



The Peninsula Naturalist

Volume 214

Newsletter of the Peninsula Field Naturalists Club

June 2007

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

- June 2007 -

As the early spring wildflowers pass on, and the early summer wildflowers open; the rush of spring bird migration is over and the nesting season has set in; with all these events that signal a new green summer in its early stages, I feel a sense of optimism coupled with a touch of melancholy.

I read in the press the great things that science is proposing to bring us. I read the statements from the political capitals that show how we are progressing – we have a new agreement that Great Lakes water can't be sold or shipped for profit (so says the Ontario government) – we have a new Species at Risk Act, toughest in all of North America (so says the Ontario government) – California and British Columbia are setting a 'green' standard for the rest of the Northern Hemisphere. Still, melancholy sets in. Why?

Because, I suppose, I know the world has changed. I have a year-old grandson who may never know what a majestic Elm tree looked like (when they grew). He may never know what it was like to play outside without applying sunscreen. He may never know that people once were not afraid to eat unwashed fruit for fear of bacterial poisoning.

Or then again, he may grow up to help solve the problems my generation have left him as a legacy. Who knows?

(Melancholy – from the Greek 'melanos' = black, and 'chole' = bile).

SEASON'S END OUTING & BARBEQUE

As noted in the April Newsletter, the annual end-of-season Outing and Barbeque will be held on **Sunday, June 17**, from 10:00 a.m. to 'whenever' at **Woodend Conservation Area**.

Woodend CA is accessed from Taylor Road (aka Beechwood Road), off Glendale East from St. Catharines and south of the Niagara College Glendale campus.

When you arrive at the road into Woodend CA, drive up to the end of the road, to the parking area. Please do not park blocking the gate into the area around the buildings. We will meet at the deck on the north side of the large white house. The house is closed, but external toilets will be available.

The Woodend property offers many hiking trails, including part of the Bruce Trail, and interesting flora and fauna including good birding opportunities.

Lunch will be about noon, on the deck. Veggie-dogs and/or veggie burgers will be available, as well as the regular carnivore fare.

Note: The green yearly Bulletin listed the date as June 16, with June 17 as a rain date. The date was changed to **June 17**, because of other commitments of the barbeque chef.

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For those who may not be able to attend this Walk and Barbeque, enjoy your summer, travel safely, and we will see you again in the fall. Happy vacation!

ON WHY I AM AN (ASPIRING) VEGETARIAN

In recent times, I have become increasingly disturbed at the contradiction between professing a love of nature and concern for all living things and our habit of killing and eating animals, birds, fish and other creatures. Not only is there considerable cruelty involved in the way animals are raised and slaughtered today, but there are far-reaching environmental and health-related effects that call for consideration.

First, the environment: an estimated 1.3 billion cattle populate the earth at this time, consuming hundreds of millions of tons of grain, equal to the caloric needs of 8.7 billion people. Feeding the average North American requires over 3 acres of cultivated land a year. Supplying a person who eats no animal-derived food requires only 1/6 acre per year. On average, cattle return only 1lb. of meat for every 16 lbs. of grain and soybeans they are fed. And it takes an average of 2,500 gallons of water to produce a single pound of meat, while only 25 gallons of water will produce a pound of wheat.

Then consider the pollution problem. Livestock in the U.S. produce 20 times the excrement of the entire U.S. population. At one time this waste was used as fertilizer, but today the sheer volume threatens to overwhelm available disposal systems. And the methane emissions are a major contribution to the greenhouse gases responsible for global warming.

Next, the issue of cruelty: of course, slaughtering animals has always involved an element of cruelty, but it pales into insignificance compared with practices today. Farm animals now are treated as things rather than sentient beings. Whereas once livestock wandered freely in the fields, browsing at will, today they are herded into huge factory-like barns where they live under quite unnatural and artificial conditions. For fear of disease, they are fed large quantities of antibiotics, and hormones to artificially increase their weight. Laws regarding cruelty to animals do not apply to animals raised for food consumption - conditions which would attract legal penalties if applied to your pets are practised and accepted where farm animals are concerned.

The extent of cruelty boggles the mind: it ranges from debeaking of chickens to prevent them injuring one another in the confined space in which they are kept, to repeated artificial insemination of cows and the removal of calves at birth to maximise milk production, to the amputation of pigs' tails to prevent them chewing each other in their restricted quarters, to the confinement and unnatural feeding of calves to produce veal. Lastly, there is the transportation of animals packed into trucks (many die en route but this is factored into the cost) to slaughter-houses, where they are put out of their misery in conditions that are appalling for both workers and animals.

