



The Peninsula Naturalist

Volume 223

Newsletter of the Peninsula Field Naturalists Club

February 2010

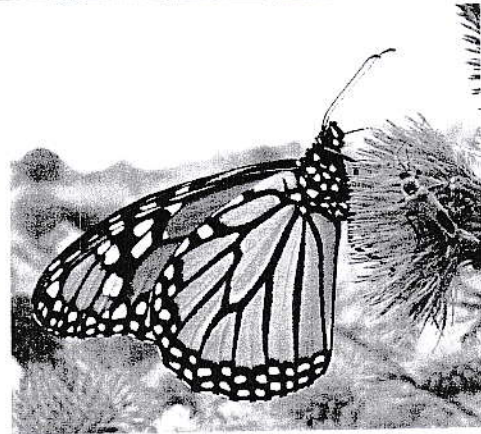
PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE – FEB. 2010

What A Winter! Anyone keeping track of global weather events in the past few months might be forgiven if they've arrived at the conclusion that Nature has gone nuts. Record snowfalls in Washington DC, earthquakes in Haiti, flooding in the American Southwest, mudslides in Mexico, heavy snow in the UK, rain on the Olympic parade in Vancouver – and that's just a quick sample of recent happenings around the planet.

In trying to understand what is happening, in typical human fashion, conflicting opinions are being expressed. There are those who deny that humans are affecting climate-change. They would have us believe that this strange weather is just 'business as usual'. (I have my own opinion on that topic, as do many other folks).

However, the real gist of the argument is to decide whether we are experiencing 'natural' climate-change (which would come about regardless of whatever humankind is doing), or 'human-made' climate change (as a result of human activities, like releasing excessive greenhouse gasses, etc.).

As I see it, 'natural' climate-change is a process that scientists believe has happened before, a process which has led to several previous 'ice-ages' – most recently about 12000 years ago. The 'human-made' climate-change could result from human activities, like overloading Earth's atmosphere with various gasses (methane, carbon dioxide), thus kick-starting a cycling process between overheating the planet and then over-cooling it - which could cause an ice-age.



Unfortunately, other creatures on the planet can only react to whatever weather comes their way. As an example, heavy rains in the hill-country of Mexico have caused huge mud-slides on some of the slopes – most probably slopes denuded of trees by over-logging. One such mud-slide episode has essentially wiped out one of the over-wintering groves of the Monarch butterfly – as if that poor critter wasn't already endangered by loss of habitat, and recovering from the loss of populations because of a severe winter a few years ago!

In response, the Niagara Parks Commission and Butterfly Conservatory are planning to greatly enhance their outdoor plantings of flowers used as food-plants by Monarch butterflies. They are also raising funds for the project by presenting a concert at the Butterfly Conservatory – call Deanna Lindblad for details. Besides supporting this worthy objective, we can all do our part by increasing our own plantings of milkweeds and protecting wild-grown milkweeds to ensure a food-source for Monarchs that do make the journey back from Mexico.

2010 SPRING NATURE CALENDAR

9TH ANNUAL MAPLE SYRUP FEST

Saturday, March 6, 2010, 10:00 a.m.

Meet at the corner of Metler Road and Centre Street, North Pelham, for a winter walk, followed by a pancake lunch at White Meadows Farm. John Potter 905-892-2566.

NORFOLK WILDLIFE FESTIVAL

Saturday, March 13, 2010, 9:00 a.m.

Exhibitors: Long Point Region Conservation Authority, Norfolk Field Naturalists and Muskoka Wildlife Centre. 172 South Drive, Simcoe. Arrange carpool with Brian Calvert 905-892-6267 by March 10.

LONG POINT TUNDRA SWANS

Saturday, March 20, 2010, 8:30 a.m.

Niagara Falls Nature Club carpools from Fonthill Shoppers Drug Mart. Dress warmly and bring lunch. Don Mills 905-892-3973.

ROCKWAY FALLS

Sunday, March 28, 2010, 10:00 a.m.

