



# The Peninsula Naturalist

Newsletter of The Peninsula Field Naturalists'

Volume 250  
Spring 2020

## New Members

- Myra Stewart
- Diana Laubitz
- Terri & Mike Kershaw
- Glenda & Barry Neil
- Carol Pazitka
- Thu Thi Nguyen-Brown & James Brown
- Lise & Ron LaRoche
- Charleen & Philip Goodwin
- Kathleen Ashwood
- Shirley Harrison
- Elizabeth Field

## Upcoming Meetings

- April meeting is cancelled.
- Updates will be posted on the Peninsula Field Naturalists Facebook page.

## Upcoming Outings

- Upcoming outings have been cancelled.
- Updates will be posted on the Peninsula Field Naturalists Facebook page.

## A Message From the President

As it has done since its founding, the Peninsula Field Naturalists' Nature Club has advocated, educated and participated in the conservation of natural resources and green spaces in the Niagara Region. To do this well, the club requires a committed executive and engaged members.

I am pleased to work with this year's Executive and was happy to see Carol Horvat step up into the role of Vice-President, a position that has been vacant for a few years. I welcome the addition of Don Stevenson to the Board, and we'll continue to come up with exciting presentations and outings. Many thanks to Wendy Bradley for her role as Secretary from 2007 to 2019.

Participating in events like Winterfest and the Birds on the Niagara will assist in informing the public of what we do for the environment and will also inspire future naturalists. Engaging kids in the 21st century can be a challenge, but we have a great team that continues to come up with new ideas.

There are many knowledgeable members in this club and finding new locations for outings in Niagara and beyond will promote participation. I look forward to attending new hikes this spring as well as coming up with new outings for this fall and next year when meeting with the Outings Committee.

Together, the members and Executive of the Peninsula Field Naturalists can look forward to spending some time in the natural areas of the Niagara Region and beyond. Hope to see you on one of the hikes or at a meeting.

Bob Highcock, President



Rick Young and Roman Olszewski representing the club at Winterfest. See page 4 for more information. © Rick Young

Since I submitted my comments for this newsletter, there has been a drastic change in the way we lead our daily lives. To flatten or plank the curve, we have cancelled meetings, postponed outings, and parks and trails have closed. Many forms of social gatherings are on hold, and I expect to send out additional cancellation notices, all to help curb the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

It will take time, but with these measures, we will be able to meet again and walk along a trail in a conservation area enjoying nature together. For now, I wish you all well and to stay healthy.

## In Memory of David Gittings 1933 - 2019

On May 3, 2019, PFN member David Gittings passed away in his 86th year. David was a member of the Niagara Regional Police Service for 40 years, retiring in 1994 with the rank of Staff Superintendent.

David enjoyed playing golf and bridge for 70 years at the St. Catharines Golf and Country Club and also served on the Board of Directors for the John Howard Society for many years.

with David looking after the church facilities and chairing the property committee.



As members of the Peninsula Field Naturalists', both David and Judy were the first to arrive and last to leave when the indoor programs were held at Mountainview United Church. If an issue arose or an item was needed, David was always eager to assist with resolving the issue. David and Judy's dedication to club meetings is truly appreciated.

The conversations with David and Judy on Monday evenings were enjoyable, and their presence will be fondly remembered.

Both he and his wife Judy were long-time members of Mountainview United Church



## Presentations 2019 - 2020 by Jean Hampson & Bob Highcock

On September 23, 2019, John Black spoke on the topic of Uganda - Land of Gorillas and Shoebills.

John and his birding friends spent 18 days travelling around Uganda in July of 2018. John's quest is to see all of the bird families, and he needed the Shoebill, plus some gorillas would be nice. The second day into his trip, John was able to see the Shoebill at the Makanaga Wetlands. They travelled all around the country, which included crossing the Equator. His group saw many other amazing sights such as elephants, giraffes, numerous colourful bird species, hippopotamuses, lions and beautiful waterfalls. They also managed to visit chimpanzee and gorilla habitats for up-close looks at these great apes.