And what about OUR health? An animal-based diet is high in saturated fat and cholesterol, leading to elevated rates of heart disease, strokes and a variety of cancers. It is also laced with antibiotics. Even fish today is likely to contain high levels of PCB's, mercury and other contaminants. A plant-based diet, on the other hand, has been found to reduce the overall death rate by as much as one third. And, due in large part to the conditions in which the animals are kept and the practice of mixing refuse, rendered animal parts and blood into their food, we have the outbreak of diseases such as "mad cow" etc.

I appreciate that it is not easy to break away from the meat and fish based diet we are so used to in this part of the world. But it can be done: apart from vegetables and fruit (and we are fortunate to have so much variety to choose from) there are beans, lentils, pulses and a wide variety of grains. There is also tofu and TVP (textured vegetable protein) which comes in chunks and is a good substitute for meat. And there are numerous books on the market and in your library to help you. For the sake of your health, the environment and the well-being of animals, not to mention your conscience, it is well worth the effort!

- *Brenda Gibson*

Sources: Fast Food Nation by Eric Schlosser
101 Reasons Why I'm a Vegetarian by Pamela Teisier

A SPATE OF SPRING OUTINGS

(Since our last Newsletter, the PFN have enjoyed a number of interesting Outings. Thanks to the excellent leaders: Rick Young, Barb West, Brian Calvert & Nancy Luft – Well done, Folks! Their reports follow, in chronological order.)

OUTING TO ST. JOHN'S C.A., APRIL 29

The morning of the last Sunday in April was clear, mild and probably the most pleasant day yet of this Spring. A goodly number of members joined together for a walk through the Conservation Area. We were able to see and identify many Spring flowers and with the expertise of John Potter we identified many of the trees by their bark as no leaves were on the trees at this time. Some of our group even identified some plants by smell, particularly Wild Leek and Spicebush. Not only did we have John to help us, we also had Barb West who picked out many of the birds seen. Barb did this by sight and sound. This proves when on a Nature Outing one must be ready to see, hear and smell. We had about fourteen participants.

Trees & Shrubs:- Spicebush, Sugar Maple, Red Maple, Sassafras, Red Oak, Tulip Tree, Eastern Cottonwood, Blue Beech, American Beech, Eastern White Pine, Black Ash, White Ash, Eastern Flowering Dogwood, Yellow Birch, Hop Hornbeam, White Oak, Aspen sp., Pussy Willow, Tamarack (Larch?), Black Elderberry;

Flowers:- Trout Lily, Toothwort, Red Trillium, White Trillium, Cut Leaved Toothwort, Canada Mayflower, Wild Leek, Blue Cohosh, Spring Beauty, Downy Yellow Violet, Common Blue Violet, Canada Mayflower, Round-leaved Hepatica, Skunk-Cabbage, Common Meadow-rue, Water-cress, May-Apple, Christmas Fern, Wood Fern sp., Scouring-rush;

Birds:- Red Tailed Hawk, American Crow, Yellow Shafted Flicker, Red Bellied Woodpecker, Myrtle Warbler, Black & White Warbler;

Butterflies:- Eastern Comma, Mourning Cloak,

ROCK POINT BIRDING, MAY 5, 2007

On Saturday, May 5, approximately 10 of us went to Rock Point Provincial Park on Lake Erie to do some birding.

Within the first 15 minutes after arriving, we saw a Rose-breasted Grosbeak, an Eastern Towhee and a Baltimore Oriole. As we walked around the park we saw many other birds, including:

White-crowned Sparrows; White-throated Sparrows; Yellow-rumped Warblers; Yellow Warblers; a Palm Warbler; a Black and White Warbler; a Black-Throated Blue Warbler; a Common Tern and several more Grosbeaks.

Afterwards, Rick Young took us to some ponds where we saw Northern Shovelers and Ruddy Ducks as well as some of the more common waterfowl.

According to one participant's count, we saw approximately 46 different birds that day. The weather was perfect and everyone seemed to have a good time.

- by Barb West

(Editor's note: According to one participant, on the way to Rock Point, a Redheaded Woodpecker was seen in the Lowbanks area.)

SHORT HILLS PROVINCIAL PARK, MAY 6

Once again good weather prevailed on Sunday, May 6, as Brian Calvert led about a dozen people on the Short Hills outing, starting from the Roland Road entrance and proceeding to the trail to Swayze Falls, which was flowing briskly at the time.

Along the trail, Early Meadow-rue was in bloom and Brian pointed out that the male flowers are pendulous, whilst the female flowers point upward, the better to catch wind-blown pollen.

