



The Peninsula Naturalist

Volume 225

Newsletter of the Peninsula Field Naturalists Club

October 2010

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

However you view events in the Niagara Region, at least in the environmental and nature aspects, this Isthmus is not dull. On one side of the Region, we've seen a multi-million-dollar music park project shelved, with the possibility of an ecological park replacing it. On the other side, we're seeing a scrap over a chunk of designated wetland being developed as a race-car track. Down the middle, we have the ongoing saga of 'will-we/won't-we install a transportation corridor'. And in various places, rumors of wind-turbine areas sprout like sassafras trees. And there are the never-ending debates about land designations and 'preservation' legislation... It all makes one muse about whether to send the kids to law school...

Above this welter of issues, some highlights are emerging. The book 'Niagara Birds' had its glamorous launch on a lovely sunny fall day - congratulations to the authors and editors! The Owl Foundation had its two weekends of tours, thanking their contributors - and hoping to be able to do the same next year. Its founder, Kay McKeever, had her 86th birthday on the same day as the book launch - and is a chapter author. And Yours Truly enjoyed the delightful task of releasing a full-grown Great Horned Owl, fostered at the Owl Foundation, into the wild where I hope 'Thumper' has many years of owly bliss.

My point? Simply this - Life can get along with us, or without us - but it is much better when we try to get along with It.

(For the past two years, John Stevens has entered the Baillie Birdathon, providing the Club with both an extra source of revenue, and an interesting account of his adventures. Here is his summary from this past May.)



2010 BIRDATHON May 23, 2010

When planning my Birdathon this year, I had selected the Saturday of the long weekend (May 22), which would provide alternative dates of the Sunday and Monday if weather conditions were unfavourable. Very warm weather in early April and an overall warm month meant that many trees were fully in leaf at the beginning of May in Niagara. By May 10th, I was concerned that the target date would be too late as the migration seemed to be ahead of schedule. The Buffalo Ornithological Society annual May Count was on May 16th and on the prior Friday I tried to rearrange things and do it on that Saturday evening and the following Sunday morning (within a 24-hour period) but neither of the people who were going to help me were available. So the long weekend it was, and as rain was forecast for Saturday, on the Thursday (May 20) I decided on doing it on the Sunday. *(Continued)*

awakening to the sound of my alarm but hearing American Robins duelling in song (one species), the day began at 0530. As the sun rose the sky was partly cloudy but mainly sunny, so the weather looked promising. An American Crow (second species) flew over as I was eating breakfast. Karin Schneider arrived from Beamsville at a quarter to seven and we set off for Port Weller. We started at the northern end of Malcolmson Park at 0700 by which time it had clouded over and it was rather gloomy among the trees. A Warbling Vireo was singing near the entrance but otherwise there was very little song. About ten minutes later, Katherine Stoltz and John Black arrived and the four of us did a leisurely circuit around the park. The best finds were Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Alder Flycatcher, Gray-cheeked Thrush and a White-throated Sparrow, the only one of this common species that we'd have all day.

We then headed to the eastern pier of the Welland Canal where John Black used his key to allow us to slowly drive out to the end. We stopped at several spots along the way where we heard bird songs. The sun had reappeared and it was becoming a beautiful day. A fair mix of migrant warblers was present including Blackburnian, Tennessee, Magnolia and Mourning. At the end of the pier we scanned the lake for some of the several species of ducks that had been present the previous Sunday but aside from one Common Loon, only Double-crested Cormorants and Ring-billed Gulls were around, not even a single tern. At the remaining pond on the eastern side of the pier, a Mute Swan was sitting on a nest and a female Bufflehead was in the water but the Coots and Moorhens often present were not around. As Katherine was on a mission to find a Connecticut Warbler, she and John left Karin and me to hike back to our car and they left for other warbler hot spots.

