



# The Peninsula Naturalist

Volume 248

Newsletter of the Peninsula Field Naturalists Club

June 2018

## PRESIDENT'S COMMENTS

During a PFN outing on April 21, it was great to see members Marlene Sanders and Carol Horvat collecting trash our group came across while identifying lichens and mosses at Louth Conservation Area. It was the day before Earth Day but members from our nature club don't need an incentive to help clean up the environment. On outings throughout the year, I have seen members picking up refuse. This summer, our club will be cleaning up a spot in St. Catharines. Stay tuned for the date and location.

More recently, the PFN were contacted by Mark Richardson, manager of cemetery services for the city of Niagara Falls. Mark was looking to speak to anyone interested in monitoring and recording the Bank Swallows that have taken up residence at Fairview Cemetery on Stanley Avenue. After discussing the swallows with Mark, I planned a visit to the site that is only minutes away from the downtown.

The Bank Swallows were easy to find for Jean and I. They were the birds flying around the large mound of earth at the cemetery. Bank Swallows are a threatened species in the province of Ontario and to preserve the site, cemetery staff fenced off the area. While surveying the mound, we could see a number of burrows were under construction. A checklist was submitted to eBird Canada and we plan on visiting the site in the near future with hopes of updating the breeding code.

Whether it is preserving a nesting site, collecting trash, or voicing your concerns for a threatened woodlot it is reassuring to know that there are people in Niagara willing to do their part to help preserve and maintain the natural environment in Niagara.

### **Presentations** – by Jean Hampson

We have recently had some requests to give presentations to various groups. On February 6, 2018, I spoke at the St. Catharines Public Library, Centennial branch to the afternoon adult program. The program was well attended by both PFN members and members of the public and featured photographs I have taken on our outings.

Bob and I spoke to the Niagara-on-the-Lake Girl Guides on April 16. They were working on obtaining their bird watching badges so we put together an interesting show of photos of Niagara birds. We have programs suitable for children or adult audiences. Contact the PFN if you would like us to speak to your group.

## **“LAKE ERIE COAST PROJECT” by Albert Garofalo, February 26, 2018**

Living near the shoreline of Lake Erie, and noticing how residents use (or mis-use) that shoreline, Albert Garafalo and other members of the Bert Miller Nature Club are concerned that the shore should be managed properly, for the benefit of the plants, animals, and humans who habit the shore, particularly the sand beaches. In his presentation to the PFN, Albert noted that the Great Lakes enclose more than 16,000 kilometers of shoreline but less than 1% of that is sand dunes - and much of that sand beach and dunes exists in southern Niagara. Because of the shape of Lake Erie, the prevailing winds blow from southwest to northeast, and the resulting wind-wave actions tend to move sand toward and onto the Lake Erie beaches. At the beaches, one of two situation can happen to the moving sand – either it will be moved inland by wind-and-wave erosion – or sand-dunes will be formed by the sand being collected into dunes by various plants such as Beachgrass, Wormwood, Sea rocket, Switchgrass, Seaside spurge and others. Preferably the Beachgrass or other plants should not be disturbed, to allow a sand-dune to act as a wave barrier. However, if the beachgrass is disturbed or trampled, the exposed sand begins to blow away, resulting as a “blowout”. Blowouts can occur if a cottage-owner on a shoreline decides to remove the vegetation so they can have a sand beach. However, with the effect of a “blowout”, erosion can damage the cottage and its surroundings, disturb vegetation, and interfere with wildlife like the Fowler’s Toad and various bird species. Albert presented a photo of a “boardwalk” which has been designed so people can access the beach without trampling the beachgrass, therefore not causing “blowouts”.

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## **“MAURITIUS”, presented by Patrick Moldowan, March 26, 2018**

Patrick Moldowan confessed that as a child he had always loved creepy crawly things. This ultimately led to his being selected by Wildlife Preservation Canada as the annual winner of a research (“New Noah”) scholarship to the island of Mauritius. He received word of this award in February 2015, and by April 2015 he had set foot on the island – “Paradise found, paradise lost, paradise in limbo: biodiversity and conservation on the island” as he put it.

Mauritius is part of the Mascarene Islands, in the Indian Ocean, 850 km off Madagascar. Only 50 by 25 km in size, it is a popular European vacation destination. The island has a long history of colonization, now densely populated (1.2 million people) with present forest representing only 2% of the land cover but nevertheless a centre of biological diversity. Dutch sailing ships were the first to arrive harvesting animals and ebony. They found giant tortoises, over-sized geckoes and a strange flightless pigeon (the Dodo). In quick order these species were rendered extinct. But there are still many remaining endemic species. A big factor in the preservation of the flora and fauna of Mauritius was the Gerald Durrell Wildlife Trust. More than thirty years ago, Durrell visualized a trust to train local people to manage local resources and spread their message across the world. Patrick was fortunate to be part of this movement. He joined a group of students from all over the world, a realization of Durrell’s dream. They were tasked with

