



The Peninsula Naturalist

Volume 224

Newsletter of the Peninsula Field Naturalists Club

May 2010

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE – MAY 2010

In spring cleaning, a collection of various trivia usually pops up. This applies to organizational newsletters as well as to other aspects of life. So here goes...

The PFN has a new mailing address, not much different from the old one, but important to be aware of. Because the hosts (Shoppers Drug Mart and Canada Post) saw fit to move postal service to a new store on Carlton Street, our address is now:

Peninsula Field Naturalists Club
P.O. Box 23031, **Carlton RPO**
St. Catharines ON L2R 7P6

We keep the same box number and postal code, but that "Carlton RPO" is vital to receiving our mail!

Keeping the PFN operating costs money. We pay rent to Mountainview United Church for our meetings, we donate an honorarium to speakers, we incur about \$4 expense per member to print and mail the newsletters to those without e-mail. Any member who has not paid their Club dues for 2010 is now freeloading. If unsure, ask Brian Calvert about your status. 'Nuff said!

Finally - President Wanted! It is time (and maybe past-time) that your President relinquished the chair to an energetic member. Please contact any member of the Board to volunteer as a new Board member or Presidential candidate.

BIRDBANDING AT ROCK POINT P.P.

At a first look, you would never expect Jim Smith, the Master Bander at the Haldimand Bird Banding Station at Rock Point Provincial Park, to be afraid of a bird. Of course, that might depend on whether the bird happened to be an irritated hawk in a canvas bag, and Jim's job required him to remove the hawk from the bag.

A fairly large man, Jim is an expert at the art of handling birds. His size belies the delicate touch that his chosen profession requires. After many years of learning the techniques of working with birds, disentangling them from mist-nets, holding them correctly while weighing and sexing them, determining their age and health, and applying small bands to their ankles, Jim has reached the status of Master Bander, a title which also requires writing exams and passing various tests to achieve. Still, the hawk in the bag was an occurrence which Jim clearly would rather not repeat - and is an inside joke between Jim and the assistant who put the hawk in the bag after taking it out of a mist net.

In his presentation on February 22, ably assisted by his wife Gerda, Jim explained how his interest in birds began at an early age, with a Golden Book of Birds purloined from the school library. Later in life he learned about birds from John Miles, an expert in the field, and his career was launched. His current work as Master Bander is obviously a labour of love.

Cont'd on next page:

Jim explained how three locations - Rock Point, Dry Lake, and Ruthven at Cayuga - are in the Haldimand Bird Banding group. He complimented the volunteers, some present at the meeting, for their efforts, and noted that support funds from the Niagara Falls Nature Club, Trillium Foundation, and TD Friends of the Environment support the work at the Stations.

Jim described the bird-banding process, with the birds being caught in mist-nets, retrieved and placed in bags to be taken to the Master Bander, who supervises data collection for each bird and bands it before it is released. Government permits are required for each species banded. Some, such as the Hummingbirds, are not banded but receive a daub of paint which will mark the fact that they have been caught and released. Hawks are normally not bagged, as mentioned above.

Over the past ten years, from 46 to 93 species of birds have been banded at Rock Point, usually about 3000 birds per year, the numbers ranging from 1194 individual birds in 2005 to 5109 in 2001. In 2009, Jim personally banded 1509 birds. He admits to a particular love of warblers, and showed a number of photos of his special favorites. He also had graphs of the numbers of some species in the past decade, showing that many species are declining, including Kinglets, American Goldfinch, and in particular Yellow Warbler. Yellow Warbler numbers may reflect a reduction of the suitable habitat in the area.

Chickadees appear to be particularly prone to being recaptured in the mist nets. Jim reported some birds being recaptured as often as 13 times, possibly because they breed in the area and are attracted to the feeder net. He commented drily that net avoidance is not a strongly learned concept from one catch to the next. He also

mentioned that apparently deer will eat birds caught in the nets - as evidenced by deer tracks near the nets and feathers found on the ground. Deer have also been known to run right through the mist-nets, obviously not seeing them when loping through the area.

9th ANNUAL MAPLE SYRUP FEST

The day is mainly about getting out in the sunny but cool weather, ambling through a property where there might be some birds and possibly other items of interest, and finally ending up at one of the local farms that has a sugar-bush and a pancake house. If there are other folks who haven't been seen for a few months, that's also a bonus.