When we left Port Weller around 1030, the species count was just over 50. We stopped at the Avondale lagoons where Karin found a Horned Lark in an adjacent field and a Spotted Sandpiper flew over the water. On the way to

the next planned stop we made an abrupt halt on the Niagara Stone Road just south of the Airport when we both heard a distinctive harsh buzzing call. We never heard the call again and couldn't find a possible source bird. During the BOS count the previous week, a Clay-colored Sparrow had been found about 0.5 km south of this location and in preparation, I had listened to a recording of its song. While I'm pretty certain that is the call that we heard, my unfamiliarity with this species (it's more than 20 years since I last saw one in Ontario) and our inability to hear it again or find the bird, convinced me to leave this species off my list.

At the Niagara College ponds, a Pied-billed Grebe was sitting on a nest in the northern pond and a Green Heron was foraging near the edge. Both these species had been present the previous Sunday but there was no sign of the seven Wood Ducks that had also been present then. Heading up the Niagara Escarpment, we stopped at Woodend Conservation Area getting Nashville Warbler and several Indigo Buntings but few of the species that had been present the previous Sunday. We checked out a field near Thorold that had had Meadowlark and Bobolink the previous week but could find neither. Nor was a Northern Harrier in view near the Cytex plant as it was the previous Sunday. Progress was becoming very slow. We contacted Marcie Jacklin and arranged to meet her at 1400 near Sodom Road and the QEW.

When we met Marcie and Peter BonEnfant, the species count was at 71. At the first place Marcie took us, Sherk Road, we quickly added Eastern Towhee, Field Sparrow, Blue-winged Warbler and Brown Thrasher. Crossing the QEW we headed to Willoughby Marsh adding Vesper Sparrow and, perhaps the find of the day, a pair of Sandhill Cranes foraging in a field quite near the road. At the marsh, actually a swamp, we added Tufted Titmouse. On the way out to the Niagara River, Marcie stopped at Nigh's Chocolates in Snyder on the pretence that she'd seen an unusual bird. It was a welcome break and I highly recommend their products, all made on site. *(Continued.)*

There was little avian variety on the Niagara River as we headed to Fort Erie. We stopped to check Frenchman's Creek where several species of herons and egrets had been reliable but none were around. Continuing on we did find a Great Egret that was very successfully fishing along the river's edge. At this point we had found Black-crowned Night Heron, Green Heron, Sandhill Crane and Great Egret but not the most commonly seen of the long-legged waders in Niagara, the Great Blue Heron! However, as we approached the Peace Bridge, one conveniently flew down the river so we could add it to the list. Near Old Fort Erie we also saw Common Terns over the water and Dunlins feeding on the shore. We stopped at Marcie and Tim Seburn's place which is right on the water. They have two pairs of Red-headed Woodpeckers nesting in some huge Cottonwoods that frequently visit their feeders. As luck would have it, we were there for a half hour and not one was to be seen.

Karin wanted to get home and Marcie volunteered to give her a ride to St. Catharines so I could pursue more species. At this point the count was at 92 as Peter and I set off around 1830. Stopping just around the corner from Tim and Marcie's we got a glimpse of one of the Red-headed Woodpeckers and picked up Semipalmated Sandpiper and Red-breasted Merganser as we stopped at various points along the Lake Erie shore. A Wild Turkey crossed the road in front of us and then we saw three others in a field. About 2015, we arrived near the end of Holloway Bay Road where we encountered Blayne and Jean Farnan who were helping Brad Clements document some nesting sites. They directed us down a side road where Hooded Warbler and Acadian Flycatcher had been reported that day. We heard the Hooded Warbler but no calls for pizza by the Acadian Flycatcher. Marcie rejoined us at this point and she picked out a Swainson's Thrush from among the many Robin and Wood Thrushes calling in the twilight.

It was now nearly dark as we headed through Port Colborne to the western side of the Wainfleet Bog where Veerys were calling everywhere. An American Woodcock was doing his mating flight and loud Peent call upon returning to the ground right close to the road. A little further along, we heard Whip-poor-wills, at least six, calling from both sides of the road. By now it was 2130 and I called it a day and headed home.