studying the biota of the island, developing research techniques, and promoting local landowner (stakeholder) partnerships. Despite the karst topography, most of the island has been developed with 70% planted in sugar cane. Plant and animal introductions have led to conflicts with native species. Introduced Chinese guava trees, wild pigs and deer all represent a major challenge. In some cases, mammal exclusion fences have been erected along with tree removals. Crab-eating Macaques predate cavity-nesting birds, but since monkeys are worshipped by Hindus – the main religious group – control of the macaques has been contentious. The Pink Pigeon is an iconic species for Mauritius. It is what attracted Durrell in the first place to the island. At one time, there were fewer than ten individuals left in the wild. A captive breeding program was set up in the 1980's and the present population now totals over 500 individuals. Challenges include inbreeding and providing adequate food. The Echo Parakeet, another endemic, was also down to less than twenty individuals. A cavity-nester, it was predated by macaques and outcompeted by an introduced congener, the Ring-necked Parakeet. Custom-made nest boxes and close monitoring brought this species back from the brink. Mauritius has a wide array of beautiful gecko species. Isle-aux-Aigrettes, a less-disturbed offshore island supports many geckos as well as Mauritius Fody (Endangered), endemic Olive White-eye (Critically Endangered), and last stands of intact lowland ebony forest. Aldabra Giant Tortoises were introduced there as an ecological analog to the extinct giant Mauritius tortoises (of which there were two species). Round Island, about 20 km north of the mainland is a volcanic island containing a collapsed crater. It supports several endemic lizards, a large seabird breeding colony and one of the last remaining native palm forests. The endemic Keel-scaled Boa is unique. It has a split upper jaw and is the only boa known to lay eggs. Luckily Black Rats have never colonized the island. There are very strict quarantine requirements for anyone visiting Round Island. Clothing is fumigated and food is put in mild bleach solutions but it was worth the effort. The boat trip over to the island was gorgeous. Round Island was down to only one native Hurricane Palm (last in situ individual of the species/variety; *Dictyosperma album* var. *conjugatum*), among other rare palms, but recovery efforts are underway. Mascarene Flying Foxes are an interesting study. They are frugivorous, so locals assumed they were major predators of cultivated fruit and so persecuted them. Studies showed that the Indian Myna and other introduced birds were the main culprits. The flying fox really prefers upland native forest. Now it is matter of educating the local farmers. Patrick Moldowan spent six months working for the Durrell Trust in Mauritius. He gained a lot from the opportunity and clearly loved the experience!

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**Hot Chocolate Walk, Feb. 17 - by Jean Hampson**

February 17 was a beautiful day. PFN members enjoyed a robust hike on the trail along Walker's Creek from Linwell Road until we reached Lake Ontario. We noted varieties of plants and birds as we walked such as Red Osier Dogwood, Red-Bellied and Downy Woodpeckers, both Red-Breasted and White-Breasted Nuthatches and Common Goldeneyes and Red-Breasted Mergansers on the Lake. On our return, we enjoyed some Hot Chocolate and homemade muffins. Yum!

## “Lichens, Mosses and Other Plants” of Louth Conservation Area”

April 21, 2018

By Roman Olszewski

A group of about 8 people met on a cool but dry day in Louth Conservation Area to continue a series of outings with the aim of finding and reporting lichens, mosses, and other “lower” plants in the Region of Niagara.

Though we avoided the lower trail due to the moisture present following some heavy rainfall and snow, there was plenty to see on the other dryer parts of the conservation area.

Of the species observed, perhaps the moss *Thamnobryum alleghaniensis* was the most interesting. At first glance this large plant resembles *Climacium americanum*, or tree moss, but the branches and leaves are swept to one side on the *Thamnobryum*.

Also of interest was the presence of the tree-inhabiting lichen *Flavopunctelia soledica* (powder-edged speckled greenshield). It is far less common in the Niagara region than its non-solediate cousin *Flavoparmelia caperata* (common greenshield). Both species are indicators of improving atmospheric conditions.

Another lichen, the crustose and corticolous (bark-inhabiting) *Graphis scripta* (common script lichen) was easily spotted along the trail.

Though some lichens, like *Parmelia sulcata* (hammered shield), *Xanthomendoza fallax* (hooded sunburst) and *Physcia adsensens* (hooded rosette) are very common in the park, they were only added to the list in this outing. A curious lichenicolous (lichen-inhabiting) fungus, the pink *Marchandiomyces corallines* was found on a fallen branch.

In a scouting mission prior to the outing, I observed the liverworts *Porella platyphylla*, *Nowellia curvifolia* and *Lophocolea minor*. These are added to the current park list which now consists of 6 liverworts.

Two ferns were spotted on the day of the outing: *Asplenium rhizophyllum* (walking fern) and *Dryopteris marginalis* (marginal wood fern).

While enjoying a nice day at Louth C. A. we were able to add to the knowledge of “lower plants” in our region. Thanks to Bob Highcock for acting as our recorder.