On March 6, the Pancake-Day Outing, led by John Potter and attended by about 20 or so members of the three Nature Clubs plus visitors, met the expectations of most of the participants. The venue was the Hamilton Short Hills Sanctuary in North Pelham. The walk was sort of about winter tree recognition, except for those who were more interested in Chickadees, Nuthatches, Titmice, Red-bellied Woodpeckers, and any other sights or sounds of bird-life on the property.

The expected stick-nest turned out to be a clump of grapevine and leaves hanging in the upper branches of a tall maple. The live Cucumber Magnolia trees (all 3 of them) were visible from the road - and the walkers also saw the massive log of the old Cucumber Magnolia that fell several years ago. The birders had sightings and sounds to whet their enthusiasm for the coming summer. And the whole party (except John with his cold and Mary, being his driver) enjoyed the lunch at White Meadows Farms Pancake House - at least I hope they did. Anyway, nobody contracted poison ivy... (JWP)

2010 SUMMER NATURE CALENDAR

A variety of outdoor events (not all PFN-specific) for your consideration. For Niagara Falls Nature Club Wednesday evening walks, obtain their schedule. Walks may be cancelled due to bad weather, so phone the contact if in doubt. Bring insect repellent and suitable shoes. Please carpool as much as possible. For any other concerns, contact Brian Calvert 905-892-6267 or oddfinding@yahoo.ca.

ONTARIO FROGS – THE RIBBET EXHIBIT

Continues until July 5, 2010.

Balls Falls Conservation Area has nature trails to two waterfalls and a historical village. Admission is \$5.50 per adult, or \$15 per carload, so it pays to carpool!

ALDERSHOT ESCARPMENT GARDEN

Sunday May 30, 2010, 3:00-5:00 p.m.

Royal Botanical Gardens is having an open house for this garden with a waterfall and sculptures. Check the RBG website for details.

OWEN SOUND WEEKEND

June 4-6, 2010.

Orchids should be in bloom. Points of interest include Inglis Falls Conservation Area, West Rocks, More Estate Gardens, and the Tom Thompson Art Gallery. Brian Calvert 905-892-6267.

DUNNVILLE WALKING TOURS

Saturday, June 12, 2010, 10:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Three easy “Trails Open” walks along the Grand River, the Riverside Cemetery and downtown Dunnville. We will carpool from Niagara at 9:00 and relax in the park between walks. Bring a picnic lunch. Brian Calvert 905-892-6267.

PFN FIREMAN’S PARK PICNIC

Sunday, June 13, 2010, 10:00 a.m.

The annual Peninsula Field Naturalists “end-of-season” picnic will start at Fireman’s Park, main picnic area, Mountain Rd at Dorchester Rd, Niagara Falls. Before lunch, there will be a walk around the park. Barbeque lunch at noon. All food supplied John Potter 905-892-2566.

FIREFLY CONVENTION

Tuesday, June 22, 2010, 9:00 p.m.

See how these insects can generate light without heat! Hundreds of them congregate near the bridge in Town & Country Park, at the end of Aberdeen Circle, off Northcliff in south St. Catharines. Brian Calvert 905-892-6267

ELORA WEEKEND

June 26-27, 2010

We plan to visit spectacular Elora Gorge, tour many historic stone buildings and enjoy the Riverfolk Music and Art Festival. Brian Calvert 905-892-6267.

ASTRONOMY NIGHT

Saturday, July 24, 2010

The Royal Astronomical Society of Canada (www.astronomyniagara.com, 905-935-9355) hosts stargazing in the evening by Dils Lake near the campground in Chippewa Creek Conservation Area, on Regional Road 45 southwest of Wellandport. Bring your curiosity. If you wish to carpool and explore the conservation area earlier in the day, contact Brian Calvert 905-892-6267.

MULMUR HILLS WEEKEND

July 30 – August 2, 2010.

Explore the Niagara Escarpment south of Collingwood with moraines, eskers and kames covered by forest and farmland. Swim in a 5 acre spring-fed pond. Cabin or campsite at Unicamp, near Honeywood. Includes Saturday night dance and Sunday night talent show. Early reservations advised. Brian Calvert 905-892-6267.

SUMMER NATURE CALENDAR CONT'D

WITH FRONDS LIKE THESE, WHO NEEDS ANEMONES?

Saturday, August 7, 2010, 9:00 a.m.