The total count was 101 *species (attached sheet on original - Ed.)*. To reach this number I had considerable help from Karin Schneider, John Black, Katherine Stoltz, Marcie Jacklin, Peter BonEnfant and Blayne Farnan. Thanks to all of them. Most of the species found were likely residents of Niagara rather than transient migrants as the migration was almost over.

Thanks again for your support;
Cheers, John

ROCK POINT & ENVIRONS OUTING

Trips to the Rock Point Provincial Park area are never boring. If not the wildlife, then the weather will find a way to get your attention. The PFN's trip on September 25, led by Rick Young, had a mixture of unusual sightings and unusual weather.

The usual safari to Rock Point would meander along the Lake Erie shore, with frequent stops at promising beaches. However, on this run, the intent was to reach the Bird Banding Station in time to watch the banding process, so the participants made haste along the Feeder Canal Road, looking for life in the canal as we passed by.

The day was sunny but cool, and only a few birds were evident at the Station. However, the
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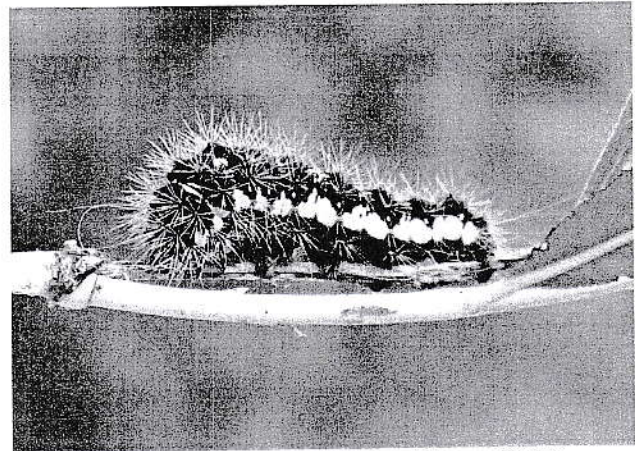
usual Turkey Vultures, American Crows and Blue Jays were about, and a Sharp-shinned Hawk soared over the Station as we watched. An errant Gray Catbird had gotten into the mist-net, and we were able to observe the whole process of measuring, weighing and finally banding this specimen. The staff (Roswitha Matuschek, Bev Stevenson, Jason Lymburner) were most obliging, answering our questions about their job, which is obviously a labour of love – why else would anyone be up so early in the morning? A Ruby Crowned Kinglet and a House Wren were also seen in this area.

After a look at the beach from the tower in the Park, we trooped down to the rocky shore, where a fossil-hunter could easily spend many hours cataloguing coral, etc. However, shore birds were the immediate interest. After much discussion and wishes for more powerful ‘scopes, Sanderlings were finally agreed upon. Canada Goose, Herring Gull, Ring Billed Gull and Double-Crested Cormorant were present, seeming to be more comfortable than the observers, who were casting baleful glances at the black clouds on the southern side of the lake and wondering at the mindset of the wind-surfer who was whipping along over the waves in the bay.

Along the sandy parts of the beach, Bur Cucumber, Wild Cucumber, Clammyweed, Blue Vervain, White Vervain, Trailing Wild Bean, Beach Clotbur, Pale Smartweed, Switchgrass, Beggar-ticks and Sticktight were prevalent, along with more mundane plants like Common Ragweed and Common Nightshade. Monarch, Cabbage White and Sulphur butterflies were seen, along with the caterpillar of a Smartweed Moth (aka Smeared Dagger Moth).

Rick proposed that we travel to Port Maitland for a look at the bird-life in the ponds and Feeder-canal. As we left the Park, some of us had a good view of several White-tailed Deer watching the passing motorcade. The suggestion of going to Port Maitland area led to sightings of Wood Duck, Mallard, Great Blue Heron,

Green Heron, Belted Kingfisher, Great Egret and an American Kestrel, while later at a sod farm we watched a flock of Horned Larks apparently having lunch on insects in the grassy turf. An excellent outing, with only one question unanswered – why don’t soybean fields all ripen at the same time? Thanks to the drivers, the passengers, and the staff at Rock Point Bird Banding Station!



