



The Peninsula Naturalist

Volume 226

Newsletter of the Peninsula Field Naturalists Club

February 2011

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

How about some happy news for a new year!

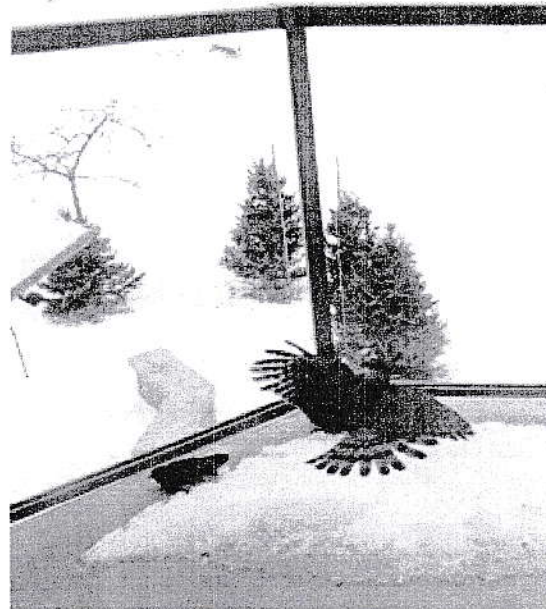
At Brock University main campus, on May 26-27, 2011, the Niagara Escarpment Commission (NEC) is joining with Brock's Department of Tourism and the Environment to sponsor 'Leading Edge Conference 2011'. The Leading Edge conferences are an annual event for the NEC but this is a first-time event for Brock. The Conference will explore the themes of tourism and economic development in the Niagara Escarpment UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. Speakers will be addressing the ways that businesses, educators, and tourism operators are striving to provide sustainable practices and attractions in this local Biosphere Reserve. For more information, check the NEC's website: <http://www.escarpment.org/>

On the initiative of Brian Calvert, we contacted the local Conference Organizing Committee and the NEC, offering to have local Nature Club members provide pre- and post-conference tours of local sections of the Escarpment via the Bruce Trail, and of the Niagara Gorge from Dufferin Islands to Queenston area. Surprisingly, the organizers had not considered having such an addition to their Conference, but were delighted by our offer, and have accepted. In all fairness, the organizers had arranged with John Black and Kayo Roy to hold an early-morning bird walk in the Brock-Decew area before their first speaker session, but had not included an extensive walk on the Escarpment. So our offer came as a natural fit with their plans.

You will be hearing more about this initiative as the plans firm up. For now, be aware that we will be soliciting and inviting the involvement of members, in particular those who know the geology, bryology and plant/bird life of the Escarpment, to help facilitate an enjoyable and educational experience for the Conference visitors.

RAPTOR RESCUE

Early one morning, we were startled by a loud, unusual noise that sounded like pipes rattling or furniture moving in the upstairs bedroom at the back of the house. This noise would stop and start. This bedroom has a balcony with a Plexiglas railing that overlooks the patio where we have our birdfeeders.



Deciding to investigate, we found to our amazement a Cooper's Hawk with a Mourning Dove grasped in its talons on this balcony. The hawk's wings were flapping but he could not ascend enough to get over the railing, although

continued to try to no avail to get out of this cage in which he found himself.



Realizing the raptor would need help, I donned hat, coat and thick gloves, and ventured out onto the balcony. The hawk abandoned the dove, who crept under the railing and disappeared in a hurry minus enough feathers to make a small pillow, and went into overdrive. The hawk tired from these renewed exertions and I was able to pick him up, and pose for photos. When released, he flew to the woods appearing to be none the worse from his ordeal. He still feeds at our "bird" feeders (although this has a different meaning to his raptor mind) but avoiding the balcony.

Contributed by Don Minchin.

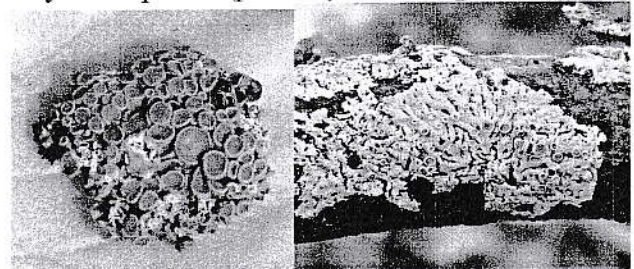
WOODEND RAMBLE

On November 6, 2010, before the winter of the interminable snow began, Roman Olszewski led a group of wanderers into the wilds of Woodend Conservation Area. As most folks now know, Woodend straddles the Niagara Escarpment, looking northward toward the Niagara College Glendale campus and providing impressive views of the lake beyond. Also, as most folks know, a ramble with Roman is certain to yield sightings of small plants with incomprehensible names. This day was not atypical.

