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# The Peninsula Naturalist

Volume 217

Newsletter of the Peninsula Field Naturalists Club

April 2008

## President's Message – April 2008

Ah, Spring! The time of year when buds are swelling, grass seems to be greener, garden centres are promoting their latest new plants and gadgets - and the trash emerges from the dwindling snowbanks. If this makes you nostalgic, then you are probably just itchin' to get out there and plant something, to get some dirt under your fingernails, to commune with nature. Well, friend, you're not alone. In many ways you can relieve that urge to be out and about - some more strenuous than others, but all very satisfying at the end of the day.

Do you enjoy planting, placing little seedlings in the warm earth (green side up, brown side down)? The Niagara Restoration Council has a number of sites in mind where you can scratch that itch for an hour or two - including a new plan for naturalizing several hundred acres around Lake Gibson. Corey Burant and his crew would like to meet you.

Do you feel like creating some cosy nesting spots for birds? The PFN at one time placed a number of bird-boxes in Malcolmson Eco-Park, some of which require maintenance - and Bob Layton would be happy to show you where they are (in dry weather). Earth-Day at Malcolmson is April 26.

How about birding? Each year in May, the Baillie Birdathon sponsored by Bird Studies Canada offers the chance to enjoy your favorite pastime and raise some cash for both the BSC and your local nature club. When was the last time you joined in?

For me, this spring is the kickoff of the third (and final) season of inventorying with the Natural Heritage Inventory being conducted by the NPCA and its partners. It's been a satisfying effort and a learning experience for the past two years, plus a lot of fun prowling the 'outback' of Niagara with very knowledgeable naturalists. The results so far have been worth it - and the photography opportunities make up for two summers of flirting with poison ivy...

Whatever you decide to do in nature, get out and do it! You'll feel better for doing it (except for petting the poison ivy!).

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### Special Offer

While I'm on the topic of sprucing up your landscape and greening your surroundings I have a special deal for you - a deal whereby the PFN can acquire some extra cash. How?

The good folks at Broadway Gardens have a fundraising offer. For every purchase at either Broadway Gardens in St. Catharines or at Rice Road Greenhouses in Fonthill between May 1, 2008 and June 16, 2008, they will donate 5% of all purchases back to the Club.

All you have to do (besides paying for your purchase) is to tell the cashier you are a supporter of The Peninsula Field Naturalists Club or "The PFN". (Yes, I know this amounts to advertising for them, but last year the PFN made about \$45 by participating!).



## WHITHER THE BOREAL FOREST?

Anyone who read Lionel Gould's column 'Protecting the Boreal Forest and Birds' in the St. Catharines *Standard* on Thursday, April 10, 2008, should now have a basic understanding of what the Canadian Boreal Initiative is all about. For those who missed that column, page 5 of the Spring 2008 volume of 'On Nature' explains what this Initiative should mean to Ontarians. For anyone who missed both items, here is a brief update.

The Boreal Forest in Canada extends from Yukon to Newfoundland, mainly north of the 50<sup>th</sup> parallel. Most of this land has been glaciated, and now is largely a black spruce/white spruce forest with shallow moss-covered topsoil, bogs and frozen subsoil. In certain areas, other tree species such as aspen, poplar and tamarack intermingle with the spruces. The forest represents 25% of the world's remaining forest, and is the largest intact forest on earth. It stores twice as much carbon as tropical forests of equivalent size.

For birds, the Boreal Forest is vital. Over 300 bird species nest in this region (about 40% of all North American birds), numbering between 1.7 and 3 billion birds. It is the summer home for many of the wood warbler species, a permanent home for grey jays, boreal chickadees and great grey owls, and a breeding ground for about 38% of all waterfowl.

The Boreal Forest Conservation Framework, an initiative begun in 2003, is aimed at establishing a network of large interconnected protected areas covering about 50% of the country's Boreal Forest and using leading-edge sustainable development practices in the remaining areas. The Framework involves industries and corporations, particularly those with activities in the Boreal, to commit to applying these sustainable practices in their spheres of activity. The Framework is guided by a Leadership Council of 18 members, including

the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, Domtar Inc., Ducks Unlimited, The Nature Conservancy, The Pembina Institute, Suncor Energy Ltd., Treaty 8 First Nations of Alberta, World Wildlife Fund, and 10 others – the complete list is on their website ([www.borealcanada.org/lead-council-members-e.php](http://www.borealcanada.org/lead-council-members-e.php)). The Framework is also endorsed by over 175 companies and societies.