Shoebill © John Black

On October 28, 2019, Jean Hampson and Bob Highcock presented **The Wild West of Cuba**.

They described their February 2019 travels in the western provinces of Cuba to search for endemic bird species and other wildlife. Highlights of the trip were the Zapata Wren, Zapata Sparrow and the Bee Hummingbird, the smallest bird in the world. Other notable observations were Cuban Tody, Great Lizard Cuckoo and Cuban Trogon, the national bird of Cuba. Historical sites were also visited while travelling through Cuba, which included the cities of Trinidad, Santa Clara and Havana. When not birding, Jean and Bob went spelunking, snorkelling, boating and sampling rum. They encourage everyone to get off the resort and explore the wild side of Cuba.



Bee Hummingbird © Jean Hampson

November 25, 2019, was the annual PFN Dessert Night, and our speaker that evening was Bruce Mackenzie. Bruce's topic was **Wings Along a Cliff**.

Bon Echo Provincial Park is located in Cloyne, Ontario and offers scenic views from a 100-metre-high cliff that overlooks Mazinaw Lake. Indigenous pictographs and the Old Walt inscription can be seen on the granite rock wall when canoeing or kayaking on the lake with a maximum depth of 145 metres.

Geology, birds and plants can be observed while camping, boating and hiking in the park. Just be careful to watch out for falling discarded parts from a Peregrine Falcon's prey while kayaking below the cliffs. Other wings along the cliff include Barn Swallow, Eastern Phoebe, Prairie Warbler, Turkey Vulture, Common Raven and Common Merganser.

Columbine, Pale Corydalis, Service Berry and Blueberry are just some of the blooms that can be seen at Bon Echo. Ancient Cedars,

White Pine and Pear Tree seem to grip onto the edges of the rock wall. If you have a list of provincial parks you would like to visit, Bon Echo should be added if it is not already there.



Sunset reflects off Mazinaw Rock at Bon Echo Provincial Park. © Bruce Mackenzie

On January 27, 2020, Claire Theijsmeijer and Veronica Clarke-Hanik from The Friends of Malcolmson Eco-Park discussed the **Invasive Plant Species Removal in Malcolmson Eco-Park**.

The St. Catharines park is located along the Welland Canal and gets its name from Mary Malcolmson, who organized the first Canadian Girl Guide Organization in 1910. Members from the Peninsula Field Naturalists have enjoyed the natural setting of the park for many years.



The removal of invasive species from the park is a multi-year plan with a focus on approximately two to three acres a year. Species of concern include European Buckthorn, Oriental Bittersweet Vine, Manitoba Maple, Sycamore Maple, Norway Maple, Multiflora Rose, Tartarian Honeysuckle and Garlic Mustard.

Malcolmson crew, Sal Sorrento (left) and Bob Highcock (right). © Sal Sorrento

The project started with the first girdling spray of two forested areas in December 2018. In May of 2019, student groups pulled Garlic Mustard in the forest and prairie sections of the park. Volunteers planted native shrubs and trees. In June of the same year, a second spray was applied in the two forested areas. In October, canopy openings were noted in the central forest sprayed area. Volunteers cut down dead invasive plants and planted native shrubs and trees. In January 2020, a girdling spray was applied to another forested area. From January to April of this year, a Niagara College field project to inventory priority invasive plants in the forest will help identify areas of high-density invasive species and where to focus removal efforts. They are looking for volunteers to help with future plantings. Hopefully, some PFN members will be able to assist with this project.

On February 24, 2020, Phil Downey presented **A Traveller's Guide to the U.S. Southwest**. It is reviewed on the next page.

Unfortunately, the March indoor meeting with guest speaker Peter Thoen was cancelled due to recent world events. We hope to reschedule his talk, **An Old Bird Book** for a future meeting.

# A Traveler's Guide to the U.S. Southwest by Janet Damude

On February 24, 2020, Phil Downey, a St Catharines resident, took club members on a tour of the U.S. Southwest. Although Phil's primary interest is the night sky, he has, in recent years, developed an interest in birding. His presentation was based on three two-week trips that were taken through the states of Arizona, New Mexico and Utah to enjoy both birds and the night sky. He gave us such a wealth of information; it was challenging to take notes on it all.