Meet at Rockway Community Center to tour the conservation area. Brian Calvert 905-892-6267.

ANNUAL PENINSULA HAWK WATCH

Friday, April 2, 9:00 a.m. - all day.

Beamer Conservation Area south of Grimsby.

A fine opportunity to see many species of raptors and meet birders from all over. Especially good for beginners! John Potter 905-892-2566.

STONEY CREEK GEOLOGY

Saturday, April 10, 2010, 9:00 a.m.

Meet at the birding tower at Beamer Conservation Area. Carpool along the escarpment, with views over Stoney Creek. Wear old clothes, bring lunch and a flashlight; join Hamilton Naturalists Club in the afternoon to explore the Eramosa Karst (small caves!). Brian Calvert 905-892-6267.

ECO-FEST NIAGARA

Sunday, April 18, 2010, 10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Climate Action Niagara's 3rd annual eco-fest at the Niagara College Glendale campus, Niagara-on-the-Lake, with talks and exhibitors. A trail

leads past the ponds to Woodend Conservation Area. Free admission. Mark Goldsworthy 289-820-6440.

MARCY'S WOODS

Saturday, April 24, 2010, 9:30 a.m.

Bert Miller Nature Club meets at the end of Holloway Bay Road, Fort Erie to examine the flora and fauna. Tim Seburn 905-871-2577.

HEARTLAND FOREST FROGFEST

Saturday, May 1, 2010, 9:00 a.m.

Bert Miller Nature Club hosts this annual event at Heartland Forest on Kalar Road, Niagara Falls. Paul Philp 905-894-2723.

ST. JOHNS CONSERVATION AREA

Saturday, May 1, 2010, 10:00 a.m.

Niagara Falls Nature Club meets north of Fonthill to look for wildflowers and birds. Bring lunch. Janet Damude 905-892-2158.

SHORT HILLS SANCTUARY CLEANUP

Sunday, May 2, 2010, 10:00 a.m.

Please help the Hamilton Naturalists Club with the annual maintenance of their sanctuary at the corner of Metler Road and Centre Street, east of North Pelham. Plenty of wildflowers! Bring lunch and tools. Brian Calvert 905-892-6267.

PORT WELLER WILDFLOWERS & BIRDS

Saturday, May 8, 2010, 9:00 a.m.

Meet at Malcolmson Eco-Park, north of Niagara Street in St. Catharines, for a walk through the forest to the west pier of Port Weller. Brian Calvert 905-892-6267.

SPRING MIGRATORY BIRDS

Saturday, May 15, 2010, 9:00 a.m.

Bert Miller Nature Club goes birding around Old Fort Erie. Learn how to use binoculars. Tim Seburn & Marcie Jacklin 905-871-2577.

ROCK POINT BIRDING 9.00

Sunday, May 16, 2010, 10:00 a.m.

Our annual birding outing meets at the Port Colborne Macdonalds Restaurant on Highway 3 for the carpool. Bring lunch. Barb West 905-935-5339.

MORRIS ON MUSSELS

When I was a youngster, we kids prowled along the river looking for 'clams'. Now, decades later, Dr. Todd Morris has finally set the record straight - those were fresh-water mussels. In his presentation to the November PFN meeting on 'Ontario's Fresh-water Mussels - A Vanishing Treasure', Todd gave us a fascinating look at these unappreciated creatures, plus a less-than-hopeful view of their future.

The Great Lakes basin, along with the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers, is a main habitat of many of the world's freshwater mussels. Canadian inland waters host about 55 species, of which about 15 species are now endangered. Water quality and alien population pressure are causes of endangerment. The alien Zebra and Quagga mussels are much to blame - not by parasitizing the native species, but because the aliens attach themselves to the shells of the natives, reducing their ability to gather food, and weighing-down the natives' shells to the point where they are suffocated in the mud-bottoms of waterways.

