



The Peninsula Naturalist

Volume 210

Newsletter of the Peninsula Field Naturalists Club

June 2006

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

- June 2006 -

Naturalist, Environmentalist, Conservationist - Which are you? Or are you all of these? As a result of following recently an Internet discussion on the topic "The Death of Environmentalism", I began wondering just what the discussion participants understood these words to mean.

"Don't call yourself an 'environmentalist', but instead refer to yourself as a 'conservationist' because some people are skeptical about the self-interest of those environmental groups who engage in land preservation" - that was one of the bits of politically-correct advice from the U.S. Nature Conservancy. Self-interest?? About global warming, fr'instance?

The Canadian Oxford Dictionary (my source of preference) gave me the following definitions:

Naturalist: An expert or student of natural history; natural history being defined as 'the study of animals or plants';

Environmentalist: A person who is concerned with or advocates the protection of the environment;

Conservationist: A supporter or advocate of environmental conservation; 'conservation' being the preservation of the natural environment.

We call our organization "The Peninsula Field Naturalists Club". I suppose that means that our Club is composed of people who share a common interest in the study of animals or plants. In truth, the interest on the animal side is largely with birds as a subgroup,

but not exclusively; many of us are more eclectic about our preferred species.

Lately, it seems to me, the interest of the Club is extending beyond just the study of natural history. Some of us are becoming (or are cast in the mold of being) conservationists or even environmentalists. We appear to be evolving toward concern with broader issues than just the *study* of life forms around us. We are being urged, cajoled, pushed, into taking stances of support for or against changes in our surroundings. "Don't drain wetlands!" "Don't drive Brand X vehicle because it uses fossil fuels!" "Don't shoot deer (let'em starve instead?)" ; and so on.

So what's my point? Just this - I don't think it's a bad thing to be an activist. If that means being called an 'environmentalist' because you want to preserve and protect the environment, so be it! 'Environmentalism' may have gotten a bad name among some of its detractors, but right now no-one should have to feel apologetic about wanting to preserve and protect nature. Naturalist, Environmentalist, Conservationist - we can be all of the above, and proud of it!

P.S. "Activism": vigorous action to further a cause.

REMINDER

PFN END-OF-SEASON BARBEQUE

SEE DETAILS ON LAST PAGE

FIREMAN'S PARK WILDFLOWERS

We had a small (6) but eager group on our Fireman's Park Wildflower walk in Niagara Falls on Sunday, May 21, 2006. The weather didn't look promising but in the end was good for our hike, not too cold or too hot but with enough wind to keep any bugs at bay.

We started at the parking lot just past the rail tracks as the one at the road end is now closed. The access to the woods now is less direct but shows off the more manicured aspects of the park.

Upon entering the woods there were an abundance of Wild Geraniums in bloom and many photo opportunities for the perfect May Apple flowers. We saw blooming False Solomon Seal, Flowering Dogwoods, Jack in the Pulpit, Common Blue Violets, White Baneberry, Herb Robert, Trilliums and Meadow Rue (just finishing). The Blood Root long finished was in a wonderful large cluster.

Since my main interest in plants is how they are used now and in the past, the main hike focus was the folklore of plants and what is edible and useful. We enjoyed munching on Garlic Mustard Dip with crackers as we walked. If you create a need, plants disappear, bad ones as well as the good ones. Use up these nuisance plants by including Garlic Mustard in salads and as a lettuce substitute on sandwiches.

We saw a wonderful clump of Wild Leeks which were reached off the main path by arduous means. These plants are very rare now because people dig them up and we even saw some evidence of it in that cluster. The aroma was amazing. It was a lovely morning in the woods.

- Nancy Luft -

(Isn't it amazing how little we know about the uses of common everyday plants? Thanks, Nancy!)

PFN SCHEDULE - LOOKING AHEAD

Here's a tentative schedule for outings next year. I would like a few more trip leaders to come forward to fill it out a bit, particularly for birding. It would also be good to list carpool coordinators for each town in the brochure.