As we started into the woody area from the parking-lot, it was surprising how many wildflowers were still identifiable by their not-quite-dead leaves and sometimes flowers.

Leaves of Sharp-lobed *Hepatica* were quite obvious, as was Zigzag Goldenrod. Not too far into the woods, we came to a rather deep depression in the rock, where it was evident that a small quarry-operation had once flourished. The rocks were, in some places, encrusted with greyish lichens, some displaying cup-shapes with colored insides. Roman called out the scientific names of several, while we neophytes pretended (not very convincingly) to know exactly what he meant.

At one point, when someone pointed out a rock with some lichen on it, Roman paused, examined it, and finally concluded that this was a rare species which he had not seen in this area before – which obviously made his day worthwhile! The species in question was (perhaps) *Xanthoria polycarpa* – or maybe *Xanthomendoza hasseana* – in either case, a first report for the Niagara Region. Another common species found on a downed tree-branch was *Physcia aipolia* (photos by Rick Young).



With a group of nearly 20 people, some not up to scrambling over rocks, the party became a long line as we made our way upward along the edge of the Escarpment toward the house at the clearing. The remnants of the old lime kiln were still standing as they have been for decades, with a bit of nondescript fence indicating that this was out-of-bounds. A few huge blocks of limestone protruded out over the lip of the escarpment, needing a few more decades of ice-pressure before they will slip off and tumble down the slope.

As we proceeded down the lane back to the parking area, a few of us noted how many of the large old trees look rather decrepit, no thanks to Gypsy Moth, assorted cankers, and perhaps Emerald Ash Borer. It will be interesting to see how the forest at Woodend survives the next few decades...

I. CATHARINES CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT - DECEMBER 19, 2010

The Peninsula Field Naturalists Christmas Bird Count was on a cloudy cold day out in the field; temperatures hovered between -3°C and -11°C with the wind chill. The day was mostly cloudy, with a few sunny breaks in the afternoon.

It turned out to be a great birding day. We tallied 79 species. This was above average for the count (75.6 average over the last 28 years). We tallied 24,255 individuals, which is almost exactly average over the past 28 years (24,269). The cold weather probably helped to push some of the birds to feeders this year.

This year we had 48 participants, including two people from British Columbia. We spent in total 130.9 hours in the field and walked or drove 1020.1 km.

Many thanks are due to all the participants. Also a big thank you to Mary and John Potter for organizing 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 Ring-necked Duck (17), Common Merganser (2156), Red-breasted Merganser (2600), Northern Harrier (16), Cooper's Hawk (16), Merlin (tie - 2), Eastern Screech-owl (tie-11), Red-bellied Woodpecker (71), Carolina Wren (tie-21), American Robin (1400), Field Sparrow (35), and Snow Bunting (1543).

Northern Cardinal (448) was the second highest count. Mourning Dove (1695) was the second highest count and the highest count in 20 years.

High counts for the decade were Canvasback (5), Rough-legged Hawk (tie-7), Hairy Woodpecker (25), and Black-capped Chickadee (498). Yellow-rumped Warbler (2) was the second record for the decade.

Bonaparte's Gull (4) was the lowest count in 25 years. European Starling (2999) was the lowest

count in 10 years. Lesser Black-backed Gull (1) was the first report in 7 years.

PARTICIPANTS: Brian Ahara, Rhonda Armstrong, John Black, Peter Bonenfant, Paul Chapman, Sue Chapman, Barb Charleton, Paula Clark, Trevor Confield, Carl Damude, Janet Damude, Don Dimond, Elaine Dimond, Rob Dobos, Jason Elliott, Ben Escott, Chris Escott, Denys Gardiner, Cathy Giancarlo, Jean Hampton, Bob Highcock, Carol Horvat, Marcie Jacklin, Nabil Khairallah, Ramset Khairallah, Irene Kiers, Mike Kiers, Natalie Kiers, Kara Kristjanson, Dean Laar, Win Laar, George Melvin, Don Mills, Gisele Mills, Roman Olszewski, Kayo Roy, Joyce Sankey, Karin Schneider, Tim Seburn, Hayley Shepard, David Smith, Pat Smith, Roy Sorgenfrei, John Stevens, Tom Thomas, Rob Waldhuber, Dora Young, Rick Young.