Most of us would not consider mussels as being long-lived animals. However, Todd stated that techniques for determining age have shown that some individuals may live to near 100 years. Also, although the shell of the mussel may have rings similar to the annular rings of trees, these shell-rings are not a measure of age. In fact, the rings may be formed when the animal is under stress - such as when it is taken out of water and then replaced again.

The means of reproduction of the various species differs with the family and genus to which they belong, and in fact the taxonomy is determined largely by the reproductive type. However, all require a host fish as part of their life cycle. Essentially, they are parasites of the fish. Their reproductive strategies vary with the species. Some species produce a juvenile stage called 'glochidia', which is inhaled by a fish, attaches itself to the gills of the host fish, and develops there for some time, as much as a year, before dropping off and settling on the bottom

of a stream or lake. If the mussel is able to develop on many different species of fish, the parent mussel usually produces huge numbers of glochidia (hundreds of thousands) and simply releases them into the water - basically, any fish species will do as a host.

However, some mussel species are very specific, with the glochidia only maturing on one species of fish. These mussels have a number of strategies for ensuring that the correct host fish becomes infested with the glochidia. Some mussels actually 'go fishing' for the host fish species, often by having modified organs which act like a lure for the particular fish host-species. One species of mussel actually traps the head of the host fish between the two halves of the shell, and holds the fish captive until the mussel has forced all of its glochidia into the fish's mouth and gills.

Regarding 'mother-of-pearl' buttons - around the early 1900's freshwater mussels were collected and the shells were used for button-making, by cutting disks out of the shell. Usually, the biggest (i.e. the breeding stock) mussels were used. These shells were collected in huge quantities; up to several hundred tonnes per year were taken from the Grand and the Thames Rivers in Ontario. Naturally, with the breeding stock being reduced, the mussel populations dropped dramatically. This, and the competition of foreigners like Zebra mussels, sadly depleted the numbers of the various species in Ontario rivers. A few are actually multiplying, but the future looks questionable for many of the Ontario species of fresh-water mussels. Recovery may be a longshot.

Asked about other invasive foreign species of concern, Todd spoke about the Asian Carp, which he described as a serious threat to the Great Lakes and Ontario's rivers. This fish is an escapee from commercial culture, has invaded the Mississippi River, and is currently being kept out of the Great Lakes by an electric barrier in a canal in Chicago. (At time of writing, a news report has just announced that the Carp has probably breached the barrier and will be in Lake Michigan).

ST. CATHARINES CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT - DECEMBER 20, 2009

The Peninsula Field Naturalists held their Christmas Bird Count on December 20, 2009. It was a beautiful day to be out in the field, with temperatures hovering between 0° and -5°. Although the morning was cloudy, the afternoon was sunny, a great day to be outside. It turned out to be a great birding day too.

We tallied 76 species plus one (Harlequin Duck) on count week. This was about average for the count. We did tally 29,682 individuals, which was the highest number of individuals in 12 years.

This year we had 51 participants, including eleven birders who were new to our count. We spent in total 82.5 hours in the field and walked or drove 516 miles.

Many thanks are due to all the participants. Also a big thank you to Mary and John Potter, Dora Young, Nancy Smith and Janice Haines for helping to organize this year's count and 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.

This year we had record high counts of Canada Goose (4258), American Wigeon (2-tie and only the 5th time on the count), Hooded Merganser (119), Wild Turkey (138), Bonaparte's Gull (1025), Red-bellied Woodpecker (51), and Carolina Wren (21).

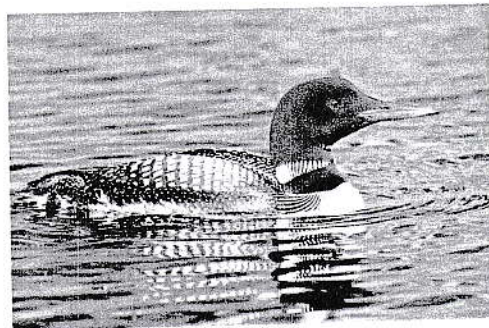
American Robins (717) and European Starlings (13,093) were both the 2nd highest counts. Common Goldeneyes (335), and Red-tailed Hawks (181) were the highest counts in 15 years or more.