Meet in the St. John's Conservation Area parking lot off Hollow Road to look for ferns and wild flowers in a mature Carolinian forest. Brian Calvert 905-892-6267.

QUEENSTON HEIGHTS

Wednesday, August 11, 2010, 7:00 p.m.

The Niagara Falls Nature Club meets at the Bruce Trail cairn for an easy walk around Locust Grove and a look around the new Queenston Bridge buildings for native plants and a roof top prairie. Win Laar 905-262-5057.

DECEW FALLS MORNINGSTAR MILL

Sunday August 15, 2010, 9:00 a.m.

Meet at the Open House, with demonstrations of blacksmithing, spinning and hand stone grinding. They sell flour, bran and corn meal! We will walk the Bruce Trail for views of Decew Falls and Lake Moodie. Note: the Decew Road bridge near Merrittville Highway might not be replaced yet, so it might be easier for you to get there from Pelham Road. Brian Calvert 905-892-6267.

HEARTLAND FOREST

Wednesday, August 25, 2010, 7:00 p.m.

The Niagara Falls Nature Club meets on the west side of Kalar Road between Brown Road and Chippewa Creek Road, Niagara Falls to look at amphibians, trees and flowers. Paul Philp 905-894-2723.

Want to receive 'The Peninsula Naturalist' by email?

If so, send a request with your email address to: jmpotter@talkwireless.ca . It's that simple.

ROCKWAY FALLS WALK, MARCH 28/10

About a dozen walkers met at 10:00 a.m. at the Rockway Community Centre for a walk in the valley along Fifteen-Mile Creek, led by Brian Calvert. We began by viewing the upstream smaller falls on the south side of the bridge on Pelham Road, where Brian pointed out the width of the present Creek bed, comparing it with the larger cut-away horse-shoe shape of the blocky Lockport rock. We then made our way downstream to a viewing point of the highest falls. Here the various rock layers (Lockport formation; Rochester formation; Irondequoit, Thorold, Grimsby) were readily seen. Brian described the various layers, explaining the difference between limestone and dolomite (which contains more magnesium, and is harder than limestone). The Rochester formation is shale, which appeared darker and crumbles easily into smaller fragments; shale originates from compressed clay. As we continued along down-stream, Brian remarked on formations which have conchoidal fractures and look much like huge mussel-shell surfaces. Later, we were shown places where the receding glacier had dragged small rocks across larger blocks of limestone, causing striations all pointing toward the southwest. Along the path, we occasionally came across other, more recent striations, the work of snowmobiles. Roman Olszewski gave a running commentary on mosses and lichens as we made our way down to where a remnant of a dam spanned the creek. Brian said that there had been a saltworks in the valley at one time. On a couple of rock outcrops, Polypody Fern was prevalent; a few rocks had new leaves of Sharp-lobed Hepatica starting; and a considerable number of tree species were noted, which included numerous small-diameter Hop-Hornbeam (Ironwood) stems. Rain had been predicted for the morning, but fortunately it held off until mid-afternoon, by which time we were out of the woods.

NATIVE CONNECTIONS WITH NATURE

On March 22nd, Jim Willford provided an informative and thought-provoking insight into North American natives' relationship with their surroundings, leaving a goodly number of the Peninsula Field Naturalists members and guests with much to ponder. As he explained in the discussion after his talk, Jim's observations are conditioned by his extensive experiences with Oriental theology such as Taoism and Buddhism, as well as by meditation, and from his ancestry as part Mohawk and part Blackfoot - "East meets West" as he put it.

Jim began by sketching a medicine-wheel, noting that the four significant points on the wheel denote the four directions N E W S, and that they relate to the Elements Earth, Water, Air and Fire. He also explained that the medicine-wheel is based on the six-pointed snowflake, where the two extra points represent the Subconscious and Superconscious states of being. Most of our interactions are at the Conscious level. By rotating the medicine-wheel 45 degrees, the two axes of the wheel then point in the directions of the two prevailing winds in North America (SW to NE, and NW to SE).

Each Element has meaning. For example, referring to Water, Jim noted that water or the ocean is seen as the sum of all possibilities. Time can be thought of as a flowing river, which is in constant change and never the same twice. Species related to Water include the Willow (representing flexibility), the Damselfly (which shows adaptability in its various life-stages) and the Kingfisher (which indicates prosperity, and a tendency to dive right in). Air refers to wisdom. Birds are considered messengers, and black birds are special, in that the colour black denotes 'ancient wisdom'. Fire is seen as representing combining things, joining the old with the new

(as ashes and new wood combine). The heat from a fire flows downhill, as does water.