One piece of advice was to go on a new moon or the last quarter. The skies are more visible, and the birds do not care. His second piece of advice was to purchase the National Parks Pass. It is reasonably priced and makes it very affordable to visit and revisit the parks.

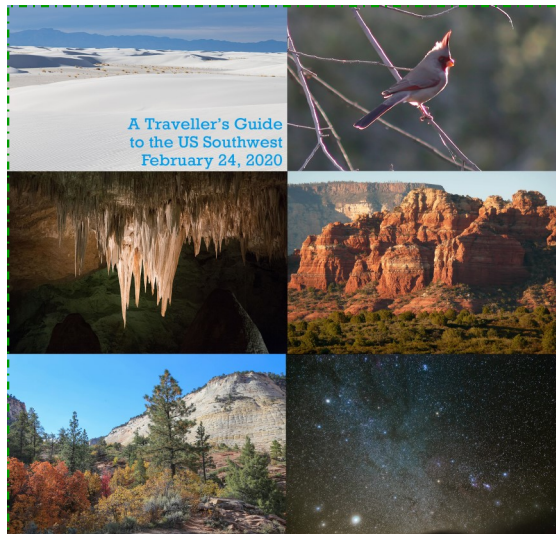
Arizona was the first trip. At Kitt Peak National Observatory outside Tucson, he found good birds, including his first Road Runner. Open night and day, with numerous observatories for stargazing, and you can watch professional astronomers at work. There are tours available for a fee and telescopes for amateurs. Saguaro National Park is named for the majestic, long-lived native desert plant, the Saguaro Cactus, found only in a small portion of the US. The city of Sedona offers suitable accommodations, great hiking and excellent bird watching. Flagstaff is home to the Lowell Observatory, which offers guided tours and is home to the telescope that made possible the discovery of Pluto. Phil suggests several days around the Grand Canyon. He was fascinated by the smoke from a controlled burn clouding the distant sky. The layers of history visible by examining the cliffs of the canyon should capture everyone's attention and the sandstone buttes in Monument Valley are spectacular. There is a fascinating historical area around the Eldon Pueblo Archeological site where people had lived in carved out holes. Phil enjoyed a Raven in Petrified Forest National Park. This park had many petroglyphs and logs that have turned to stone. Nearby is Meteor Crater, just under a mile wide and carved by a meteorite impact; it offers tours and a museum and has been used by Astronauts for training.

The trip to southern New Mexico provided excellent birding with lots of new birds because of the elevation. The dark skies of the area also made for fantastic star

gazing. Pine Oak Woodlands had a profusion of hummingbirds, some familiar and some new. Gypsum sand crystals form the dunes of White Sands National Park. Phil was impressed with the Yucca plant that thrives here, with it being beneficial in dune stabilization as well as for animal and human uses. Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge is a famous birding destination. Ross's and Snow geese are plentiful, and they congregate at an area called the flight deck. Early on winter mornings, there will be silence, then almost simultaneously, thousands of geese will take off. They circle around and eventually resettle. Large numbers of Sandhill Cranes also winter in the wetland. For a long downhill walk, visit Carlsbad Caverns National Park with its over one hundred caves and lots of stalactites. From spring to fall, every evening, park visitors can watch the spectacular outflights of bats that roost in some of the caves. Don't forget; you have to walk back uphill.

Phil's trip was to Utah to visit The Mighty 5 National Parks, prime sites you can visit night or day. Zion National Park was his first stop, which was quite beautiful. He then moved on to Bryce Canyon National Park with its many stunning overlooks such as Sunset Point and Sunrise Point, beautiful alpine forests and red rock hoodoos. Phil felt it also had the best astronomy sites. At Capitol Reef National Park, the fall colours were lovely. It has some fantastic geological structures and offers dark sky programs for stargazing. Rain here comes in quite quickly, so hikers must watch for flash floods. The Arches National Park has over 2000 natural sandstone arches. Photographing was a must, and the Balanced Rock, a massive rock balance on a natural pillar, drew much attention. Canyonlands National Park displayed beautiful colours and breathtaking cliffs. Within the park is Upheaval Dome, which for many years was a mystery but is now thought to be a meteorite crater.