August /06: Anyone for canoeing up north?
Sep 10 /06: Glenridge Quarry Naturalization?
Sep 17 /06: Doors Open Waterloo?
Oct 7-9 /06: Thanksgiving Weekend at Unicamp
Oct 14-15/06: Doors Open Niagara
Nov 5 /06: Fall Color Hike - Grimsby?
Dec 17 /06: Christmas Bird Count
Jan 14 /07: Duck Count for MNR
Mar 3 /07: Maple Syrup Hike
Apr 6 /07: Hawkwatch at Beamer CA
Apr 29 /07: St Johns Wildflowers
May 5 /07: Rock Point Birds
May 6 /07: Short Hills Wildflowers
May 12 /07: Woodend Wildflowers
May 19-21/07: Victoria Weekend - Rondeau?
June 16 /07: Season-End Barbecue

Anyone willing to lead an outing (particularly birding experts) should phone me at 905-892-6267, or email [oddfinding @ yahoo.ca](mailto:oddfinding@yahoo.ca), before you go off on your summer holidays, so the new schedule can be distributed in August.

- Brian Calvert -

THANKSGIVING WEEKEND OUTING

OCTOBER 6-9, 2006

Fall colour, scenic views, Bruce Trail walks, wetlands and crevice caves. A Thanksgiving feast on Sunday with vegetarian option available. Located at Unicamp, about halfway between Orangeville and Collingwood in the Mulmur Hills of Dufferin County.

Cost: 3 nights + 7 meals would be \$65 to \$80 per adult, depending on whether you sleep in a bunkhouse or family-style cottage. Campsites are available. Reserve with Brian Calvert 892-6267.

SHORT HILLS PARK WILDFLOWER WALK

The wildflower walk at Short Hills Park on Saturday, May 6, 2006, was our "Doors Open to Nature" event for Ontario Nature. The Friends of Short Hills club was also invited, and it was posted in the local newspapers, so we were hoping for a big turnout. However, the weather did not cooperate.

It was raining as I drove there, so I was worried. But then it cleared up, and about 10 people showed up, most of them a bit late. I can imagine them deciding it wouldn't be so bad at the last minute. They were mostly non-members who read about the event in the newspaper.

We hiked along the wheelchair accessible trail from Roland Road to the Swayze waterfall and admired the gorge. Then, with special permission from the park authorities, we hiked down the hill to the east, and along the stream.

There was Red Trillium right beside White Trillium, so I had the chance to make a point by point comparison. There was also Dutchman's Breeches near Squirrel Corn, another good comparison. Lots of Wild Ginger, Trout Lily and Cutleaf Toothwort were in bloom. We saw one bluebird near the nesting boxes.

- Brian Calvert -

("Doors Open to Nature" is the celebration of Ontario Nature's 75th Anniversary. Given the way the weather has messed with our outings, I'd say 10 people was a good turn-out - Thanks, Brian!).

PFN WEEKEND OUTING POSTPONED

Due to lack of participants, the proposed weekend outing to Georgian Bay (May 26-28) was scrubbed. If enough interested parties surface, this trip may be rescheduled for the Canada Day weekend. Please contact Brian Calvert (905-892-6267) if interested.

LOOKING FOR A FEW GOOD PEOPLE

As I write this, it is only six months until the next Peninsula Field Naturalists Annual General Meeting. I can almost hear some members whispering to themselves that the summer season has not officially begun, but they're being reminded of an event next fall - late fall! Yes, that's the situation - this is your first reminder that the next AGM is only six months away. Ho-hum, what else is new?

Why a reminder this soon? Well, ask yourself whether you value the PFN enough to be concerned about whether anyone is willing to step forward to be President or Secretary, or Newsletter Editor, or Outings Convenor, or Environmental Convenor - or any of the other jobs that have to be done by someone to keep the Club operating. The Annual General Meeting is the time at which the Officers and Board are elected. If no-one stands for election, what then?

Over the summer, in those lazy smoggy days, think about who you would like to see in the various Officers' positions - and then please inform your current President or any Board Member of your choices. You'll be glad you did!

