



# The Peninsula Naturalist

Volume 235

Newsletter of the Peninsula Field Naturalists Club

February 2014

Happy 60th Anniversary, Peninsula Field Naturalists!

On April 26, 1954, citizens interested in nature responded to an invitation sent by J.R. Ferguson and George H. Dickson and attended a meeting to discuss the formation of a naturalist club in Niagara. At the conclusion of the inaugural meeting, the first nature club within the Niagara Peninsula was formed. At the next meeting which included a field trip to a farm in Fonthill, it was decided the club be named the Peninsula Field Naturalists.

Since the 1950's, members of the PFN have participated in field trips and attended indoor meetings and in 1964, the first newsletter was published to keep members informed on activities and feature articles about nature in the Niagara Region. Fast forward to 2014. After 60 years, the Peninsula Field Naturalists continues 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.

We have an interesting lineup of speakers set for this year and outings are scheduled from March until the end of May. If more are scheduled, we'll let you know at a meeting, through the club website and on our Facebook page. If you have an idea and would like to lead a Fall outing, let me or a member of the executive know. There are still many hidden gems within the Niagara Region that we can explore.

The Peninsula Field Naturalists have offered in-kind support to two projects. If called upon, we may need your knowledge and identifying skills as well as some good old-fashioned manual labour to assist the Niagara Restoration Council with their "Conserving Niagara's Forests for the Future" project and the Hamilton Conservation Authority with their "Species At Risk Stewardship Fund" project in Short Hills.

It looks to be an interesting year and I hope to see you on one of the outings or assisting with one of the projects. You will be pleased to know that you're carrying on the aims and objectives that the Peninsula Field Naturalists established 60 years ago.

*Pres. Bob Highcock*

---

## CONTENTS

- Page 2. Changes at the NPCA – Joyce Sankey; Necrology
- Page 3. Peninsula Field Naturalists 2014 Outings
- Page 4. Mud Lake Birding; Purple Sandpiper search
- Page 5-6 Christmas Bird Count
- Page 6-7 Winter Waterfowl Inventory



## Changes at the NPCA – Why You Should Care

When the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority (NPCA) advertised consultation on its strategic plan two years ago, I did not realize that what was being planned was an extreme change of direction. I was shocked to see on the NPCA website that the plan indicated a much more development friendly direction and also that “surplus” lands were to be disposed of.

At the open house in November, the consultant on the strategic plan made much of the fact that employees with a “sandpaper attitude” (workers enforcing the by-laws?) had been let go. He also outlined the process of consultations, where “stakeholders” such as developers were given private meetings to let them voice their opinions of what the NPCA should do.

The plan has not yet been adopted but employees have been fired. In Mid-November one person was fired from the Watershed Development Services. On Nov. 22<sup>nd</sup>, the Director of Land Management’s position was eliminated and that staff member was fired. His duties had included ensuring public safety and managing all of the Conservation Authority’s lands, buildings, etc. and the staff who maintain the conservations areas. On Dec 18<sup>th</sup>, it was announced at the NPCA Board meeting that Mr. David Barrick, who was on leave from this same board, was recruited in the position of the newly created “Operations Manager in the Land Management Department”. This position was never publicly advertised. New positions are being created and filled with titles more in line with the Conservation Authority’s anti-conservation bent. The CEO is being given a retirement package.

More conservation employees have been fired. On January 9<sup>th</sup>, four persons from the Watershed Stewardship Department were let go, three additional persons were fired including the Site Administrator of Ball’s Falls and the Conservation Planner (previously under Land Management). This means that in November and January ten persons – nearly 20% of staff have been let go.

As naturalists in Niagara we know and have worked with NPCA employees. We know them to be hard working individuals who are devoted to Niagara’s natural heritage and its preservation.

If we do not have the Conservation Authority acting as a front line protection for our forests and wetlands but instead as an agency charged to make sure developers have no roadblocks put in front of them, Niagara will lose much of the nature that we love.

