



The Peninsula Naturalist

Volume 241

Newsletter of the Peninsula Field Naturalists Club

February 2016

PRESIDENT'S PREVIEW

Have we got an outing for you this Spring! Members of the Peninsula Field Naturalists nature club were asked to contribute and they answered with a variety of walks that cover a wide spectrum of interests.

Of course, the first is an annual treat to get outdoors and enjoy a short hike in Short Hills Provincial Park, followed by a pancake lunch. The first of our new hikes will take place on April 9 and will cover searching for and the identification of lichens and mosses in Niagara Falls' Heartland Forest. Wildflower walks have returned and will take place at Louth Conservation Area in April and at St. John's Conservation Area in May. Another new walk is the Sandhill Valley outing. I'm looking forward to the birds we will find and I'm confident our leaders will find a lifer for one or two participants.

After spotting some warblers in Fonthill in early May, you can check out the next wave of migrants in Malcolmson Eco-Park on May 17. To finish off the month of May, the PFN will travel to the County of Haldimand to visit the Rock Point Bird Banding Station and to explore the limestone shoreline in the Provincial Park. Members enjoyed the fall outing to the Glenridge Quarry Naturalization Site so much that we thought we would turn the tables and see what northward-bound migrants we can observe. To finish off the spring outings and celebrate the beginning of summer, we'll have an evening walk through Jaycee Park and Rennie Parks on Martindale Pond. Enjoying nature in the city and a bit of ice-cream - what could be better?

Looking over the spring schedule, I can say that we have a good selection for our members to choose from. At this time, I would just like to offer my thanks to all that contributed ideas and volunteered to lead an outing in 2016. With members like you, I'm certainly proud to be President of the Peninsula Field Naturalists.

Speakers for the remaining PFN Meetings in 2016

February 22	John Black and Marcie Jacklin	Colombia Birding
March 28	Finn Madsen	Harmony Residents Group
Sept. 26	Adam Shoalts	Alone Against the North: Expedition into Unknown Landscape
October 24	Justin Peter	A Naturalist's Rambles in India
November 28	Janet Rose	The Importance of Composting

TEN OUTINGS FOR THE SPRING OF 2016

Maple Syrup Walk; Saturday, March 12, 2016, 10:00 a.m.

Meet at the parking lot for Short Hills PP at Roland Rd. entrance; Walk followed by pancake lunch at White Meadows Farms.

Bob Highcock 905-688-1260

Hawk Watch Open House; Good Friday, March 25, 2016, All day from 9:00 a.m.?

Meet PFN and many other 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 the Heartland Forest; Saturday, April 9, 2016, 10:00 a.m.

Meet at the Heartland Forest Parking area; 8215 Heartland Forest Road, Niagara Falls

Roman Olszewski 905-732-9955

Louth Conservation Area Wildflower Walk; Saturday, April 16, 2016, 1:00 p.m.

Parking off Staff Road west of Rockway. Bring cameras, bins, curiosity and good footwear.

Brian Calvert 905-892-6267

Sandhill Valley (Fonthill Kame) Outing; Sunday, May 7, 2016, 8:30 a.m.

Meet Barb and Marlene at Shopper's 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 8, 2016, 1:00 p.m.

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

Brian Calvert 905-892-6267

Malcolmson Eco-Park Birding; Tuesday, May 17, 2016, 8:30 a.m./

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

Barbara West 905-935-5339

Excursion to Rock Point Provincial Park

Saturday, May 28, 2016, 8:30 a.m to mid-afternoon.

Meet Rick Young at Shopper's 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.

Binoculars and/or spotting scopes are useful.

Rick Young 905-734-6228

Glenridge Quarry Naturalization Site; Saturday, June 4, 2016, 8:30 a.m.

Meet at the parking area for the site on St. David's Road (Regional Rd. 71)

Leaders: Bob Highcock, Jean Hampson 905-688-1260

"Enjoying Nature in the City"; St. Catharines; Thursday, June 23, 2016, 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 the Jaycee Park parking lot at 7:00 pm, 543 Ontario Street (beside Robertsons Rentals). Contact: Jean Hampson 905-688-1260

Native Plant Gardening in the Golden Horseshoe - by Paul O'Hara

Our November speaker, Paul O'Hara, owns the 'Blue Oak Native Landscapes' company, based in Hamilton, and is an expert on species at risk. Beginning his talk, he explained that "Blue Oak" is also called Bur Oak, ranges from southern Saskatchewan east to New Brunswick, and is a species typical of Carolinian Canada. Next, Paul pointed out that Hamilton and Halton Region are at the extreme northern edge of the Deciduous Forest Region, also known as Carolinian Canada. He explained that Carolinian Canada is the meeting place of three "biomes", which gives this area a richer plant flora than anywhere else in Canada. (A biome is a large naturally-occurring community of flora and fauna adapted to the conditions where they occur.). So we are at the point where the Boreal Forest Region of northern Canada, the Deciduous Forest Region of the Eastern United States, and the Prairie or Great Plains Region of the Midwest all converge.

