688-1260**

### **Excursion to Rock Point Provincial Park**

**Saturday, May 13, 8:30 a.m.**

**Meet Rick Young at Shoppers Drug Mart Plaza in Fonthill; carpool, bring lunch.**

**Rock Point PP may have Ruddy Turnstones and Red-headed Woodpeckers.**

**Ticks are a possibility; dress appropriately.**

**Rick Young 905-734-6228 Barb West 905-935-5339**

**Malcolmson Eco-Park Birding**

**Tuesday, May 16, 8:30 a.m.**

**Usually a good site for warblers and other migrants. Meet in Malcolmson Eco-Park parking lot off Lakeshore Rd at Niagara St. Don't forget your binoculars.**

**Barbara West 905-935-5339**

**Grimsby Lagoons (Biggar Lagoons)**

**Saturday, June 10, 9:30 a.m.**

**Birding at the lagoons. Don't forget your binoculars and your scope,**

**Meet Rick Young and Carol Horvat at Vineland/QEW Tim Hortons (Parking available at carpool lot)**

**4th Annual Bert Miller Nature Club Butterfly Festival**

**Sunday, June 11, 11:00 am - 3:00 pm**

**Stevensville Conservation Area**

**2555 Ott Ed, Fort Erie, ON**

**"Enjoying Nature in the City"**

**St. Catharines, Thursday, June 29, 7:00 p.m.**

**Join our walk through Jaycee Park looking for resident birds. We have located Orchard Oriole, Great Crested Flycatcher and Brown Thrasher, among others in this park in past Junes. We will cross to Rennie Park on the pedestrian bridge and see Cliff Swallows and Barn Swallows nesting underneath. Bring some money so we can stop for ice-cream in Port Dalhousie.**

**Meet at Jaycee Park parking lot at 7:00 p.m., 543 Ontario St. (Beside Robertsons Rentals)**

**Jean Hampson 905-688-1260**



**Purple Sandpiper seekers (left); Centennial Gardens (right);**

**Photos by Jean Hampson**

## **CLUB END-OF-SEASON MEETING**

**MONDAY, APRIL 25: Punch 6:00 PM, Dinner 6:30 PM**

### **POTLUCK DINNER AND EX-TREASURES SILENT AUCTION**

**Members with surnames A-L please bring first course;  
surnames M-Z please bring salads or desserts;  
Everyone bring own cutlery, cups, plates  
Also, please bring ex-treasures for the Auction.**

**Set-up helpers please arrive at 5:30 PM**

**(A Photo Exhibit by/for Members may be mounted, depending on members' interest)**



#### **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 .

**P.O. Box 23031, RPO Carlton, St. Catharines, ON. L2R 7P6**

**Website : [peninsulafieldnats.com](http://peninsulafieldnats.com)**

#### **The Peninsula Naturalist Newsletter**

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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](mailto:jmpotter068@gmail.com)** Colour photos (jpg) accompanying articles are welcome. New ideas and constructive criticism are welcome. Please send submissions by email to the above address or mail to the Club's postal address.

**Editor:** John Potter  
**Assistant:** Mary Potter

**Deadlines for submissions 2017:  
February 4; June 7; October 6**