A single Little Gull was only the 2nd record for the count. Two Black Scoters were only the 3rd record for the count. A single Merlin and Ring-necked Duck were only the 5th records for the count.

Cedar waxwings (21) were the lowest count in 20 years. We missed counting Lesser Scaup and Horned Lark.

PARTICIPANTS:

Brian Ahara, Rhonda Armstrong, Barbara Austin, John Black, Peter BonEnfant, Peter Booker, Jacob Bruxer, Cindy Cartwright, Paul Chapman, Sue Chapman, Barb Charleton, Paula Clark, Trevor Confield, Carl Damude, Janet Damude, Don Dimond, Elaine Dimond, Rob Dobos, Jason Elliott, Chris Escott, Denys Gardiner, Simon Gawn, Cathy Giancario, Steve Gillis, Jean Hampton, Don Heatherton, Bob Highcock, Carol Horvat, Marcie Jacklin, Myra Kennedy, Nabil Khairallah, Irene Kiers, Mike Kiers, Natalie Kiers, Kara Kristjanson, Ray Landry, Eric Maki, Kirsten Maki, Gisele Mills, Roman Olszewski, Kayo Roy, Karin Schneider, Tim Seburn, Dave Smith, Pat Smith, Roy Sorgenfrei, John Stevens, Chris Street, Tom Thomas, Rob Waldhuber, Rick Young.



HELLOO THERE !!

**HAVE YOU BOUGHT YOUR COPY OF
'NIAGARA BIRDS' YET?**

It only costs 55¢ for me to own or to give to your favorite bird-loving friend or relative! You should see John Black or Kayo Roy about reserving your own copy – why wait?

Snow Goose	1		
Canada Goose	4258		
Mute Swan	21		
American Wigeon	2	Eastern Screech-Owl	10
American Black Duck	13	Great Horned Owl	5
Mallard	1024	Belted Kingfisher	6
Duck sp.	45	Red-bellied Woodpecker	51
Redhead	1	Downy Woodpecker	109
Ring-necked Duck	1	Hairy Woodpecker	24
Greater Scaup	42	Northern Flicker	37
Harlequin Duck - count week		Northern Shrike	2
White-winged Scoter	125	Blue Jay	357
Black Scoter	2	American Crow	213
Long-tailed Duck	650	Black-capped Chickadee	408
Bufflehead	148	Tufted Titmouse	4
Common Goldeneye	335	Red-breasted Nuthatch	13
Hooded Merganser	119	White-breasted Nuthatch	81
Common Merganser	327	Brown Creeper	10
Red-breasted Merganser	235	Carolina Wren	21
Wild Turkey	138	Golden-crowned Kinglet	20
Red-throated Loon	5	Eastern Bluebird	59
Common Loon	2	Hermit Thrush	1
Horned Grebe	1	American Robin	717
Double-crested Cormorant	14	Northern Mockingbird	58
Great Blue Heron	8	European Starling	13093
Bald Eagle	1	Cedar Waxwing	21
Northern Harrier	8	American Tree Sparrow	305
Sharp-shinned Hawk	7	Song Sparrow	8
Cooper's Hawk	10	Swamp Sparrow	2
Accipiter sp.	1	White-throated Sparrow	14
Red-tailed Hawk	181	White-crowned Sparrow	2
Rough-legged Hawk	1	Dark-eyed Junco	532
Buteo sp	1	Snow Bunting	9
Hawk sp	1	Northern Cardinal	268
American Kestrel	30	Brown-headed Cowbird	9
Merlin	1	House Finch	375
American Coot	3	Pine Siskin	7
Little Gull	1	American Goldfinch	280
Bonaparte's Gull	1025	House Sparrow	1745
Ring-billed Gull	373		
Herring Gull	190	Total individuals	29682
Glaucous Gull	2	Total species	76
Great Black-backed Gull	22		
Gull sp.	15		
Rock Pigeon	614		
Mourning Dove	802		

(Thanks to Marcie Jacklin for acting as 'chief bird wrangler' once again, and to Nancy Smith as 'understudy wrangler'!)