SPECIES OBSERVED:

Canada Goose	2365
Mute Swan	18
Gadwall	3
American Black Duck	42
Mallard	1069
Canvasback	5
Redhead	5
Ring-necked Duck	17
Greater Scaup	11
Scaup sp.	5
White-winged Scoter	110
Long-tailed Duck	185
Bufflehead	128
Common Goldeneye	132
Hooded Merganser	39
Common Merganser	2156
Red-breasted Merganser	2600
Wild Turkey	31
Pied-billed Grebe	1
Double-crested Cormorant	71
Great Blue Heron	4
Northern Harrier	16
Sharp-shinned Hawk	10
Cooper's Hawk	16
Accipiter sp.	2
Red-tailed Hawk	168
Rough-legged Hawk	7
Hawk sp.	2
American Kestrel	43

in	2
American Coot	7
Bonaparte's Gull	4
Ring-billed Gull	379
Herring Gull	216
Lesser Black-backed Gull	1
Glaucous Gull	2
Great Black-backed Gull	35
Rock Pigeon	329
Mourning Dove	1695
Eastern Screech-Owl	11
Great Horned Owl	9
Belted Kingfisher	3
Red-bellied Woodpecker	71
Downy Woodpecker	103
Hairy Woodpecker	25
Northern Flicker	22
Northern Shrike	1
Blue Jay	500
American Crow	171
Horned Lark	70
Black-capped Chickadee	498
Tufted Titmouse	9
Red-breasted Nuthatch	17
White-breasted Nuthatch	41
Brown Creeper	3
Carolina Wren	21
Winter Wren	2
Wren sp.	1
Golden-crowned Kinglet	25
Eastern Bluebird	32
American Robin	1400
Northern Mockingbird	38
European Starling	2999
Cedar Waxwing	84
Yellow-rumped Warbler	2
American Tree Sparrow	583
Field Sparrow	35
Song Sparrow	18
Swamp Sparrow	2
White-throated Sparrow	25
White-crowned Sparrow	4
Sparrow sp.	2
Dark-eyed Junco	1028
Snow Bunting	1543
Northern Cardinal	448
Red-winged Blackbird	1
Common Grackle	1
Brown-headed Cowbird	34
House Finch	267
Common Redpoll	36
Pine Siskin	27

American Goldfinch	397
House Sparrow	1715
Total individuals	24,255
Total species	79

Thanks to Marcie Jacklin for this report. Ed.

WINTER WATERFOWL COUNT 2011

The weather for this year's count was less than amenable – a cold north wind brought tears to the viewer's eyes, while wave action and the propensity of ducks to dive added to the difficulty. The area covered this year was similar to last year's count, i.e. primarily along the Lake Ontario shoreline. This year's report shows the counts from 50 Point to Victoria Road (50-VICT); Victoria Road to Welland Canal West Pier (VICT PWV); Welland Canal East Pier to Niagara-on-the-Lake (PWE-NOTL), and Total, with additional data from the Niagara River (NOTL-Falls). A few species recorded on the Niagara River count were not noted in the Lake Ontario shoreline records.

In total, 21 species were seen, the most numerous again being Long-tailed Duck. The total number of birds seen (25243) was substantially higher than last year (19299). (*This year's total might be a record for this area; although John Black did not mention that possibility, last year he called a 'near-record'. Editorial note.*)

Several species were more numerous than last year - Red-breasted Merganser 5980 (3246 last yr); Common Goldeneye 2669 (1403); White-winged Scoter 2995 (666); Canada Goose 2721 (1468); Bufflehead 800 (420); Greater Scaup 1708 (30); Double-crested Cormorant 73 (5). Two species were less numerous than last year - Mallard 850 (1058) and Long-tailed Duck 8009 (10694).

PARTICIPANTS: John Black, Peter BonEnfant, Drew Campbell, Paula Clark, Blayne and Jean Farnan?, Jean Hampson, Bob Highcock, Kayo Roy, Dan Salisbury, Tim Seburn, John Stevens; Marcie Jacklin helped coordinate the group.