Since about 90% of the Boreal Forest is on public or Aboriginal traditional lands, the Canadian Boreal Initiative (CBI) tries to work with governments at all levels to advance conservation and sustainable development solutions for the Boreal. The CBI also encourages interested organizations to sign Memoranda of Understanding (MOU's), which commit the organizations to take action in promoting conservation and sustainable development.

Curiously, although the Government of Newfoundland/Labrador, the Government of the Northwest Territories, and also several First Nations organizations have signed MOU's, thus far the Government of Canada and the Province of Ontario have not. As a result, organizations such as Ontario Nature, Nature Canada and others are sponsoring petitions asking the Prime Minister and the premiers of all provinces to endorse the Boreal Forest Conservation Framework to protect 50% of the Boreal Forest. At present, protected areas cover less than 12% of the Boreal while over 30% has been allocated to industry. The Environmental Commissioner of Ontario recently commented on discrepancies between Ontario's government environmental policies and the actual practices that allow intrusive development in northern Ontario.

Admittedly, some northern Ontario cities such as Thunder Bay, Sault Ste-Marie and others are in economic decline, but the policies of companies which have created this situation are exactly what adherence to the Boreal Initiative would mitigate or prevent.



## PFN SPRING/SUMMER OUTINGS

### WAINFLEET BOG & HAROLD MITCHELL RESERVE

Saturday, April 26, 2008, 10:00 a.m.

Look for spring wild flowers and shrubs, together with the Niagara Falls Nature Club. Meet at McDonalds, Highway 3, Port Colborne. Bring rubber boots and lunch. Leader: Rick Young 905-734-6226.

### HAMILTON CONSERVATION 50TH ANNIVERSARY

Saturday, May 3, 2008, 8:00 a.m.

Carpool with Brian Calvert (905-892-6267) to celebrate Hamilton Conservation's 50th anniversary. There should be free admission to some of their conservation areas. Watch their website for details.

### SHORT HILLS SANCTUARY CLEANUP

Sunday May 4, 2008, 10:00 a.m.

Please help the Hamilton club with their annual maintenance of Short Hills sanctuary, at the corner of Metler Road and Centre Street, east of North Pelham. Bring lunch and tools. Many hands make light work, so there should be lots of time to enjoy the wild flowers. Contact: Brian Calvert 905-892-6267.

### ROCK POINT BIRDING

Saturday, May 10, 2008, 9:00 a.m.

This annual birding outing meets at the Port Colborne McDonalds Restaurant on Highway 3 for the carpool. Bring a lunch. Leader: Barb West 905-935-5339.

### MALCOLMSON PARK WILDFLOWERS

Sunday, May 11, 2008, 10:00 a.m.

Meet at the north end of Niagara Street, St. Catharines. We will walk the trails to see what is blooming. Leader: John Potter 905-892-2566.

### ALLEGANY NATIONAL FOREST, PA., USA

May 16-19, 2008

Primitive camping; hiking and exploring crevice caves. Leader: Brian Calvert 905-892-6267.

### FRIENDS OF SHORT HILLS WILD FLOWER WALK

Saturday May 24, 2008, 10:00 a.m. The first part of the walk is on the wheelchair-accessible Paleozoic Path. Meet at the Roland Road entrance. Leader: Brian Calvert 905-892-6267.

### ANNUAL WEEKEND OUTING

June 6-8, 2008

On Saturday June 7, we will explore Owen Sound, including Inglis Falls and the West Rocks. This area is known for the Harts Tongue Fern and it is the right time of year to look for orchids. On Friday and Sunday, we will explore the Bighead and Beaver Valleys. Bognor Marsh is a good place to see migrating birds. Leader: Brian Calvert 905-892-6267.

### 'SEASONS END' OUTING & BARBECUE

Saturday, June 21, 2008, 10:00 a.m. (Rain date June 22).

Niagara Shores (on north side of Lakeshore Rd., between St. Catharines and Niagara-on-the-Lake, about 0.75 km east of Four Mile Creek Rd. Meet in the parking lot, opposite Niven Rd.) Features woods, marsh, lakeshore and bank swallows. Bring lawn chairs for the picnic/barbeque. Leader: John Potter 905-892-2566.