EARTH DAY- APRIL 24, 2010
MALCOLMSON ECO-PARK
 Annual clean-up/spruce up day plus
 Native Tree and Plant Sale
 8:00 a.m.– 1:00 p.m.
 Niagara St./ Lakeshore Rd, St. Catharines
"It's not easy being green – but it's nice!"

**JANUARY 10/ 2010 LAKE ONTARIO
MID-WINTER WATERFOWL SURVEY –
NIAGARA**

There were 13 participants in the Survey; area covered was unchanged from last year. The counters covered only the Lake Ontario shore line, from 50 Point to Niagara-on-the-Lake, with the exception of walking the east and west sides 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. At Port Dalhousie, we also observed ducks in the old Canal from Lakeshore Road out into the lake (it is not necessary to walk out on to the piers). The results of the annual waterfowl count are shared with Glenn Coady at the OMNR.

A total of 20 species were seen; the most numerous species was Long-tailed Duck. Ice conditions were terrible. At many stops, only leads in the ice with a few ducks were visible out to the limit of our ability to count. In spite of the ice, we had a record number of Mallard and Long-tailed Ducks!! And a near-record overall total.

Barnacle Goose Directions (presumably the same bird as seen last year.): A single Barnacle Goose was seen. At Grimsby, exit the QEW at Christie Street. Head north toward the lake. On Lakeside Ave., turn left to Murray Street Park, or turn right to Whittaker Park, or go to the stop sign and then turn left and go down the hill to the Pump House parking lot at the mouth of the Forty Mile Creek.

Total party hours from 50 Point to Niagara-on-the-Lake = 13.25. Total person-hours from 50 Point to Niagara-on-the-Lake = 57.5.

Participants were: John Black (Coordinator), Pete BonEnfant, Drew Campbell, Blayne Farnan, Jean Farnan, Jean Hampson, Bob Highcock, Marcia Jacklin, Kayo Roy, Dan Salisbury, Tim Seburn, Maggie Smiley, John Stevens.

(Thanks to John Black for this report)

Duck Count 2009 Niagara

SPECIES	Totals
Common Loon	0
Pied-billed Grebe	0
Horned Grebe	0
Red-necked Grebe	0
Double-crested Cormorant	5
Tundra Swan	0
Trumpeter Swan	0
Mute Swan	2
Snow Goose	0
Canada Goose	1468
Wood Duck	0
Green-winged Teal	0
American Black Duck	45
Mallard	1058
Northern Pintail	0
Northern Shoveller	0
Gadwall	0
American Widgeon	0
Canvasback	0
Redhead	14
Ring-necked Duck	0
Tufted Duck	0
Greater Scaup	30
Lesser Scaup	1
Scaup (sp)	2
Harlequin Duck	0
Long-tailed Duck	10694
Black Scoter	0
White-winged Scoter	666
Surf Scoter	0
Common Goldeneye	1403
Bufflehead	420
Hooded Merganser	5
Common Merganser	228
Red-breasted Merganser	3246
Merganser (sp)	6
Ruddy Duck	0
American Coot	3
Red-throated Loon	0
King Eider	0
Barnacle Goose	1
Great Blue Heron	0
Bald Eagle	2
Unknown (*Barrow's Common Hybrid?)	1*

NATURAL AREAS INVENTORY

The title, or the topic, for the January 2010 meeting of the PFN was “The treasures we always knew existed and now we can prove!” As our speaker Deanna Lindblad explained, the title implied that species of various unusual and/or rare organisms were known to exist in Niagara, but hadn’t been seen or photographed recently. (Kind of like the tin box of old coins that Grandma claimed to have hid in the corncrib – before it burned down!). Thus, her presentation was “a photo diary of the Natural Areas Inventory, a three-year project to document the natural heritage of the Welland River watershed”.