For a list of species of lichens, mosses and liverworts at the Louth S.A., please contact Roman Olszewski – [roman.otfa@cogeco.ca](mailto:roman.otfa@cogeco.ca)

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### **Sandhill Valley, Fonthill Hiking** - by Marlene Sanders

On Saturday, May 5<sup>th</sup>, our President Bob Highcock, his wife Jean Hampson, Carol Horvat, Doug Gillard, Barb West and myself, Marlene Sanders, had an enjoyable hike of 2 ½ hours in Sandhill Valley.

Not many people are aware of Sandhill Valley, Fonthill, which is a provincially significant Area of Natural & Scientific Interest, designated by the MNRF. According to documents found by

our Treasurer Janet Damude, who also holds a number of the PFN archives, “Sandhill Valley was formed at the edge of melting ice, under water in a large river delta. It is the only feature of its kind in the Niagara Peninsula. Several headwaters of the Twelve Mile Creek originate just south of and travel through Sandhill Valley”.

The Sandhill Valley property is partially privately-owned by 12 landowners and partially owned by the City of Thorold, but public access is allowed.

Highlight birds that we saw were: Ruby-crowned Kinglets, a Hermit Thrush, a male Eastern Bluebird, Broad-winged Hawk, and Red-eyed Vireo. A Pileated Woodpecker hole was seen but not the bird that made it, unfortunately.

American Toad eggs were visible in some of the huge mud puddles, as well as varying sizes of tadpoles.

Virginia Waterleaf, Trilliums, Yellow & Purple Violets, Mayapple and Trout Lily in flower were some of the plants that we found.

If you do decide to venture into Sandhill Valley yourself, be sure to spray for ticks and wear rubber boots, especially after a rain. Access is at the end of Station Street, but it is not marked. You will see a wide trail heading into the woods near the park.

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**MALCOLMSON ECO-PARK – BIRDING OUTING: TUESDAY, MAY 15, 2018**

Having been awakened during the night by heavy rain and thunder, I had my doubts that this outing was going to take place at all. However, by 7:30 the rain had stopped and the sun was attempting to shine, so 8 of us set out at 8:30 to see how many birds we could find. There was a lot of activity and we were able to get many birds. We saw: Northern Flicker, White-crowned Sparrow, a Robin with white wing bars, a Green Heron, Cardinal, Chickadee, Mourning Dove, Red-bellied Woodpecker, a Veery, Goldfinch, a House Wren, Baltimore Orioles, a Hermit Thrush, Catbirds, Red-eyed Vireos, a Red-breasted Grosbeak, Cowbirds, Swainson Thrush, Downy Woodpecker, Great-horned Owl, Blue Jays, Crows, Blue-headed Vireo, a Warbling Vireo, a Hairy Woodpecker and an Eastern Wood Pee-wee. We also got 16 different warblers. These were: Yellow-rumped, Blackburnian, Nashville, Black-throated Blue, Tennessee, Wilson’s, Chestnut-sided, Black-throated Green, Black and White, Yellow, Bay-breasted, Redstart, Ovenbird, Magnolia, Common Yellowthroat and Northern Parula. We heard a Wood Thrush but couldn’t find it. So although it rained off and on during the morning, it was a very successful outing...

By Barb West

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**WINDMILL POINT**

**Saturday, July 7, at 9:a.m.**

**Meet at Shoppers Drug Mart Plaza in Fonthill, and bring lunch.**

**Rick Young 905-734-6226**

## NOTICE: PFN ANNUAL SUMMER PICNIC

The PFN Annual Picnic will take place at Burgoyne Woods in St. Catharines on Friday, July 13 at 6:00 pm, 2018. Bring your plate, cup, utensils, drinks and your favourite dish. Sandwiches to be provided.

The event will be held at a spot along the one-way loop. Look for signs "PFN PICNIC". In case of serious precipitation, rain-date will be Saturday, July 14 at 6:00 pm.

Please RSVP to Bob Highcock/Jean Hampson (905-688-1260 or [bob.jean@sympatico.ca](mailto:bob.jean@sympatico.ca)) to indicate if you will be attending, and how many persons will be in your group.

Please contact Bob or Jean by July 10 to allow time for preparations.

Burgoyne Woods is located at 70 Edgedale Road, off of Glenridge Avenue in St. Catharines.

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### INDOOR CLUB PROGRAMS 2018 - 2019

7:30 P.M. on the fourth Monday of each month from September to April.

LOCATION: Niagara Region Building, Meeting Room 4



#### 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 Peninsula Naturalist

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We welcome written articles or artwork on natural history topics. Colour photos (jpg) accompanying articles are welcome. Please submit typed paper items or emailed to: [jmpotter068@gmail.com](mailto:jmpotter068@gmail.com) . Please send submissions by email to e-address above, or by snail-mail to the Club's postal address. New ideas and constructive criticism are welcome.

**Editor:** John Potter

**Assistant:** Mary Potter

The Editor regrets that several photographs could not be included in this copy of the PFN "Naturalist"; we apologize to the photographers.

Deadlines for 2018 submissions:; **June/July; November**