### SHENANDOAH

Late June or early July

My brother, Peter Calvert, has invited me to visit his octagonal house in Grottoes, Virginia. This is near the Blue Ridge Mountains and Shenandoah River (just like the song). He has guest rooms for a few friends. Contact: Brian Calvert 905-892-6267.

### BRUCE TRAIL HIKING & CAMPING

July or August, whenever we can get a carpool together. Contact: Brian Calvert 905-892-6267.

*(Thanks to Brian and the other Outings leaders: - Ed)*



## FROM TREES TO WOOD: with Rob Ritchie

The February 2008 meeting of the PFN, by chance, fell on a night when a winter storm was forecast. Not a surprising possibility, considering what the winter of 2007-08 had already delivered in the way of precipitation – this is a completely opposite winter from the balmy one of 2006-07. Nonetheless, a good crowd gathered to learn about wood, from a long-time fancier of trees and their by-products.

Robert Ritchie has been an admirer of trees and wood for his lifetime, even to having been a firewood seller at one time. However, it was the aesthetic aspects of wood which he emphasized during his presentation, which became a real show-and-tell event.

Robert was amply prepared, with a travel-trunk-full of assorted woods, including even a slice of palm-wood. He admitted to having a 'modest' collection of blocks (standard size: 3 by 6 by 0.5 inches) of about 500 species of woods but noted that some collectors have collections numbering in the 1000's of species of trees. (A 70-year-old book on trees in my own collection mentions about 1200 species of trees in the USA alone).

To be sure that everyone understood the intricacies of wood, Robert showed us in diagrams and drawings how wood is produced by trees. It is amazing that both the bark and the wood of a tree develops from one thin cell layer, the cambium – without which, the tree cannot live. The different cell layers – radial cells and longitudinal cells – when wood is cut will show a different appearance, depending whether the cut is a cross-section, a radial slice, or a tangential cut. All the patterns that we see in wooden furniture result from each different way of cutting the wood. Bringing those patterns out into a pleasing design is the skill of the woodcarver – or the cabinet-maker.

Robert had brought many sample specimens from his wood collection, demonstrating the characteristics of wood – the variation in weight from the lightweight Balsa (about the same weight as styrofoam) to the waxy heavy Lignum Vitae (so dense that it sinks when placed in water); the varying colours from jet-black Ebony to the yellowish Sumach to the purplish heartwood of Lilac and many other shades; the variation of annual growth rings from the ring-porous wood of Elms with their zig-zag pattern to the ancient (1500 years) White Cedar with annular rings so thin they could not be counted without a hand-lens or a microscope.

A special curiosity to me was a stick of 'bog oak', which is oak wood that has fallen into and been immersed in a peat bog, which preserves and colours the wood to a dark olive shade. From this piece, it is easy to imagine how a full-sized Viking ship could be preserved in the acid darkness of a peat bog – as in fact such ships have been found and exhumed in perfect states of preservation.

There was hardly enough time to pore over the impressive display of books about wood (Robert estimates he has about 300). However, it was a special treat to see Robert's volumes of "The American Woods" by Romeyn Beck Hough. These rare books have pages of paper-thin sections of actual wood, cut in cross-section, radial, and tangential slices and mounted in cutouts on the paper. I marvelled at the skill and patience of the original 'author' of these volumes; the sections are thin enough to be translucent when held up to a light!

As it happens, I have a reprint version of Hough's book, titled "The Wood Book", with the wood sections as printed photos rather than the actual wood. Although well done, the copy in no way matches the beauty or technical skill of the original.

Thanks to Robert for a fascinating evening!



**January 6, 2008 Lake Ontario  
Mid-Winter Waterfowl  
Inventory-Niagara**

This year there were 15 participants and we covered the area from Fifty Point to the Base of the Falls. As we did last year, we covered only the shore line, with the exception of walking the east side of the Port Weller piers which extend out about 1 km into the lake from the shore and protect the Welland Canal from wave action. The Canal often has a number of sheltering ducks in it. We also observe ducks in the old Canal from Lakeshore Road out into the lake at Port Dalhousie (it is not necessary to walk out on to the piers).