What can you do? Let the NPCA know how important the protection of wetlands and forests is to you. Contact the NPCA board member from your municipality <http://www.npca.ca/corporate-services/board-of-directors/> and also let other regional and city councillors know your priorities. Feel free to email me for more information. – [jsankey@cogeco.ca](mailto:jsankey@cogeco.ca)

Joyce Sankey

---

## NECROLOGY

### **John (Jack) H. Travers (1920-2014)**

Another long-time member of the Peninsula Field Naturalists has passed on. Jack Travers was the third President of the Club, in the year 1958, and retained his membership until the end of 2013. Jack was a pilot during the Second World War, and worked with the Seaway for 31 years. He and his wife Beatrice had lived on Jefferson Drive until recently when they moved to the Orchards Retirement Home in Vineland.

On his last PFN membership renewal form, Jack mused “I can still remember the great trips along the river at Jordan, with “old” Bert (80) scampering across the rocks. Now that I am over 90, no more jumping over ponds. Bea and I still dance at the Seniors Club but seldom get out at night. Regards to all the members”. He also retained his sense of humour – on the renewal, he noted “No computer – we can just barely manage our cellphones”. And on that last membership form, he gave a substantial donation to the Club. R.I.P.



## MUD LAKE OUTING

On a sunny but chilly morning on November 3, ten PFN members met in Port Colborne at the entrance to Mud Lake Conservation Area. Immediately, we observed a flock of lovely Cedar Waxwings feeding on fruiting trees close to the parking area. Proceeding to the lake, we were rather disappointed that the usual variety of waterfowl were not present, although a small number of Mallard Ducks were on the water and we did hear Canada Geese in the vicinity. Some of us did observe a Yellow-Rumped Warbler flitting above, some Downy Woodpeckers put in an appearance and we had many American Robins and Black-Capped Chickadees along the trail. Some of the plants and trees were still holding onto their fall colour and the Grey dogwood and asparagus was particularly attractive.

We saw red squirrels, American Tree Sparrows, Northern Cardinals and Blue Jays but the highlight bird would have to be the bird I first dismissed as a Cowbird. Thankfully, I took a closer look and realized it was a beautiful male Rusty Blackbird! A bird that Bob and I needed for our year list and a new bird for some of the people on the trip. We even heard his unique song, sounding like a squeaky screen door. Everyone had a good look at him before he moved off into the brush.

The trail was slippery from the rain the day before so we didn't walk the entire 3 km perimeter of the lake but I encourage everyone to give it a try sometime. Bob and I have observed 66 species of birds there including Sora, Black-Crowned Night Herons, many species of ducks including Northern Shovelers, Pintails, Wood Ducks and Teals. We have seen deer, muskrats and frogs as well. I want to thank everyone who came out and hopefully we can visit Mud Lake again, perhaps in the Spring.

*By Jean Hampson*

---

## IN SEARCH OF THE PURPLE SANDPIPER

November 10, 2013

This PFN trip began at the entrance to the East Pier of Port Weller at 0830 hours. While we were getting ready to walk out on the pier, a rare Northern Goshawk flew over and vanished in the east. A strong wind blew from the west during our walk out to the tip. There were surprisingly few late migrants and overwintering birds. We saw a few Juncos, Robins and Chickadees. Once out at the tip we observed a Red-throated Loon, a Common Loon and, just south of the light beacon, a pair of Red-necked Grebes. The usual ducks were present; Long-tailed Ducks, Bufflehead, Red-breasted Mergansers and Mallards. A solitary American Kestrel was flying about by the canal at the tip and a single Snow Bunting was observed as we walked out to the light beacon.

We scanned the rocks looking for the Purple Sandpipers and, unfortunately, were not able to find one.

It took us about 2 hours to complete the walk. Some of the participants then continued on to the Parmalat Lagoons, where we observed a Dunlin, and then to the Sir Adam Beck Reservoir where we saw 8 vultures, 4 of them Black Vultures, a new arrival in Niagara.

(Note: this is the second year we have searched for, and failed to find, the Purple Sandpiper. I walked out to the tip on November 23 and again failed to find a Purple Sandpiper but noted that the American Kestrel was still present.)

*By John Black*

## ST. CATHARINES CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

The Peninsula Field Naturalists held their Christmas Bird Count on December 15, 2013. Neither heavy snowfall, gusty winds, getting stuck in driveways or secondary roads kept 40 dedicated counters from going out that day. The number of participants was lower than average (44) but that was due to a few illnesses and injuries. Many thanks are due to all the participants who braved the weather conditions. Temperatures ranged between -4°C and -12°C. The results show that everyone on the count contributes to the success of this count. We collectively spent 90.7 hours in the field and walked or drove 932.65 km. In spite of one area, which wasn't covered, we tallied 80 species, which is just above average of 76 species. We tallied 15,236 individuals, which is well below the average of 23,676.