Jim alluded to many animals, birds, plants and physical land features that have special meanings to the Native Americans. A few examples - Frogs are a symbol of transformation; Deer represent awareness and gentleness and deer antlers are symbolic of higher perception; Butterflies symbolize transformation; Spiders suggest a waiting for a reward to come, and that we should trust what we feel. Cattails are special because they react with several Elements, from Earth, through Water, to Air. Squirrels remind us that we, like them, can learn by doing and develop trust in ourselves. Among plants, the Pine tree symbolizes health and eternal life; Spruce represent new realizations; Hemlock stands for doing away with; Maple represents a practical expression of mind; and Oak demonstrates slow but mighty growth.

Early in his talk, Jim mentioned the bow and arrow as symbolizing a human couple, the man being represented by the bow, the woman the arrow. Separately, each is just a stick or a piece of string - together they join forces and complement each other.

Colours, numbers, shapes of items such as round stones, all have meanings. He also gave the example of how we use (or don't use) our senses, by telling us how most of non-native society mainly uses their eyes only. He stated that a Native entering a forest might stop and look around, then close his eyes and listen, then smell the air, then grasp a leaf and feel its texture and shape, and finally bite it and taste it - all of these actions creating a sense of the Forest. Even with self-effacing comments about his own abilities, Jim gave us an insight into what we could gain if we let Nature teach us by example, and if we knew how to interpret the meanings of the wild.

STONEY CREEK GEOLOGY OUTING

Saturday, April 10/10, was a cool but generally sunny day, when the PFN was scheduled to take an extended tour of geological features along the Niagara Escarpment. Unfortunately, Brian Calvert was unable to lead the outing, due to a family-related issue, but provided us with all the necessary info for the trip.

We (Mary, John, Lee and Donna) assembled at Beamer Conservation Area and ambled along the trail around the upper shelf. Troutlily, Bloodroot and the omni-present Periwinkle were blooming, and Trilliums were on the verge of flowering. From Brian's notes, John explained about the town of Grimsby being sited on the gravel resulting from the former Lake Iroquois which once lapped at the base of the escarpment. We also located what we believe is Peter Kelly's ancient cedar tree 'The Ghost', a mere 224 years old at present.

From Beamer, we motored along Ridge Road toward Stoney Creek, witnessing a Red-tailed Hawk with a small mammal firmly grasped in its talons crossing the road in front of us, just before we arrived at the Devil's Punch Bowl. The sighting was too quick for anyone to photograph.

In spite of the sun, the air was cold at the Punch Bowl, but we viewed the 34-metre falls and the ravine and secondary falls downstream (and downhill). Along the ravine, besides the geological layers (similar to those at Rockway), we were fortunate to have a good view of two Turkey Vultures perched on a tree-limb, their wings partially spread (perhaps warming in the sun?). Looking out over Lake Ontario, we could see distinct deep areas in the lake (darker water), and the prominence of Mount Nemo across the end of the bay, although we were unable to spot the sand bars in Hamilton harbour.

Our next and last stop was at the Eramosa Karst Conservation Area, a property owned by the Hamilton Conservation Authority, and designated an ANSI (Area of Natural and Scientific Interest) by the OMNR. We joined a larger group of Hamilton Nature Club members, led by Marcus Buck, an expert on karst features, for a tour of this astounding property. A karst is a geological formation, usually on limestone or similar rock, which includes underground caves, passages, streams and sinkholes formed by the dissolving of the rock. The property is about 200 acres (80 ha), and includes upland forest, streambeds, and marshy lowlands - a rich variety of habitats. In the forested areas, where limestone rock outcrops are everywhere, an amazing variety of trees (some definitely old-growth) manage to insert their roots into the crevices of the rock. Some of the largest Black Cherry and Hop Hornbeam John has ever seen grow on this property. Marcus showed us several cave entrances, places where streams emerge and disappear into the ground, sinkholes, and dry streambeds which can suddenly become streams after a rain. He also noted that an adjacent property of about 80 acres, owned by the Ontario Realty Company, is also karst land which the Friends of Eramosa Karst would like to see protected and preserved from development. For the birders, Eastern Kinglets, Eastern Phoebe, Nuthatch, a Yellow-bellied Woodpecker, a Red-tailed Hawk, and numerous Chickadees livened up the afternoon.