Duck Count 2011 Niagara

Location	50-Vict	Vict PWW	PWE-NTL	Total	NOTL-Falls
SPECIES					0
Common Loon				0	1
Pied-billed Grebe				0	
Horned Grebe				0	
Red-necked Grebe				0	
Double-crested Cormorant		73		73	
Tundra Swan				0	
Trumpeter Swan		1		1	
Mute Swan		2		2	10
Snow Goose				0	
Canada Goose	2366	283	72	2721	47
Wood Duck				0	
Green-winged Teal	1		1	2	
American Black Duck	18	8	27	53	5
Mallard	358	396	96	850	42
Northern Pintail				0	
Northern Shoveller				0	
Gadwall				0	
American Widgeon				0	1
Canvasback				0	8
Redhead				0	
Ring-necked Duck				0	1
Tufted Duck				0	
Greater Scaup	1708			1708	45
Lesser Scaup	2			2	
Scaup(sp)				0	
Harlequin duck				0	
Long-tailed Duck	7821	91	97	8009	602
Black Scoter	8			8	
White-winged Scoter	1963	94	38	2095	2
Surf Scoter	2			2	
Common Goldeneye	2176	344	149	2669	1
Bufflehead	434	190	176	800	21
Hooded Merganser		1		1	
Common Merganser	42	33	184	259	1
Red-breasted Merganser	2708	3018	254	5980	2
Merganser(sp)				0	
Ruddy Duck			1	1	
American Coot		2		2	1
Red-throated Loon				0	
King Eider				0	
Barnacle Goose				0	
Great Blue Heron				0	20
Bald Eagle				0	
Unknown		5		5	
Other					

*Grimsby, In poor shape

** CommonXBarrow's ?

2011 SPRING NATURE CALENDAR

10th ANNUAL MAPLE SYRUP FEST

Saturday, March 12, 2011, 10:00 a.m.

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

TUNDRA SWANS AT LONG POINT

Sunday, March 13, 2011, 8:30 a.m.

Meet the Niagara Falls Nature Club at the Fonthill Shoppers Drug Mart for a full day viewing Tundra Swans and other waterfowl. Bring lunch and dress warmly. Don Mills 905-892-3973.

LICHENS AND MOSSES AT ROCKWAY

Saturday, April 16, 2011, 10:00 a.m.

Meet at Rockway Community Centre to view the falls and identify lichens, mosses and early wild flowers along the trail. Roman Olszewski 905-732-9955.

4th ANNUAL ECOFEST NIAGARA

Sunday, April 17, 2011, 10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Niagara College, Glendale Campus, NOTL. Various demonstrations and speakers on 'Green Living'.

Climate Action Niagara 289-820-6440.

ANNUAL PENINSULA HAWKWATCH

Friday, April 22, 2011. All day.

Beamer Conservation Area south of Grimsby on Ridge Road. A fine opportunity to see many species of raptors, learn their identification, and meet birders from all over. Especially good for beginners! John Potter 905-892-2566.

MARCY'S WOODS

Saturday, April 30, 2011, 10:00 a.m.

Meet the Bert Miller Nature Club at the south end of Holloway Bay Road, Sherkston, to look for rare species. Tim Seburn 905-871-2577.

SHORT HILLS SANCTUARY CLEAN-UP

Sunday, May 1, 2011, 10:00 a.m.

Please help the Hamilton Naturalists Club with the annual maintenance of their sanctuary at the corner of Metler Road and Center Street, east of North Pelham. Plenty of wildflowers! Bring

lunch and tools for digging weeds. John Potter 905-892-2566.

FROGFEST AT HEARTLAND FOREST

Saturday, May 7, 2011, all day.

Expect to see many amphibians and flowers. Heartland Forest is on the west side of Kalar Road, between Brown Road and Chippawa Creek Road in south Niagara Falls. Family friendly and wheelchair-accessible. Paul Philp 905-894-2723.

ROCK POINT PROVINCIAL PARK

Saturday, May 14, 2011, 8:30 a.m.

Bring lunch and meet the Niagara Falls Nature Club at the Fonthill Shoppers Drug Mart to enjoy birds, butterflies and flowers. There is a park entrance fee. Family friendly. Rick Young 905-734-6226.

SWAYZE GORGE & SHORT HILLS PROVINCIAL PARK

Sunday, May 15, 2011, 2:00 p.m.

Meet at the Roland Road entrance to Short Hills Park to view Swayze Falls and spring wildflowers. The first part of the walk will be wheelchair accessible. Brian Calvert 905-892-6267.

LEADING EDGE CONFERENCE

May 26-27, 2011 (Thursday-Friday).

A Conference about the Niagara Escarpment, hosted by Brock University. (Note President's message, page 1). See the Niagara Escarpment Commission website <http://www.escarpment.org> for more details.

DECEW FALLS TO VINELAND

Saturday, May 28, 2011.

Details about these morning and afternoon walks will be in the May PFN newsletter. Brian Calvert 905-892-6267.

PFN SOMETIMES-ANNUAL PICNIC?

Yes, the attempted PFN PICNIC last year was a victim of inclement weather (read - RAIN!) But believing in the mysteries of fate, we will try again this year. Look for more info in the next newsletter.

Ramblings....