PFN INTERESTS

Each year, as memberships are renewed, members are invited to indicate their particular interests. Since the Club has traditionally been oriented toward birding, one might expect bird studies to be most popular. From the 2006 renewals, here are the responses of those who provided input (some checked more than one topic):

- 36 Birds
- 27 Wildflowers
- 20 Environmental Issues
- 19 Trees & Shrubs
- 13 Geology
- 10 Astronomy
- 7 Mushrooms & Lichens
- 6 Insects

WHY THOSE HILLS ARE SHORT!

Whenever a well is drilled, the driller files a report, which includes the depth at which bedrock was found. By studying this data, geologists deduced a deep channel cut into the bedrock, running across the Niagara Peninsula under Wainfleet Bog, Fonthill and the Short Hills area. They concluded that a river, which they named the Erigan, flowed northward and carved this gorge into the bedrock, similar to the Niagara River gorge of today.

During the last retreat of the Laurentian Ice Sheet, this gorge was completely filled with layers of glacial till and lake-bottom sediments. The flat land resulting at the top was part of the Haldimand Clay Plain which now covers much of the peninsula south of the Niagara Escarpment.

Since about 11,000 B.C., many small tributaries of the Twelve Mile Creek have washed away this loose sediment, gradually cutting V-shaped valleys as much as 40 metres deep. After reaching this base level, the larger streams meandered, widening their valleys, thus producing flat bottoms. The remnant of the clay plain between these valleys is seen today as the many flat-topped hills of Short Hills Park and the St. John's area.

The rate of flooding and erosion increased after settlers cleared much of the forest, disturbing the soil. Some slopes along 12 Mile Creek are badly scarred by mud slides. The former Gilligan Road, now a trail down the hill from the Pelham lot, is usually gullied in the spring.

Two layers of bedrock, exposed on the east and west sides of the park, are remnants of the ancient gorge walls. The upper layer of Lockport Dolostone and lower layer of Irondequoit Limestone are more resistant to erosion than the other strata of sandstone and shale. Creeks plunging over these escarpments produced Swayze Falls on the west wall and Terrace Falls on the east wall.

Shortly after the glaciers retreated, humans settled in the area. After 6000 B.C., chert was brought from the Lake Erie shore area, and broken into cutting tools at outdoor workshops in the Short Hills. More recently, the Neutral Indians settled on the east and west sides of the park, but were exterminated by tribes from New York State during the 17th century.

After serving in Butlers Rangers, John Brown was granted 700 acres and cleared much of the forest to grow crops and plant orchards. A few of his heritage-variety fruit trees have survived in the east side of the park. Settlers built many mills along the creeks at Power Glen and St. John's. Morningstar Mills on Decew Road, now restored, is a museum.

In 1968, Gertler wrote a report which convinced the Province of Ontario to buy land for parks and impose zoning to preserve the Niagara Escarpment area. Land assembly for Short Hills Park began in 1969. Now the park has grown to 735 hectares. Most of the farmland has been reforested, but some fields around the edges are still rented out for crops.

Access to the park interior is from 3 parking lots: Pelham Road just west of the scout camp, Roland Road east of Effingham Street and at the end of Wiley Road west of Cataract Road.

Two shared-use trails have yellow blazes. The 6.2 km. Swayze Falls trail loops around the west side of the park, between the Pelham and Roland lots. The 4.3 km. Black Walnut trail loops around the east side, between the Pelham and Wiley lots. It has many steep slopes, making it a challenging hike. The other 4 trails should only have hikers, but you may encounter the occasional cyclist breaking the rules. A trail guide may be purchased from the Friends of Short Hills Park. This club plants trees, puts up bird houses, and has many nature outings throughout the year.

- Brian Calvert -

(More details on the geology can be found in "The Glaciation of Short Hills", a 1970 thesis by Roberta Jane Hughes. There is a copy at Brock University library.)

Ramblings...

A few days ago, I received a phone call from a distraught woman - a complete stranger to me - which began with the question: "Do you know anything about birds?" I admitted to having some interest in them, presuming she was referring to songbirds and probably not barnyard fowl. Her line of questioning then continued toward my knowledge of how to care for baby birds. It quickly devolved that she had become the unwitting and unwilling guardian of a young robin, thanks to her cat. The bird was partially feathered, but unable to fly or feed itself. The cat had literally dragged it home, from goodness-knows-where. The woman had spent considerable time on the phone with various government agencies trying to determine how to care for the bird, or where to take it for help. She was quite indignant that one animal welfare group had essentially advised that the bird should be euthanized, and had been quite forthright in advising her about the laws regarding capturing wildlife. When I explained that I was part of a field naturalist group and not a specialist on bird rehab, her question was "So what do you do?"