Smartweed Moth Caterpillar - JWP

THAT’S A RAP

No, this isn’t about completing a movie - but it *is* about bringing a long-needed process towards a successful end. RAP stands for ‘Remedial Action Plan’, which is what Valerie Cromie (NPCA) and Mary Ellen Scanlon (MOE) were discussing at the September 2010 meeting of the PFN. (Bear with me, the use of acronyms tends to be a characteristic of government and ex-government employees). The message from Valerie and Mary Ellen was a positive one.

Almost twenty-five years ago (1987), the Great Lakes were known to have a number of areas where environmental pollution was causing serious problems with water use. These ‘hotspots’, termed Areas of Concern (AOCs), included 43 in all, 12 in Canadian waters and 5 more shared between Canada and the USA. The Niagara River, all 58 km of it, was considered an AOC, but since both countries share a

Common border, each country was obliged to deal with pollution sources on its own side of this border. In Canada's case, the decision was made to address pollution in the Welland River Watershed as well as in the Niagara River itself. A plan, the Niagara River (Ontario) Remedial Action Plan Stage 2 Report, released in 1995, listed 16 goals and 37 recommendations to guide the restoration of the AOC.

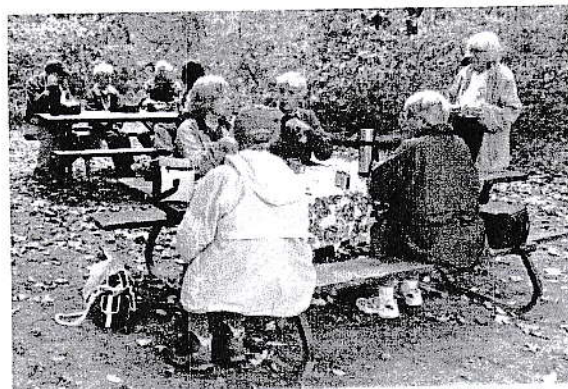
The Ministry people refer to the 'hotspots' as 'beneficial use impairments', and have a series of criteria for determining what specifically needs to be done before a 'beneficial use impairment' can be considered as no longer a problem and taken off the list of hotspots ('delisted' or in layman's language 'cured').

Some of the 'beneficial use impairments' in the Niagara River included: degradation of fish and wildlife populations; restrictions on fish and wildlife consumption; degradation of the benthos (worms and insects living on the bottom of the river); eutrophication (decreased oxygen and increased nutrients in the water) plus undesirable algae growth. These conditions were caused by habitat destruction plus a number of contaminant sources (urban sewage, stormwater runoff, agricultural runoff, failing septic systems, contaminated sediments, municipal sewage treatment practices).

So, what has happened? Well, bird and animal deformities and reproductive problems are now delisted; fish tumours and deformities are delisted; restrictions on wildlife consumption are delisted; restrictions on dredging activities have been removed. Also, undesirable algae growth has been delisted, but eutrophication still exists. The benthos degradation, loss of fish and wildlife habitat, and beach closings continue to be problems, but further remedial plans have been proposed. In addition, the Niagara River Restoration Council, partnering with the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority and Environment Canada, has managed to remove a large number of barriers to fish migration in the Welland River, opening up about 511 km of fish habitat, which should increase the spawning areas in this tributary river.

Mary Ellen spoke specifically about a problem case in Lyons Creek East in Welland, where PCB-contaminated sediment was found in the stream-bed. PCBs and arsenic had also been found in Lyons Creek West, where Hydro One, the City of Welland, and Transport Canada were the owners. Hydro One dredged these locations to remove the contamination. However, although there was no arsenic in the Lyons Creek East location, there were rare plants, birds and fish, including some species protected by species-at-risk legislation, so the remedial action proposals had to be appropriate to acknowledge these conditions. With four levels of government (City of Welland, Niagara Region, Ministry of the Environment, and Environment Canada) involved as well as the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority and local residents, the action plan discussions were complex. Ultimately, since PCBs will eventually degrade, it was decided to avoid dredging and simply leave the site undisturbed. It is worth noting that any operations that would disturb this area, such as road-widening alongside the property, would have to meet the requirements of environmental assessments from all four levels of government.