After discussing each trip, Phil shared his list of bird species he observed, and the show closed with lovely shots of the colourful sky as the sun went down, and the stars twinkled.



© Phil Downey

## Nature Quiz

1. When do Great Horned Owls begin sitting on their nests?  
Why do they start so much earlier than songbirds?
2. In what type of very limited habitat can the Kirtland's Warbler be found?  
Where in Ontario has it been located?
3. What tree leaf is heart-shaped and has toothed edges?  
When do the flowers bloom on this tree?

by Marlene Sanders

4. Which tree bark looks like ski runs?  
Do the leaves have pointed or rounded lobes?
5. The Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority oversees the Niagara Peninsula watershed. Which two areas are part of the watershed other than Niagara?  
How many properties or Conservation Areas does the NPCA manage?

Answers can be found on the back page.

## Spring Tailgate Potluck

by Janet Damude

We arrived at our usual meeting spot on April 22, 2019, but the doors to the Niagara Region building were locked. It was the evening of our spring potluck party. We waited. Fortunately, it was a cool but pleasant evening. Finally, a gentleman came out and explained it was a government holiday, and access was not to be.

What about our supper? President Bob decided to have members arrange their vehicles in two lines, back to back about nine feet apart in the parking lot. With trunks and hatchbacks open, the food was displayed, the desserts finding their way to the back of a pick-up truck. Everything looked delicious.



Desserts on a tailgate.

excellent if not as hot. There was a wide variety of salads and other dishes and a punch brought by the Potters was enjoyed. The desserts were a challenge to choose from.

When appetites were satisfied, we tidied the trunks and replaced the food with the treasures for the auction. We purchased our tickets and dropped them into a container next to each prize we hoped to win. Ticket sales were brisk, and many were delighted with their winnings. Barb, with her team, supervised the draws. Goodwill and laughter prevailed.

Let our tailgate party begin! Wandering between the vehicles, we filled our plates, chatted and sampled each dish. Hot foods had been brought warm and were still

As the light was fading and a chill fell in the air, we packed up. This evening will not be forgotten. Hurray for tailgate parties.

## In Search of the Purple Sandpiper

by Barb West

November 9, 2019 was a beautiful day, so we once again set out to find the elusive Purple Sandpiper. We never did see it, but we got to see some other exciting birds. We saw a Peregrine Falcon, a Great-Horned Owl, Common Loons, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Tree Sparrow, Cedar Waxwing and Snow Bunting. Among the more common birds we saw were the Downy Woodpecker, Chickadee, Robin, Mourning Dove, Flicker, Goldfinch, Cardinal, Junco, Blue Jay, White-Throated

Sparrow, Hairy Woodpecker and Red-Bellied Woodpecker. On Lake Ontario and the pond, we saw Cormorant, Bufflehead, Mallard, Gadwall, Greater Scaup, Red-Breasted Merganser, Goldeneye, Long-tailed Ducks, Wigeon, Canada Geese, Black Duck, Herring Gull and Ring-billed Gull. So although we didn't see the Purple Sandpiper, we did have a successful outing. Oh well, maybe next year.

## Birds on the Niagara

by Jean Hampson & Bob Highcock

The Peninsula Field Naturalists' were invited to participate in this international birding event on February 15, 2020. This is the second year the Birds on the Niagara International Winter Celebration has taken place, but last year Bob and I were in Cuba, so we were unable to participate.

This year we set up a booth inside the Niagara Glen Nature Centre alongside other nature clubs and organizations. We talked to a good number of people stopping by our booth, who expressed a genuine interest in our club. The bonus was that our booth was located next to the Canadian Raptor Conservancy and their live birds of prey.