Paul stated that 65% of Canada's rare and endangered species occur in Carolinian Canada, and about 25% of those species are restricted to this region and occur nowhere else in the country. So his point was that we are blessed by having a large number of plants that are specific to this area.

To point out how the country has changed, historically 80% of Carolinian Canada was forested, and the rest was wetlands, savannas, and prairie. Now, about 11% of forest cover remains in general and in some areas (Chatham-Kent, Windsor-Essex) less than 4% remains. (We in Niagara have about 15% of forest but about half of that is Ash sp. which will soon be erased by Emerald Ash Borer beetle.)

Moving then into his topic, Paul suggested that the gardening community who specialize with native plants have the goal of creating 'a web of green' across Southern Ontario. At the outset of beginning a garden, he recommends removing undesirable plants such as Tree-of-Heaven (Ailanthus), White Mulberry, Siberian Elm, Russian Olive, Norway Maple, and Dog-Strangling Vine.

Next, in planning a garden, he recommends using elements of landscape design, which include balance, rhythm, repetition and winter interest. To develop winter interest in a garden, he suggests: where available, include Rocks (mossy boulders, pebbles, beach rock, armour stone); allow for fences, retaining walls, and path paving stones; and use evergreen plant material, such as conifers (Hemlock, Red Cedar, White Pine) and broad-leaf evergreens like Bearberry, and grasses and sedges that can stand the winter.

For summer garden planting, Paul emphasized plants that will be colourful and also will provide food for butterflies, bees, etc. Plants like Asters, Milkweeds and Goldenrods are good for Monarch Butterflies; other insect-attracters include Smooth Beardtongue, Pussytoes, Spikenard and Wild Bergamot.

The entire list of wildflowers (spring-, summer- and fall-blooming), grasses and sedges, ferns, vines, shrubs, deciduous trees and evergreens that Paul provided as samples of native planting material amount to about 100 species. The list also includes informational notes about the appearance and best locations for planting the various species. (Unfortunately the list would be too lengthy for this report, but I could provide copies to anyone wanting the list - jmpotter068@gmail.com.)

In planning gardens with native plants, Paul suggests that informal gardens with curving lines and desirable views are preferable; the design elements (plants, patios, walkways) should match the scale of your property; trees should be at least 1.5 metres away from structures; water features (ponds, bird baths) enhance the garden for wildlife; conifers can be placed to soften the appearance of buildings; gardening in layers (ground, shrub, canopy) provides more niches for wildlife.

Paul also supplied a list of several Native Plant Gardening books, and some Local Native Plant Nurseries, which again you can request from me - jmpotter068@gmail.com, or 905-892-2566.

Natural Heritage and Wind Turbines - Compatible? ? - by Loretta Shields

While the need to move away from the use of fossil fuels and non-renewable resources is important for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, government subsidized programs for the development of renewable energy projects must ensure that current environmental protection regulations and conservation programs are not affected. In Ontario, the Green Energy Act provides the Province the authority to override its own environmental regulations. At our January meeting, Loretta Shields presented serious concerns for Niagara's Natural Heritage as a result of the Niagara Region Wind Corporation (NRWC) wind energy project that is currently underway.

By December, 2015, 2300 industrial wind turbines were either installed or had been approved for installation, accounting for 40% of Canada's total wind energy capacity. But when you look at the placement of these wind energy projects, you will note that these are mostly adjacent to the shores of Lake Erie, Lake Huron and Lake Ontario. It is along these shorelines where we see the annual migration of birds and butterflies. Important Bird Areas (internationally recognized conservation areas) such as the South Shore of Prince Edward County, Amherst Island and Wolfe Island are also found along the Great Lakes, and these have also not been spared for the development of wind energy projects.

Seventy-seven industrial wind turbines are currently being built as part of the NRWC project. The project area is located from Lowbanks, and stretches north to Lincoln within our Carolinian Canada zone and within sixteen provincially significant wetland complexes. These are the largest land turbines currently being built, with generation capacities of 3.0 Mw. The rotor diameters measure 331 feet, with a swept area of 8,012 m². The poles upon which the blades are secured are 406 feet high.