A total of 23 species of waterfowl were seen. Large numbers of Canada Geese (2734 birds) and Red-breasted Mergansers (5381 birds) were observed. Unusual sightings were a Peregrine Falcon and a Barnacle Goose not far from Victoria Avenue. Next years' count is Sunday January 11, 2009.

Total party hours from 50 Point to Niagara on the Lake = 15. Total man hours from 50 Point to Niagara on the Lake = 60.

**PARTICIPANTS:**

Brian Ahara  
Barbara Austen  
Manley Baarda  
John Black\*  
Drew Campbell  
Blayne Farnan  
Jean Farnan  
Marcia Jacklin  
Brian Joule  
Carol O'Shea  
Kayo Roy  
Tim Seburn  
Maggie Smiley  
John Stevens  
Scott Watson

\*Coordinator and info provider – Thanks, John!

**Duck Count 2008**

NIAGARA SPECIES	Total
Common Loon	1
Pied-billed Grebe	1
Horned Grebe	1
Red-necked Grebe	0
Grebe sp.	1
Double-crested	16
Cormorant	
Tundra Swan	0
Trumpeter Swan	0
Mute Swan	0
Snow Goose	0
Canada Goose	2734
Wood Duck	0
Green-winged Teal	0
American Black Duck	17
Mallard	509
Northern Pintail	0
Northern Shoveller	0
Gadwall	0
American Widgeon	0
Canvasback	0
Redhead	4
Ring-necked Duck	0
Tufted Duck	0
Greater Scaup	1012
Lesser Scaup	12
Scaup (sp.)	16
Harlequin duck	0
Long-tailed Duck	2430
Black Scoter	2
White-winged Scoter	609
Surf Scoter	13
Common Goldeneye	2474
Bufflehead	1012
Hooded Merganser	1
Common Merganser	2717
Red-breasted Merganser	5381
Merganser Sp.	30
Ruddy Duck	0
American Coot	4
Red-throated Loon	1
King Eider	0
Barnacle Goose	1
Unknown	43
Merlin	0
Peregrine Falcon	1
Domestic?	6
Total	18999



## RESTORING NIAGARA - AND MORE

The Peninsula Field Naturalists were treated to a double-header on March 24/08.

First on the program was Corey Burant, Environmental Program Manager for the Niagara Restoration Council (NRC). Operating mainly in Niagara, the NRC has tackled and completed a variety of projects ranging from streambank restoration and riparian plantings, to removal of fish-barriers in the Welland River and tributaries, to pondbank stabilizing on golf courses and creeks.

The Council cooperates with other agencies having complimentary programs, such as sharing tree-planting activities with Land Care Niagara, and is currently preparing a project to naturalize a large tract of land around Lake Gibson, in cooperation with Ontario Power Generation, the Friends of Mel Swart Park, and other partners such as the PFN. Another current project is the replanting of about 60 Cherry Birch tree seedlings on the Lancaster property where this species was first identified in Niagara. The seedlings were grown to planting-size at the Guelph Arboretum.

As with many other nature-related NGO organizations, funding is a continuing issue with the NRC and partnerships with other agencies helps pay the way toward a greener Niagara. Corey illustrated his talk with digital pictures of many of the sites that the NRC has transformed, both current and during the tenure of his predecessor, David Beamer.

The second part of the program was a birding-travelogue of a recent trip to Trinidad and Tobago, photographed and narrated by Margarete Kormendy. The many colourful birds were generally unfamiliar to most of us, although now and then it was possible to guess to what family or genus a bird probably belonged. The scenery of the Islands was also gorgeous, stirring notions of getting away from the Niagara winter.

## SAKI TO ME?

Last year, in an item titled "No Fuel Like An Old Fuel", I commented on the USA's plan for converting corn-grain into ethanol for use as motor fuel, a plan being fast-tracked to increase the capacity for large-scale ethanol production, over the concerns of the farming community that feed-grain would become too expensive and livestock production would suffer. Mexico was also ramping up production of yellow corn, anticipating export sales, but causing its citizens to worry that food-grade white corn would become scarce. Guess what? In Mexico, corn for human food became scarce and people started salting away a little extra.

Now the Americas may be heavily dependent on corn and wheat, but a large part of the world, primarily in Asia and Africa, depends instead on rice as a staple grain. Envision the requirement for rice to feed just the population of China alone (about 1 billion people, more or less). Now factor in the situation that Southeast Asia is beginning to look toward rice as a feedstock for fuel ethanol.