We also led a guided walk along the Niagara River at Brown's Point in Niagara-on-the-Lake. We had sixteen participants, and we observed birds both on the river and in the wooded grove along the trail. It was a newly introduced birding area for some of the attendees.

Marcie Jacklin from the Bert Miller Nature Club and Kayo Roy from the Niagara Falls Nature Club also led outings at different points along the river. Outings and events took place on the U.S. side of the river as well.

It was wonderful to be in the company of people from both countries who care about wild birds.

## Winterfest

by Rick Young

Each year on Family Day, the Heartland Forest group celebrates Winterfest and invites many organizations such as nature clubs, geology and astronomy groups to participate in this event at their open house.

The Peninsula Field Naturalists' accepted this invitation and had our display board there along with a craft for children to make and take home.

Our display board depicted what we had seen on our outings and walks, items such as birds, animals, butterflies and plants. We also handed out our club brochures describing our outings and meetings.



Rick and Roman making bird nests with the children. © Rick Young

Our children's event was to encourage them to make models of a bird's nest designed by Marlene Sanders. This they did by using a homemade play dough made by Marlene to form the nests into a saucer-like shape. Next, a feather and a piece of moss were added. Finally, one or two jelly beans were added to represent eggs. At least fifty children participated, and most took their models home.

This was a successful day. Many thanks to Marlene Sanders and Roman Olszewski for providing materials and expertise. It was a beautiful day, sunny but cool, so the large crowds were able to enjoy the outdoor events and walks along with the indoor ones.

# St Catharines CBC

by Jean Hampson & Bob Highcock

The Peninsula Field Naturalists' held their Christmas Bird Count on Sunday, December 15, 2019. The daytime temperature ranged from -3°C in the morning to a high of 2°C in the afternoon with clouds throughout the day.

Thank you to the 51 participants listed below for assisting with the count, to Mary and John Potter and Janet and Carl Damude for organizing the round-up party at the North Pelham Youth Hall, and to everyone who brought main courses and treats for all to enjoy. Thank you also to Sharon Wilson for allowing access to her property during the count.

Brian Ahara, Rhonda Armstrong, John Black, Sam Brockington, Carla Carlson, Paul Chapman, Sue Chapman, Barb Charlton, Paula Clark, Emily Cornfield, Rachael Cornfield, Trevor Cornfield, Rob Dobos, Philip

Downey, Rob Eberly, Chris Escott, Doug Gillard, Lynn Glover, Bev Hadler, Jean Hampson, Sara Handrigan, Shirley Harrison, Bob Highcock, Carol Horvat, Myra Kennedy, Mike Kershaw, Terri Kershaw, Nabil Khairallah, Nabila Khairallah, Kara Kristjanson, Win Laar, MaryAnn Mikolic, Gisele Mills, Matt Mills, Greg O'Rourke, Bill Rapley, Judy Robins, Kayo Roy, Marlene Sanders, Karin Schneider, Tim Seburn, Loretta Shields, Bill Smith, Ken Smith, Nancy Smith, Roy Sorgenfrei, Lucas Stanfield, John Stevens, Sally Tasane, Tom Thomas, Victoria Tousaw, Rick Young.

New high counts were recorded for Trumpeter Swan (15), Bald Eagle (8) and Common Raven (4). Trumpeter/Tundra Swan (6) was a new record for the SC CBC. Species observed during count week - Fox Sparrow.