One serious concern of the project approval is the incomplete physical site investigations within the 120 meter zone of investigation for the industrial wind turbines. In most of the turbine locations, the 120 meter zone of investigation includes neighboring lands where the landowners are not participants of this project. Loretta showed several field notes where the surveyors for this project could not fully conclude the ecological land classification within the survey area (ie. "interior not visible, only edge"). 30% of the field notes were inconclusive for reptile hibernacula, bat roosting areas, stick nests and vernal pools. While the Renewable Energy Regulations do allow for alternative site investigations (surveys from the roadside instead of physical site surveys), these must be supported by an explanation as to why it was not reasonable to physically survey the site. An explanation (other than it was not reasonable) was not provided in the Natural Heritage report provided by the wind energy company, but the project was approved nonetheless.

The location of the turbines severely encroaches on Niagara's regulated watercourses. Sixty-two of the original 80 turbine locations are within lands that are regulated by the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority and required permits prior to construction. There was no recognition of the Core Natural Heritage system in Niagara, which is part of the Official Plan for Niagara. Four turbines are within the potential natural heritage corridors connecting the core natural areas. Several turbines are located adjacent to woodlands, one of which comes as close as 3.6 meters to the blade tip.

Four migratory land-bird stopover areas were identified as significant in the Lowbanks area, but one was not surveyed because the company claimed property access constraints. There was no pre-construction monitoring, nor will there will be post -construction monitoring at this particular stopover area. Short-eared owl habitats are also in the area of the wind project. But because there are no habitat regulations for this species, no monitoring will be done during or after construction.

Loretta expressed concerns over the changes in the Species at Risk legislation that occurred in June 2013. A similar wind energy project was granted a "harm, harass or kill" permit for the removal of an eagle's

nest in Fisherville, Ontario in January, 2013. At that time, it was required to post this permit on the Environmental Registry. By June, 2013, the updated legislation provided an alternate “authorization” measure to allow renewable energy companies to construct projects within endangered species habitats. As such, there was nothing posted on the Environmental Registry to inform the public of the twenty turbines that were approved to be built in Blanding’s turtle habitat in the southern portion of this project area. The Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority also allowed the wind energy company to use 635 meters of the Gord Harry Conservation trail to move heavy equipment into the lands where the turbines are being constructed. This is also Blanding’s turtle habitat. A previous environmental tribunal proceeding for Blandings turtle accepted evidence that construction traffic and the addition of access roads will affect the Blanding turtle populations through sensory disturbance, and increased predation due to the removal of protective vegetation.

There are many more environmental concerns (such as effects on bat populations, fish populations, etc) that the presentation did not touch upon. And with the inappropriate environmental studies that were conducted prior to the approval of this project, we may never know how great the negative effects this large project has, or will have, on Niagara’s natural heritage.

AND AGAIN, THE SEARCH FOR THE PURPLE SANDPIPER.....!

On Sunday, November 8, 2015, John Black led the fourth annual walk along the East Pier in Port Weller. During the 2014 hike, one member had a brief view of a Purple Sandpiper, and in 2015 we were hoping for an extended observation for all when checking the large rocks along the Lake Ontario shoreline.

Walking on the George Nicholson Trail, the group observed an adult Bald Eagle gracefully fly across the bow of a ship headed for Lake Ontario. It then perched itself in a tree on the west pier. The waterfowl observed on the outing included Mallard, Redhead, American Black Duck, Lesser Scaup, Red-Breasted Merganser, Long-tailed Duck, Ring-necked Duck, Bufflehead, and Mute Swan. Red-throated and Common Loon were also seen. A flock of 30 Snow Buntings flew over the tip near the beacon. Those looking for this species for their lists should come to Port Weller in the late fall. Snow Buntings are an easy tick at this location.

Once again, the elusive Purple Sandpiper was a shy shorebird for most of our group. Lucky for Barb West and Lynn Glover, they were on the right side of the spit at the right time. For the second year in a row, a Purple Sandpiper was observed on the east pier. After completing the hike in Port Weller East, the group continued the walk on the west pier. The highlight in Port Weller West was a Peregrine Falcon. The sunny weather certainly enhanced the hike. Hope to see you next November.... Cheers!



St. Catharines Christmas Bird Count , December 20, 2015 - by Marcie Jacklin

The Peninsula Field Naturalists held their Christmas Bird Count on December 20, 2015. The weather was mild for mid-December with the thermometer hovering slightly above zero. The count was conducted by 41 participants. Thank you one and all for your efforts that day.

We tallied 74 species plus one on count week (Snowy Owl). This is below the average of 76. We tallied 17,379 individuals, which is the below the average of individuals (23,552).

Many thanks are due to all the participants who helped out. The results show that everyone on the count contributes to the success of this count. We collectively spent 114.5 hours counting and walked or drove 1157.5 km.