You can obtain a wealth of information by 'googling' "Eramosa Karst". The website provides a map of the property, numerous descriptions of what can be found there, and a series of short videos in which Marcus Buck leads a video 'tour' of the fascinating geological features of this unusual site. Hopefully we can organize another trip specifically for the PFN to experience this marvellous property.

LAKE ERIE & ROCK POINT BIRDING

Barb West led this expedition of 10 members on May 16, starting at the usual assembly point in Port Colborne promptly at 9:00 a.m. The ponds on Cement Plant Road yielded little of interest, but before leaving Port Colborne area some had seen Ring Billed Gulls, Turkey Vulture, Canada Goose, Red-winged Blackbird, Common Grackle, Least Flycatcher and Tree Swallow.

Numerous Swallows (Cliff, Tree, Barn) were seen at Morgans Point, where the Tree Swallows were inhabiting bluebird houses as usual, and Herring Gull was along the shore. On the drive around Long Beach, Purple Martins were present at Lowbanks, although not in huge numbers. It seemed that the main action would be at Rock Point PP so we headed that way. A half-dozen huge wind turbines were rotating lazily as we passed by, which created some discussion about their size and speed.

At Rock Point PP, birds were much more active. Yellow Warblers were everywhere, and down on the shoreline Ruddy Turnstone, Caspian Tern, Great Blue Tern, Common Tern, Semi-palmated Sandpiper, Spotted Sandpiper, Least Sandpiper, Bufflehead, Mallard, and Dunlin were about. Off-shore, Cormorants skimmed the water. In the wooded areas, we caught glimpses of Baltimore Oriole, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Bluebird, Warbling Vireo, American Robin, White-Crowned Sparrow, Gray Catbird, Yellow-shafted Flicker, Eastern Kingbird, Chipping Sparrow, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Killdeer and Black-capped Chickadee. An American Lady Butterfly added to the colour-parade.

At lunch time, birding almost supplanted munching, as a large raptor arrived in a nearby tree. After much discussion and use of binocs and scopes, the consensus was that the bird was

an immature Redtailed Hawk. At the Mosaic Ponds near Port Maitland, a diving waterbird created some confusion, being ID'd as a Bufflehead and also as a Rednecked Grebe before being generally accepted for what it was, a Ruddy Duck. Canada Goose, Swamp Sparrow, Savannah Sparrow, Short-billed Dowitcher and Turkey Vulture were also noted.

Good weather, good birding! No blisters on eyeballs!

Somehow, between Haiti and the Gulf oil spill, this old folksong still seems relevant to today...

"The Time Of Man"

Once there were trees and a river,
once there was grass where we stand,
once there were songs about rights instead of wrongs
once was The Time Of Man.

We heard the drumming like thunder,
we saw the clouds rise at dawn,
then came the rain, as we watched and prayed in
vain,
then all was still, all was gone.

Grass doesn't grow on the hillsides,
the trees shrink and die in the sun,
no way to hide my little baby's eyes
from the damage the dead have done.

They didn't know in the Old Time,
the earth and the trees were to share;
they didn't know in the Old Time -
Or Care...

Once there were trees and a river,
once there was grass where you stand,
once there were songs about rights instead of wrongs
once was The Time Of Man.

(The Limelinters, 1961.)

EVENTS OF INTEREST

PFN FIREMAN'S PARK PICNIC

Sunday, June 13, 2010. 10:00 a.m.

The annual Peninsula Field Naturalists "end-of-season" picnic will start at Fireman's Park, main picnic area, Mountain Rd at Dorchester Rd, Niagara Falls.

Before lunch, there will be a walk around the park.

Barbeque lunch at noon. All food and drinks supplied
Please advise if you require vegetarian or other specialty food.

John Potter 905-892-2566.



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-FCN) and Nature Canada.

P.O. Box 23031, RPO Carlton, 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 are accepted; if possible, please submit typewritten articles, computer disks, or email to jmpotter@talkwireless.ca. Colour photos (jpg) accompanying articles are welcome. All pieces of artwork will be accepted; 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 2010:

Jan. 28; April 10; Sept. 30

2009/10 PFN EXECUTIVE

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