One further important comment about the RAP is that the managers of the Plan are developing and implementing an updated monitoring plan to help track progress of the delisted beneficial use impairments, to make sure that they do not regress back to their previous undesirable state. We can hope that cleaner and safer water sources and beaches will result from all of this activity.



THE LUNCH-BUNCH AT ROCK POINT P.P.

AFTER THE NAI, WHAT NEXT?

By now, most folks who have attended any Nature Club meeting in Niagara (PFN, Niagara Falls or Bert Miller) will have heard of the Natural Areas Inventory (NAI). Many of you heard the presentation by Deanna Lindblad, describing and illustrating what was found during the Inventory. Some may have seen or read parts of the two-volume report that was produced, either the print copy or the on-line version. If you wish to sit down with a copy and browse, please let me (JP) know and I'll happily oblige you.

What came out of that Inventory project was a snapshot of the 'wild' areas of the Welland River watershed, a snapshot that includes plants, birds, reptiles, amphibians, butterflies and moths, dragonflies and damselflies, lichens and bryophytes - including what species are locally rare. The total list of vascular plants alone requires about 160 pages. Unfortunately, not all of the properties that were offered for the Inventory were visited. Far more locations were offered than could be surveyed in 3 summers.

Nevertheless, because of the attention to detail that was maintained in the field work, the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority (NPCA) now has an excellent concept of what important areas exist in the watershed. Also, they have much more detail on how much wetland exists, and where. Why is this important? Think for a moment - how much do living things depend upon clean safe water supplies for existence?

So, what's next? How does all this get used, and by whom? For starters, the NPCA has the mandate to oversee human activities in the watersheds in Niagara - which means primarily all the land included in the Welland River and Twenty-Mile Creek watersheds. This oversight does not prevent landowners or municipalities from using the land for whatever their purposes may be - municipalities in particular have control over land within their legal urban boundaries. What the oversight does mean that the NPCA will advise on the wise use of land,

and may take action to prevent destruction of significant ecological features. And since water resources are vital to all life in the area, the NPCA is intensely concerned about water and wetlands.

The scientific system used to map out all the properties that were inventoried in the NAI is a system that also can map out areas of significant interest, such as areas where marshland, vernal pools, etc. exist - in essence the areas that should not be disturbed by draining, farming, or building upon. So what needs to be done now with these areas is to develop some 'ground rules' about how these areas will be managed. Obviously, many different organizations will be interested in the land use management - farmers, developers, planners, naturalists, aggregate-miners, etc. So the "problem" or perhaps we should say, the 'necessity' is to come to some basic agreements on how the land in Niagara will be used - agreements that everyone can accept.

That phrase "agreements that everyone can accept" is crucial. We know already, from various events happening in our Peninsula, how serious the arguments over land-use can be. And, ultimately, every land-use issue becomes an issue of give-and-take. What the 'ground rules' need to do is to evaluate, on a scientific basis, what would be the best uses of any given parcel of land - perhaps not the single best use - but at least the most acceptable uses within the bounds of good science. And when the scientifically-determined best uses can be decided, then every potential user will know why a parcel of land is being designated for a certain purpose.

Okay, if you're still with me, here is the "What Next?". The mechanism being designed for land management in Niagara is what is called the Natural Heritage System (NHS). In a Natural Heritage System, various attributes of the landscape are evaluated and their importance is ranked by using criteria agreed upon by the various stakeholders who are interested in the lands to be managed.