Canada Goose	4,624	Herring Gull	165	American Tree Sparrow	81
Mute Swan	9	Lesser Black-backed Gull	1	Chipping Sparrow	2
Trumpeter Swan	15	Great Black-backed Gull	7	Fox Sparrow (Count Week)	1
Tundra Swan	10	gull species	79	Dark-eyed Junco	362
Tundra/Trumpeter Swan	6	Rock Pigeon	619	White-crowned Sparrow	42
American Black Duck	22	Mourning Dove	409	White-throated Sparrow	31
Mallard	376	Eastern Screech Owl	6	Song Sparrow	2
Canvasback	8	Great Horned Owl	3	Northern Cardinal	223
Redhead	14	Snowy Owl	1	Red-winged Blackbird	5
Ring-necked Duck	28	Belted Kingfisher	5	Brown-headed Cowbird	23
Greater Scaup	9	Red-bellied Woodpecker	58	House Finch	248
Lesser Scaup	1	Downy Woodpecker	56	American Goldfinch	388
White-winged Scoter	16	Hairy Woodpecker	12	House Sparrow	77
Long-tailed Duck	65	Northern Flicker	30		
Bufflehead	29	American Kestrel	24		
Common Goldeneye	60	Merlin	1	Total number of species	79
Hooded Merganser	53	Northern Shrike	1	Total number of individuals	16,898
Common Merganser	154	Blue Jay	371		
Red-breasted Merganser	501	American Crow	57		
duck species	14	Common Raven	4		
Wild Turkey	50	Horned Lark	53		
Common Loon	4	Black-capped Chickadee	169		
Pied-billed Grebe	1	Tufted Titmouse	3		
Red-necked Grebe	1	Red-breasted Nuthatch	2		
Double-crested Cormorant	45	White-breasted Nuthatch	28		
Great Blue Heron	8	Brown Creeper	1		
Northern Harrier	2	Carolina Wren	29		
Sharp-shinned Hawk	7	Golden-crowned Kinglet	4		
Cooper's Hawk	10	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	1		
Bald Eagle	8	Eastern Bluebird	76		
Red-tailed Hawk	110	American Robin	393		
Rough-legged Hawk	2	Northern Mockingbird	12		
American Coot	1	European Starling	5,854		
Bonaparte's Gull	1	Cedar Waxwing	136		
Ring-billed Gull	471	Yellow-rumped Warbler	9		

*The Peninsula Field  
Naturalists' Club*



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**2020 Executive**

**President** ~ Bob Highcock

**Vice President** ~ Carol Horvat

**Secretary** ~ Jean Hampson

**Treasurer** ~ Janet Damude

**Membership Secretary** ~ Rick Young

**Directors** ~ Barb West ~ Doug Gillard

~ Roman Olszewski ~ Marlene Sanders

~ Don Stevenson

**Non-Executive Positions**

**Newsletter Editor** ~ Lorraine Brown-Joyce

**Webmaster** ~ Adrian Lawler

The Peninsula Field Naturalists' Club is 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. We are affiliated with Ontario Nature and Nature Canada.

Our meetings are held on the fourth Monday of each month from September to April (except December) at 7:30pm. We meet in Committee Room 4 at the Niagara Region Headquarters, 1815 Sir Isaac Brock Way, Thorold, ON, Canada. We also offer various outings around the Niagara area. Please check our Facebook page for more information.

The Peninsula Naturalist newsletter is published twice per year, in Spring and Fall. Submissions for the next newsletter should be received by the end of March or September for publication.

Club members are encouraged to send in articles, photos, stories, observations and outing reviews to PenFieldNatsNews@gmail.com. Material accepted may be edited and will be used subject to space allowances.

Views expressed are not necessarily those of the Peninsula Field Naturalists' Club or the Editor.

Thank you to all the members who volunteer their time to our club and also to those who make submissions to make our newsletter fabulous!

**Nature Quiz Answers**



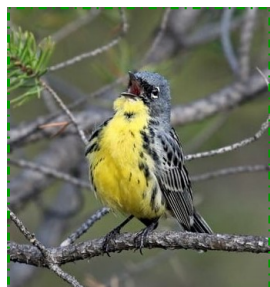
© Debbie Wright

1. In January or February

They are such a large bird, the young take longer to grow and mature

2. Large stands of young Jack Pines, which grow in sandy soil and regenerate only after fires.

Petawawa, adjacent to Algonquin Provincial Park



www.allaboutbirds.org  
© Cornell Lab of Ornithology

3. Basswood

Mid summer



© Not So Hollow Farm

4. Red Oak

Pointed lobes



© Not So Hollow Farm



© Sutton Massachusetts

5. City of Hamilton, Haldimand County

41 areas



© NPCA