And just as in Mexico, so too in the Orient some folks are just worried enough that they are hoarding a bit. Officially, the Chinese government has a stash of about 40-50 million tons of rice in its emergency stockpile. Which seems like a lot, until you calculate that if each person in China consumed 1 pound of rice per day, the stockpile represents between 400 and 550 days' supply – even at zero population growth. And as panic-hoarding begins, up go prices – to where the prediction is that rice will hit \$1000/ton before year's-end. That's \$0.50 per pound – in a country where \$0.50 is a chunk of money for an unskilled labourer.

My point? Simply, there may appear to be a world of difference between North America and the Orient, but to the farmers and the under-privileged, this global grain deficiency is getting beyond just worrisome. I wish my crystal ball showed a better picture, but right now the clouds are gathering... in my humble opinion...



## BRAIN FOOD

Imagine what the North American hemisphere might be like if Henry Ford had not invented the assembly-line to mass-produce the horseless carriage. Suppose General Motors and the other automobile makers had not bought up and shut down almost all the light-rail electric transit systems in North American cities – how different would our cities be from what they are today?

These are just some of the themes that run through the book “Urban Meltdown”, by Clive Doucet. In his role as a City Councillor in Ottawa, and as a poet who was elected to public office almost inadvertently, Doucet has had much cause to ponder the current state of North American society and the role that the automobile and its chief supporter, the oil industry, have had in shaping the very landscape and our present society.

What are the thoughts of a small-town Acadian Cape Bretoner, when he arrives in the Toronto of the 1960’s, amid the era of protest, civil rights marches, rockstars and ‘Woodstock’? How does an aspiring varsity football player get tangled up in the protest to stop the Spadina Expressway? And what are his views on other expressways, which are built over the rubble of demolished heritage buildings?

Doucet has been on that idealist’s journey and does not mince words in stating his opinions of some of the current political ‘movers and shakers’. He makes a good case for the notion that the problem with Canada is that, while the city governments have all the responsibilities, the federal government has all the money and taxation-powers. A similar case was made by the late Jane Jacobs in her book ‘Dark Age Ahead, (Chap.5 “Dumbed-Down Taxes”), and the two authors clearly have mutual respect for each others’ opinions on city management.

Doucet also presents a thought-provoking question as to the mind-set of a superpower country spending billions of dollars to develop missile-defence systems – for defence against what? Is this an effective way to spend tax dollars while cities can’t afford subsidized housing?

Without giving away much more of Clive Doucet’s message (which sometimes drifts into a rant about ‘Big Oil’), it is refreshing to read the thoughts of a city councillor who is convinced that there must be – and is – a better way for society to be organized. “Urban Meltdown” is worth the time, if you have ever thought that somewhere, somehow, our system of urban organization went off the rails.

Clive Doucet: *Urban Meltdown*. New Society Publishers. \$20.95 Cdn.

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### “The Bear Facts”

The following photo was provided by Corey Burant. The picture was taken while Corey was employed in Chapleau, ON. As Corey said, the opportunities for recreation in Chapleau included considerable time for photography. (and maybe running?) Thanks, Corey!





## EVENTS OF IMMEDIATE INTEREST

### INNINGS:

The **ANNUAL PFN POTLUCK DINNER** will be at Mountainview United Church, 150 Glendale Ave., St. Catharines, on Monday, April 28 /08, starting at 6:00 p.m. As has been the custom, please bring your ex-treasures for the draw – draw tickets will be \$0.25. Those with surnames beginning with A-L please bring salad or desserts, surnames M-Z bring first course. All bring cutlery, cups, plates. Anyone willing to help set up, please arrive about 5:30 p.m.

### OUTINGS:

**NOTE THE SCHEDULE OF OUTINGS ON PAGE 3 OF THIS NEWSLETTER. ALL OUTINGS ARE WEATHER-DEPENDENT – PLEASE CHECK LOCAL FORECASTS – NOTE THE RAIN DATE FOR THE END-OF-SEASON EVENT**



### 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

### The Peninsula Naturalist Newsletter

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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 2008:**

**Jan. 28; April 10; Sept. 30**

### 2007/08 PFN EXECUTIVE

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