Eventually, for lack of any better suggestion, I directed her toward the Owl Foundation, hoping that they might know whether a rehab for songbirds exists in this part of Ontario. Had I been thinking clearly, I could have asked whether she had internet access, and suggested googling 'songbird rehab' - that inspiration came days later, much too late.

Two things about this incident still disturb me. First, during our conversation, the woman told me that her cat had twice before appeared with baby birds, which it had proceeded to eat - in one case, two birds in one day. At that, my delayed reaction was (and is) - if she knew her cat was a bird killer, why in creation did she allow her cat to continue decimating the local robins' nests? Is this responsible cat ownership? Could some cat owners please tell me whether they would allow

their cats to continue attacking songbird nests after discovering that this was going on?

Second, her questions illustrated to me that there is a gap in the animal welfare system when it comes to small songbirds, and presumably certain other wildlife. I previously knew of the Owl Foundation and the Welland House of Wildlife Rehab Centre; I've just become aware of the Songbirds Only Avian Rehab (SOAR) Centre in Rockwood, ON. But, to the average citizen, I suspect the list of possible help agencies starts and stops at The Humane Society and the Ministry of Natural Resources. And apparently circumstances (time, budget, probability of success, etc.) tend to put small, immature and common species on the low-priority list for assistance.

Make no mistake, I am not getting onto the Humane Society's case, nor the MNR - these folks have their priorities, their constraints and they do great work. But there is apparently a gap - and I keep thinking of the woman's question about the field naturalists - "So what do you do?" Is there something we should be doing to help, if not by learning how to do rehab then perhaps by at least being able to tell average citizens where help can be obtained - if the agencies for small-animal and songbird rehab do exist? Just wondering.....

WEATHER TRIVIA

One-third of all reported tornadoes in Canada have occurred in southwestern Ontario;

The highest wind speed for one hour (201.1 km/hr) was recorded on Nov. 8, 1931 at Cape Hopes Advance, Quebec;

On June 30, 1912, a tornado hit Regina, Sask., causing 28 deaths and \$56 million in damage;

Hurricane Hazel, on Oct. 15, 1954, had winds of 113 km/hr, dropped 10 cm of rain over 12 hours, and caused 83 deaths. In Toronto, 40 bridges were washed out on four rivers. Outside Toronto, the storm hit an area 320 kilometers wide.

**PENINSULA FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB
END-OF-SEASON OUTING/BARBEQUE**

Saturday, June 17, 2006 10:00 a.m.

Hosts: Don and Sue Minchin 905-562-1953

Location: 2288 Robbins Ave., Vineland

Directions: From St. Catharines, drive west on Regional Road 81 to 11th St. Louth, turn left and drive south to Robbins Ave. (on right); continue to end of Robbins Ave.

The Minchin's property adjoins Louth Conservation Area and is crossed by the Bruce Trail; we hope to see bluebirds as we explore the back of Louth C.A.

Food, beverages, etc. will be provided – just bring your sweet selves, and hope for fair weather; since the following day is Fathers Day (Sunday, June 18), a rain date has not been determined.



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 (ex-FON) and Nature Canada (ex-CNF).

P.O. Box 23031, 124 Welland Ave., St. Catharines, ON. L2R7P6

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The Editor welcomes written articles or artwork on any natural history topic. Handwritten articles will be accepted, and if possible, please submit typewritten articles, or computer disks containing your file. All pieces of artwork will be accepted, although line drawings are preferable, as they are better suited to photo copying. New ideas and constructive criticism are always welcome.

Editorial Staff: John Potter

Labelling/Mailing: Kay Smith

– please send submissions to the above address –

Deadlines for submissions 2006:

Jan. 28; May 20; Sept. 30

2005/6 PFN EXECUTIVE

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