Also a big THANK YOU once again to Mary and John Potter for organizing this years round-up party. A great big thank you to everyone who helped set up, clean up and brought very yummy food to the round up. It was very much appreciated.

No new species were added to the count. Turkey Vultures were all second records for the count.

A count of 123 Hooded Mergansers (tie), 3 Turkey Vultures, 15 Eastern Screech-owls, 2 Merlins (tie), 2 Peregrine Falcons, and 2338 Brown-headed Cowbirds were record high counts. A count of 15 Gadwall is the highest count in 20 years. A count of 88 Eastern Bluebirds is tied for the highest count in 15 years. A count of 1042 Ring-billed Gulls is the highest count in the past decade.

Counts of 18 Common Mergansers, 1 Bonaparte's Gull, 61 Herring Gulls, 4 Great Black-backed Gulls and 174 House Finch are all record low counts.

Three White-throated Sparrows were the lowest count in 20 years. Counts of 1463 Canada Goose, 34 White-winged Scoter, 2 Great Blue Herons, 3 Sharp-shinned Hawks, 579 Mourning Doves, 10 Northern Flickers, 14 American Kestrels, 7 Golden-crowned Kinglets, 476 Dark-eyed Juncos, 257 American Goldfinch and 1206 House Sparrows are the lowest counts this decade.

After several years of high counts, Tufted Titmouse, Carolina Wren and American Robins showed declines. Northern Shrikes and Winter Wrens were not tallied this year.

This year we had 41 participants (listed below).

Participants: Brian Ahara, Rhonda Armstrong, Manley Baarda, John Black, Peter BonEnfant, Lorraine Brown, Paul Chapman, Sue Chapman, Paula Clark, Emily Cornfield, Trevor Cornfield, Carl Damude, Janet Damude, Don Dimond, Elaine Dimond, Chris Escott, Denys Gardiner, Steve Gillis, Lynn Glover, Lynda Goodridge, Jean Hampson, Bob Highcock, Marcie Jacklin, Nabil Khairallah, Ramsey Khairallah, Kara Kristjanson, Win Laar, Bob Manson, Judy Robins, Kayo Roy, Marlene Sanders, Joyce Sankey, Karin Schneider, Tim Seburn, Dave Smith, Nancy Smith, Pat Smith, Roy Sorgenfrei, John Stevens, Katherine Stoltz, Tom Thomas, Rick Young.

THE BIRDS: Total individuals 17,379 Total species 74

Canada Goose	1463	Belted Kingfisher	6
Mute Swan	17	Red-headed Woodpecker	1
Gadwall	15	Red-bellied Woodpecker	54
American Wigeon	1	Downy Woodpecker	89
American Black Duck	34	Hairy Woodpecker	17
Mallard	500	Northern Flicker	10
Northern Pintail	2	American Kestrel	14
Canvasback	7	Merlin	2
Redhead	14	Peregrine Falcon	2
Ring-necked Duck	3	Blue Jay	440
Greater Scaup	3	American Crow	112
Surf Scoter	1	Horned Lark	2
White-winged Scoter	34	Black-capped Chickadee	263
Long-tailed Duck	96	Tufted Titmouse	7
Bufflehead	56	Red-breasted Nuthatch	8
Hooded Merganser	123	White-breasted Nuthatch	47
Common Merganser	18	Brown Creeper	3
Red-breasted Merganser	79	Carolina Wren	11
Ring-necked Pheasant	3	Golden-crowned Kinglet	7
Wild Turkey	36	Eastern Bluebird	88
Common Loon	2	American Robin	652
Double-crested	20	Northern Mockingbird	28
Cormorant			
Great Blue Heron	2	European Starling	5497
Turkey Vulture	3	Cedar Waxwing	79
Northern Harrier	5	Lapland Longspur	2
Sharp-shinned Hawk	3	American Tree Sparrow	276
Cooper's Hawk	11	Dark-eyed Junco	476
Bald Eagle	1	White-crowned Sparrow	29
Red-tailed Hawk	108	White-throated Sparrow	3
Hawk species	4	Song Sparrow	6
Bonaparte's Gull	1	Northern Cardinal	157
Ring-billed Gull	1042	Red-winged Blackbird	5
Herring Gull	61		
Great Black-backed Gull	4	Brown-headed Cowbird	2338
Gull species	2	House Finch	174
Rock Pigeon	555	American Goldfinch	257
Mourning Dove	579	House Sparrow	1206
Eastern Screech-owl	15		
Great Horned Owl	8		

1 Snowy Owl seen during Count Week.

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 M-Z please bring first course;
surnames A-L 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 .

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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** 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 2016:
February 4; April 7; October 6**