(Continued – next page)

May-apple leaves were up, and the group also found Sharp-lobed Hepatica, Dutchman's-breeches and Squirrel-corn close together. Trout lilies were nearly over, but Trilliums and Jack-in-the-Pulpit were everywhere.

As we were returning to our starting-point, we encountered a volunteer team from Friends of Short Hills examining bluebird boxes, and some members observed Eastern Bluebird eggs and young in the boxes. Tree Swallows were also observed in flight and perching in some of the bluebird box entrances.

Oddly, a non-PFN couple from the Hamilton area, who had an interest in geology, were visiting the Park and joined our group at the parking lot, tagging along and joining in on the discussions with Brian about the limestone rock strata in the cliff at Swayze Falls. One never knows when you might meet people with shared interests!

WOODEND CONSERVATION AREA, MAY 12

On May 12, Nancy Luft led a hardy party through the gardens and woods at Woodend CA, a site with a marvelous view toward the Lake. The Woodend gardens are a curious mix of native and 'garden' species, gradually intermingling. Some of the earlier spring flowers such as Trout Lily were past prime, but a goodly number of other species were in bloom – Columbine, May-apple, Meadow-rue, Jack-in-the-Pulpit and purple Violets were evident. At a convenient tree stump which provided a table, Nancy produced a jar of Violet jelly (made from purple violets but pink in colour), which we sampled on small bread squares. *(The jelly recipe is printed, following this report – Thanks, Nancy!).*

Prowling the edge of the Escarpment above Niagara College, we could look down into the remains of a former lime kiln (partly restored?). For the birders in the party, Woodend provided some entertainment, including an Indigo Bunting, Baltimore Oriole, Red-tailed Hawk, Killdeer, and several warblers. Something for everyone....

Wild Violet Jelly

Fill any glass jar with violet blossoms and cover with boiling water. Place a lid on the jar and let the blossoms infuse for 24 hours. Next day strain the liquid off the mixture and discard the spent flowers. Add the juice of one lemon to 2 cups of violet extract and one package of commercial powdered pectin like Certo. This liquid will become a beautiful rose violet colour. Bring this to a boil and add 4 cups of sugar. Bring back to a boil and boil hard for 1 minute, then pour into sterilized jars and seal.

For easy picking just rake your fingers through the blooms.

- by Nancy Luft

VICTORIA WEEKEND, MAY 18-20

(It has been customary to organize an extended camping/motelling trip to some exotic locale out of the Peninsula. This year, only a few hardy souls were available for the trip into New York State, led by Brian Calvert.)

On Friday morning, the U.S. border guard asked us a lot of questions because unrelated people were in the same car. Early that afternoon, we arrived at Ontario County Park, north of Naples. There is a fantastic view of a U-shaped glacial valley from the top of a hill. The campsites looked like they would be good for a future visit. Then we went to Big Tor Wildlife Area and explored two bedrock ravines, eventually discovering a beautiful little waterfall pouring into a round pool. In warmer weather, we would have been tempted to swim. Finally, we arrived at Watkins Glen State Park and hiked the glen for about a mile each way. The sinuous erosion of bedrock is quite impressive, and a lot of work has been done to make it accessible, but there are many steps to climb. The parking lot costs \$6 per car, but you can walk in free if you park elsewhere in town. The campsite cost noticeably more than we expected due to numerous extra charges. *(Continued on next page)*

VICTORIA WEEKEND, MAY 18-20 (Cont'd)

On Saturday we visited Montour Falls to the south and had a look at the rail trail. Then we hiked around Finger Lakes National Forest for the rest of the day. There are enough trails to spend a week there, so we could only check out a few. There were plenty of spring wildflowers in bloom. A fawn was curled up only a few feet away from the trail! On Saturday night, camping was free.

On Sunday morning, we hiked on more trails in the National Forest. As we headed home, we checked out the string of waterfalls mentioned in Bruce Kershner's "Secret Places" book. Some of the directions need to be changed, since some land owners have withdrawn permission to trespass. The town of Akron has an interesting park with trails along the river. There was a big lineup to get back into Canada, and the border guard laughed when I declared a half-eaten bag of potato chips.

P.S. Brian Delano got some good digital photos!

- by Brian Calvert

(Nice to know that some Canada Revenue staff still have a sense of humour! Ed.)

Musings: Does anyone else ever wonder whether Turkey Vultures ever check the 'Best Before...' date?



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).
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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 2007:

Jan. 28; April 10; Sept. 30

2006/7 PFN EXECUTIVE

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