The big surprise of the count was two Turkey Vultures, a first record. Nancy Smith saw the Red-headed Woodpecker during count week, which bumped our total species to 80.

A sighting of three Tundra Swans produced a third record for the count and a record high count for this species. We recorded the highest number of White-crowned Sparrows (64) since the official beginning of the count in 1982. We also recorded several lowest counts for American Crows (55) and Black-capped Chickadees (164). Two Bonaparte's Gulls was also an unusually low number for the count. Northern Shovelers (2) and a Black-legged Kittiwake were both seen for the fourth time on this count.

Of course the big story this winter is Snowy Owls and we managed to record two on the count this year.

Also a big THANK YOU once again to Mary and John Potter for organizing this years 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 40 participants:-: Brian Ahara, Rhonda Armstrong, Jesse Barraza, John Black, Peter BonEnfant, Paul Chapman, Sue Chapman, Barb Charleton, Emily Cornfield, Rachael Cornfield, Trevor Cornfield, Carl Damude, Janet Damude, Elaine Dimond, Rob Dobos, Kathy Ellis, Chris Escott, Cathy Giancarlo, Sarah Gillespie, Lynda Goodridge, Jean Hampson, Bob Highcock, Carol Horvat, Marcie Jacklin, Nabil Khairallah, Ramsey Khairallah, Kara Kristjanson, Matt Mills, Carol Ricciuto, Kayo Roy, Joyce Sankey, Tim Seburn, Dave Smith, Nancy Smith, Pat Smith, Roy Sorgenfrei, John Stevens, Katherine Stolz, Jamie Wolf, Rick Young.

**Total individuals      15,236                      Total species    80**

Canada Goose	2790	Eastern Screech-Owl	5
Mute Swan	13	Great Horned Owl	1
Tundra Swan	27	Snowy Owl	2
American Black Duck	31	Belted Kingfisher	2
Mallard	803	Red-bellied Woodpecker	42
Northern Shoveler	2	Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	1
Redhead	7	Downy Woodpecker	85
Ring-necked Duck	38	Hairy Woodpecker	13
Greater Scaup	5	Northern Flicker	21
Lesser Scaup	2	Blue Jay	346
Surf Scoter	1	American Crow	55
White-winged Scoter	42	Horned Lark	97



Long-tailed Duck	30	Black-capped Chickadee	162
Bufflehead	31	Tufted Titmouse	10
Common Goldeneye	85	Red-breasted Nuthatch	3
Hooded Merganser	39	White-breasted Nuthatch	27
Common Merganser	342	Brown Creeper	2
Red-breasted Merganser	45	Carolina Wren	10
Wild Turkey	15	Winter Wren	1
Red-throated Loon	1	Wren sp.	1
Pied-billed Grebe	1	Golden-crowned Kinglet	18
Double-crested Cormorant	67	Eastern Bluebird	39
Great Blue Heron	7	American Robin	594
Turkey Vulture	2	Gray Catbird	1
Bald Eagle	1	Northern Mockingbird	21
Northern Harrier	4	European Starling	3079
Sharp-shinned Hawk	8	Cedar Waxwing	71
Cooper's Hawk	10	Yellow-rumped Warbler	1
Red-tailed Hawk	102	American Tree Sparrow	445
Hawk sp.	2	Field Sparrow	1
American Kestrel	20	Song Sparrow	11
Merlin	1	White-throated Sparrow	42
American Coot	7	White-crowned Sparrow	64
Bonaparte's Gull	2	Sparrow sp.	1
Ring-billed Gull	339	Dark-eyed Junco	1236
Herring Gull	105	Snow Bunting	86
Glaucous Gull	3	Northern Cardinal	221
Great Black-backed Gull	66	Red-winged Blackbird	1
Black-legged Kittiwake	1	Brown-headed Cowbird	8
Gull sp.	4	House Finch	228
Rock Pigeon	364	American Goldfinch	284
Mourning Dove	1199	House Sparrow	1230
		Unspecified sp.	1
		Am.Black Duck x Mallard	1
		Red-headed Woodpeck CW	1

## LAKE ONTARIO MID-WINTER WATERFOWL INVENTORY

I am writing this report on Tuesday, January 7, and am very relieved the count was not scheduled today (21 degrees below zero and strong winds)! Eighteen observers participated in the count on January 5, 2014. We covered the Lake Ontario shore line, from 50 Point to Niagara-on-the-Lake, and the Niagara River up to the Falls. We also drove out on the east and west sides of the Port Weller piers. The canal often has a number of sheltering ducks in it but this year it was almost entirely frozen over. There were a few Double-crested Cormorants and Mallards at the sewage outlet.