What are you reading these days? This question is frequently posed whenever our extended family get together. The love of books and reading is a legacy from my grandparents, one of the best presents our family ever received. Lately, with the popularity of e-books and downloading of internet material, I wonder if we'll experience a new version of "Fahrenheit 451" - ie. a world in which paper books are burned, not because of their informational content, but simply because paper books have become obsolete. I hope not.

Anyway, thanks to a kind gift from Kay McKeever, I am currently reading the book by William Stoltzenburg - "Where The Wild Things Were," sub-titled 'Life, Death and Ecological Wreckage in a Land of Vanishing Predators'. This is a book that will make you think, and challenge your assumptions of how the natural world works. I suspect that most of us, when presented with the statement that a few predators such as bears, timber wolves, tigers and the like are necessary in natural systems, might be inclined to argue that 'Well, yes, we might need a few, but not too many - and not in my subdivision!'

What Stoltzenburg suggests is that not only do we need some predators but that, in ecosystems where those predators are eliminated, the ecosystem quickly falls apart. Think of the food-chain or food-web as a triangle, with many species at the base and one or two (usually a predator) at the top. Now, consider what happens if the predator is removed. Usually, without the predator keeping the next level in check, that level of species can multiply without restraint, and over-populate until or unless its food sources are depleted and it either migrates or starves. Think of the white-tailed deer population, free of predators in Short Hills Provincial Park. Then consider white-tailed deer being likewise numerous and predator-free in almost every American State and that, in some Federal and State parks, deer have almost exterminated species like ladies-slipper orchid, spring beauty and trilliums by over-grazing.

You may not particularly care for coyotes - many of us don't, especially since we've been informed by the press that coyotes have been known to kill small pets. However, how many folks consider their favorite house-cat as a predator? Stoltzenburg cites evidence that U.S. house cats murder nearly a billion mice, voles and baby rabbits, plus hundreds of millions of birds yearly. In coastal Florida, house cats were found to be depleting colonies of piping plovers. Surprisingly, in San Diego, a researcher discovered that in the chaparral canyons, a fair number of bird species were being protected from cats by - guess what? - coyotes! The coyotes were actually predated the cat population, and allowing the songbirds to flourish. This information was gained by radio-tracking the cats, and finding their carcasses obviously partially-consumed by coyotes.

Further, Stoltzenburg suggests, one species on this planet has been particularly efficient at eliminating or drastically reducing the predator species that once were at the top of the food-pyramid. That efficient eliminator would be us - *Homo sapiens*. Think of the species which are now endangered - whales of all types, tigers, lynx, bluefin tuna, Atlantic cod, albatrosses, sharks - the list goes on and on. Who or what replaces these lost species? And how does the ecosystem react when the top predator is gone? Can you picture, in your wildest imagination, a planet on which we, the ultimate top predator, has been also somehow eliminated? Could it be that our extinction would be the salvation for all the rest of the Earth-bound species?

I started this Rambling talking about books. You or I might also consider that the paper-copy book itself could become a casualty of the current fascination with social media. And that the tendency amongst youth towards avoiding the outdoors could have disturbing results in the whole scheme of Nature. The bottom line, according to Stoltzenburg, might be summarized as this: "If we are indeed seeing a fundamental decline in people's appreciation of natural areas... this does not bode well for the future of biodiversity conservation."



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, Carlton RPO., St. Catharines, ON. L2R7P6

EVENTS OF IMMEDIATE INTEREST

INNINGS:


The **ANNUAL PFN POTLUCK DINNER** will be at Mountainview United Church, 150 Glendale Ave., St. Catharines, on Monday, April 25, 2011, 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 first course, surnames M-Z bring salad or desserts. 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 6 OF THIS NEWSLETTER. ALL OUTINGS ARE WEATHER-DEPENDENT – IF IN DOUBT, CALL THE DESIGNATED CONTACT.

The Peninsula Naturalist Newsletter

Published: February, April/May, October
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The Editor welcomes written articles or artwork on any natural history topic. Hand-written articles will be accepted; if possible, please submit items on disks or email to jmpotter@talkwireless.ca
All pieces of artwork will be accepted, although lines drawings are preferable, as they are better suited to photocopying. New ideas and/or constructive suggestions are always welcome.
Editorial Staff: John Potter
Labelling/Mailing: Kay Smith

2010/2011 PFN EXECUTIVE

President	John Potter	905-	
Past. Pres.	Roman Olszewski		
Vice-Pres.			
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Treasurer	Don Minchin		
Membership	Brian Calvert	905-	
Director	John Black		
Director	Brian Calvert		
Director	Lorraine Desjardins		
Director	Bryan Joule		

-please send submissions to the above email or postal address-

Deadlines for submissions 2011:

Jan. 28; April 10; Sept. 30