(Continued)

The NHS system depends upon all stakeholders sharing their land-use needs, and making compromises for the good of all. In the case of the NHS to be developed for Niagara, the stakeholders have been assembled into a Scenario Development Team. What this Team will do, over the next few months, is discuss the aspects of the landscape that they consider desirable to retain and preserve, and develop by consensus a preferred heritage system design. They will discuss such features as: **Habitats** and requirements of species at risk; **Wildlife habitat** and how many and how large their natural areas need to be; **Unique vegetation communities** in the ecosystem; **Hydrologic features** that maintain a healthy watershed; **Socio-political constraints** which encompass the existing land uses – such as Parks and urban areas.

When these discussions have led to several possible options for a heritage system design, a computer program called Marxan will model the system and analyze what improvements can be made that would be agreeable to all the stakeholder groups. For example, Marxan might be programmed to produce a map that shows a projection of a desired X% of land outside urban boundaries as being forested, instead of the current estimate of Y% forested. Then, the computer might be asked to show the effect of increasing forested land to Z%, and how this would change if more land was required to include vernal pools – or what if more farmland was required in an area where the soil was appropriate. Ultimately, the Team will design a 'best-case' plan for managing the land so that everyone's requirements are met adequately, by general agreement, in a cooperative and non-confrontational approach.

When the Scenario Development Team have done their work, the resulting Natural Heritage System Plan for the Region will be given to an Outreach and Education Committee, who will disseminate information about the NHS Plan to the public, municipalities and stakeholders. As the Teams proceed with their work, I will try to keep you informed about their progress. (JP).

THIS 'N THAT

Sometimes spacing in a newsletter just doesn't work out. That's when you get bits'n-bites that didn't fit anywhere else. (Ed.)

Check your pink bulletin. There are outings on: Saturday, Nov.6, 10:00 a.m. Roman Olszewski leads a moss/lichen walk. Woodend Cons. Area

Saturday, Nov.13. 12:30 p.m. Brian Calvert leads a walk at the Arboretum at Vineland Res. Station, plus a talk by Peter Kevan on Tree Pollination at Rittenhouse Hall at 2:00 p.m.

Saturday, Dec.11. Brian Calvert leads an outing to Royal Botanical Gardens for a greenhouse walk + Victorian Christmas at Dundurn Castle.

Saturday, Jan.01, 2011. Brian Calvert leads a hike on the Lynn Valley Rail Trail in Port Dover, plus watching a Polar Bear Plunge, and attending a free fiddle party at the Harbour museum. Bring a food-bank donation.

NEW BOOKS

"Niagara Birds" by John Black & Kayo Roy (If you haven't heard of this one, where have you been? \$55.00, direct from the authors!

"Antarctica – First Journey" by Geoffrey Carpentier. The author is a retiree from the Ontario Ministry of the Environment, who has been traveling to Antarctica for 5 years as a lecturer and naturalist. The book covers everything a traveler would need to know on a trip to Antarctica – planning the trip; medical issues; weather and climate; tourism rules; info on wildlife; choosing a ship; and more. (The author has offered to come to speak to the PFN)

"Where the Wild Things Were" by William Stoltzenburg. The author argues convincingly that large carnivores and predators are necessary in maintaining a healthy environment. We could think about that re the moose in Newfoundland! \$20.00 CDN, from Bloomsbury USA.

EVENTS OF INTEREST

ST. CATHARINES CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT
SUNDAY, DECEMBER 19, 2010
COORDINATOR : MARCIE JACKLIN, 905-871-2577

PLEASE CONTACT JOHN OR MARY POTTER (905-892-2566)
IF YOU ARE WILLING TO HELP AT THE 'AFTER-BIRDING PARTY'

- Ω -

LAKE ONTARIO MID-WINTER WATERFOWL SURVEY
('DUCK COUNT')
SUNDAY, JANUARY ??, 2011 (DATE TO BE DETERMINED)
COORDINATOR : JOHN BLACK, 905-684-0143

PARTICIPATION IS LIMITED - PLEASE CALL JOHN B. BY DECEMBER 15, 2009 FOR DETAILS



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, RPO Carlton, St. Catharines, ON. L2R 7P6

The Peninsula Naturalist Newsletter

Published: February, April, October

Circulation: 120 recipients per issue

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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