At the outset, Deanna noted that the Welland River watershed takes in a huge chunk of territory, including most of Niagara Region south of the Niagara Escarpment, plus bits of Haldimand Region and the city of Hamilton. Clearly, this was a large area to take inventory in – even after discounting cultivated fields and urban lands. However, as the main target was the forested areas and wetlands, fortunately the Ministry of Natural Resources had just taken air-photos of the Region in 2006 and from these photos it was possible to map the areas to be investigated. The mapping included delineating which areas were probable wetlands.

With grant money from various sources, the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority hired a number of experts to determine the ecological classifications of the mapped areas, and to explore the biological species therein. Along with the experts, a number of volunteers from all three Nature Clubs in Niagara came forward, some taking positions on the Steering Committee and Technical Committee which oversaw the project, and others ‘putting boots on the ground’ to help with the field searches of the areas in question.

One major success story, early in the process, was the response of landowners. Of several thousand letters sent, asking owner’s permission to inventory on private land, about 27% of

owners responded. In fact, it was impossible to cover all of the offered properties in the three summers of the survey.

However, from the properties that were visited, the inventory team discovered that several kinds of ecological land classifications were prevalent in Niagara, some of which had never been reported previously. Some properties represented expected land classifications, such as forests where Red Maple was the dominant tree species. Some species such as Pin Oak were more widespread than had been anticipated. Also, some very rare plant species were found, such as Spotted Wintergreen which had not been seen since the late 1800s.

In telling the story, Deanna illustrated many of the interesting discoveries with photos taken by the field crews, some strikingly beautiful, some simply unusual – such as the shot of two baby Turkey Vultures in their nest in a hollow tree, or the picture of Gartersnakes hanging in the low limbs of a tree, several feet off the ground.

One additional outcome of the survey is that the MNR have revised their method of determining what constitutes a wetland, resulting in the wetland coverage of Niagara being increased 300%.

Credit for the success of the project can be given to the NPCA staff, particularly Deanna, Suzanne McInnes and Tony D’Amario, to the hired field teams led by Albert Garofalo, Tom Staton and Ryan Kitchen, to the many members of the Nature Clubs who did field inventories, to various specialists (Roman Olszewski, Bert Murphy, Bob Curry, etc.), and to the supporting agencies who bankrolled the project.

A Trillium grant application by the PFN was instrumental in leveraging other money to support the cost of the effort. And, finally, the enthusiasm of the landowners made the entire project possible, for which all of the project workers are grateful.

EVENTS OF IMMEDIATE INTEREST

INNINGS:

The **ANNUAL PFN POTLUCK DINNER** will be at Mountainview United Church, 150 Glendale Ave., St. Catharines, on Monday, April 26 /10, 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 M-Z please bring first course, surnames A-L bring salad or dessert. All bring cutlery, cups, plates. Anyone willing to help set up, please arrive about 5:30 p.m.

Again this year, a **Photographic Gala Display** will be organized for all members to contribute their most interesting/excellent photos of Nature or whatever. Please review your recent pics and contact Barbara Austin (905-892-7870) to display your photographic gems. This is not a juried show – all contributions are welcome and appreciated!

OUTINGS: NOTE THE SCHEDULE OF OUTINGS ON PAGE 2 OF THIS NEWSLETTER. ALL OUTINGS ARE WEATHER-DEPENDENT – IF IN DOUBT, CALL THE DESIGNATED CONTACT.



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 .

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; if possible, please submit typewritten articles, computer disks, or email to jmpotter@talkwireless.ca 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

2009/2010 PFN EXECUTIVE

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Director	Don Stevenson

– please send submissions to the above address

Deadlines for submissions 2010:

Jan. 28; April 10; Sept. 30