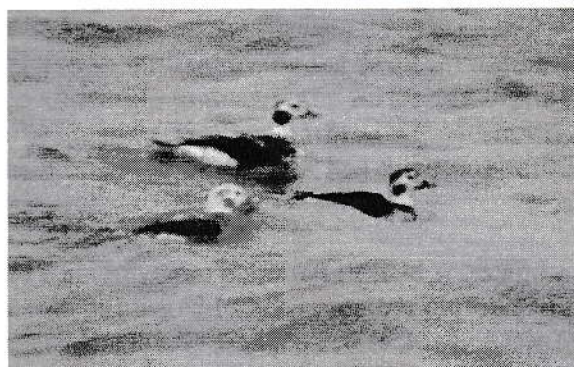
In almost all locations there were open leads close to shore but then the ice extended out to beyond the range for identification through the telescopes. We could see many hundreds of ducks out too far to be identified. We saw 17 species of duck, 9 Red-throated Loons, 1 Horned Grebe, Tundra and Mute Swans, Coots, 3 adult Bald Eagles and an amazing 10 Snowy Owls sitting out on the ice!

*By John Black*

Duck Count 2014  
Niagara

Location SPECIES	50-Vict	Vict PWW	PWE- NOTL	Total	NOTL- Falls
Common Loon				0	
Pied-billed Grebe				0	
Horned Grebe		1		1	
Red-necked Grebe				0	
Double-crested Cormorant		13		13	1
Tundra Swan		7		7	
Trumpeter Swan				0	
Mute Swan		3	2	5	1
Snow Goose				0	
Canada Goose	1946	189	70	2205	32
Wood Duck				0	
Green-winged Teal				0	
American Black Duck	3	4	2	9	6
Mallard	396	350	72	818	106
Northern Pintail				0	
Northern Shoveller				0	
Gadwall				0	
American Widgeon				0	
Canvasback			2	2	1
Redhead	2			2	4
Ring-necked Duck		2		2	
Tufted Duck				0	
Greater Scaup	352	1		353	12
Lesser Scaup			4	4	
Scaup (sp.)		12	19	31	
Harlequin duck				0	
Long-tailed Duck	4657	151	178	4986	925
Black Scoter				0	1
White-winged Scoter	672	542	105	1319	450
Surf Scoter				0	1
Common Goldeneye	1196	828	398	2422	50
Bufflehead	466	186	63	715	36
Hooded Merganser				0	2
Common Merganser	96	99	38	233	60
Red-breasted Merganser	1944	1061	119	3124	64
Ruddy Duck				0	
American Coot		11		11	2
Red-throated Loon			9	9	
King Eider				0	
Unknown Merganser		9	21	30	
Unknown	7200	745	500	8445	
Bald Eagle	1 Adult	1 Adult	1 Adult	3 Adults	
Snowy Owl		2	8	10	





**Top Left – Mud Lake Outing; Top Right – Port Weller East Spit; Bottom – Long-tailed Ducks**  
Photos by Jean Hampson



**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 and Nature Canada .

**P.O. Box 23031, RPO Carlton, St. Catharines, ON. L2R 7P6**

**Website : [peninsulafieldnats.com](http://peninsulafieldnats.com)**

**The Peninsula Naturalist**

*Published:* February, April/May, October/November

The Editor welcomes written articles or artwork on any natural history topic. Please submit typed reports on paper or by email to: [jmpotter068@gmail.com](mailto:jmpotter068@gmail.com) Colour photos (jpg) accompanying articles are welcome. All pieces of artwork will be accepted. New ideas and constructive criticism are welcome. Please send submissions by email to e-address above, or by snail-mail to the Club's postal address.

**Editor:** John Potter  
**Assistant:** Mary Potter

**Deadlines for submissions 2014:**  
**February 14; April 18; October 17**