



The Peninsula Naturalist

Newsletter of The Peninsula Field Naturalists' Club

Volume 257
SPRING 2024

New Members

- Katherine Christie
- Philip Downey
- Jeff Gilbert
- Barbara Harris
- Nancy Hartwell
- Jill Miike
- Doug Palmer
- Guy Royal
- Karen Saylor
- Ian Wright

Upcoming Meetings

- All monthly meetings are in person at Bethany Community Church, 1388 Third Street Louth, St Catharines at 7:00 pm.
- September 23 - Mike Kershaw - PLAINS OF KENYA
- October 28 - Rafael Fernandes - BRAZILIAN BIODIVERSITY AND ORNITHOLOGY IN TROPICAL ECOSYSTEMS
- November 25 - Josh Vandermeulen - SOME HERPS I'VE KNOWN: EVOLUTION AND LIFE STRATEGIES ENCOUNTERED ON MY TRAVELS

Upcoming Outings

- Watch your email, the PFN website or our Facebook page for our upcoming outings.

A Message From the President

After receiving a letter dated April 15, 1954, recipients attended the Peninsula Field Naturalists (PFN) inaugural meeting on April 26, 1954. G. Francis Goldring (temporary chairman), J.W. McInally (secretary-treasurer), Mrs. J.A. Selby, Alan J. Smith, George H. Dickson and Dr. W.E. Hurlburt were appointed to the board. Less than a month later, the next meeting was held and included the first field trip to the farm of W.E. Hurlburt.

Since the 1950s, the club has offered outings, held indoor meetings and sponsored the St. Catharines Christmas Bird Count.

Over the last several decades, the Peninsula Field Naturalists have stood up for the natural environment. With our excellent Executive and wonderful membership, I look forward to continuing to work together to advocate, educate and participate in the conservation of natural resources and green spaces in the Niagara Region.

Happy 70th Anniversary to the Peninsula Field Naturalists!

Bob Highcock,
President



The cake celebrating 70 years of PFN from the annual picnic held in June.

SC CBC 2023

by Jean Hampson & Bob Highcock

The Peninsula Field Naturalists held their annual St Catharines Christmas Bird Count on December 17, 2023. Throughout the day, the daytime temperature averaged 8° Celsius and the skies were mostly cloudy. Precipitation during the count was light to heavy throughout the day.

Thanks to all the participants who assisted with the count as well as to Sharon Wilson and Carla Carlson for allowing access to their

properties. Jean, Paula and Bob appreciated the warm coffee prepared by Carla Carlson.

New high counts were recorded for Mute Swan (40) and Trumpeter Swan (18). Previous high counts for Mute Swan (25) and Trumpeter Swan (17) were recorded during last year's SC CBC. Common Raven was noted as a count week bird.

For this year's count, we had forty participants as follows: Amanda Anstic, Lisa Bacon, Zhianna Bacon, Laura Bell, John Black, Neal Bonnor, Sam Brockington, Carla Carlson, Shirley Chambers, Paul Chapman, Sue Chapman, John Ciemitis, Paula Clark, Philip Downey, Christopher Escott, Kirsti Haaka, Jean Hampson, Bob Highcock, Myra Kennedy, Mike Kershaw, Terri Kershaw, Ramsey Khairallah, Laurie King, Olivia King, Kara Kristjanson, Renee Kuchapski, Sandy McCutcheon, Joan Preston, Andrea Radman, Karin Schneider, Tim Seburn, Bill Smith, Ken Smith, Nancy Smith, Roy Sorgenfrei, John Stevens, Katherine Stoltz, Michelle Stranges, Tom Thomas, Diana Werezak, Rick Werezak, Debbie Wright.



Train trestle over Twenty Mile Creek in Jordan Station .
© Bob Highcock

We'd like to thank everyone who volunteers to help make the annual event a success.



Jean and Paula walking at Jordan Harbour Conservation Area. © Bob Highcock



Jean looking for birds out into Jordan Harbour. © Bob Highcock

| | | | | | |
|--------------------------|-------|-------------------------|-------|-----------------------------|--------|
| Canada Goose | 2,969 | Sharp-shinned Hawk | 1 | Brown Creeper | 3 |
| Mute Swan | 40 | Cooper's Hawk | 11 | Winter Wren | 2 |
| Trumpeter Swan | 18 | Bald Eagle | 6 | Carolina Wren | 22 |
| Tundra Swan | 2 | Red-tailed Hawk | 63 | Golden-crowned Kinglet | 17 |
| Gadwall | 7 | Rough-legged Hawk | 1 | Eastern Bluebird | 30 |
| American Black Duck | 7 | Ring-billed Gull | 660 | Hermit Thrush | 1 |
| Mallard | 350 | Herring Gull | 138 | American Robin | 502 |
| Northern Pintail | 2 | Great Black-backed Gull | 7 | Northern Mockingbird | 4 |
| Canvasback | 20 | gull species | 5 | European Starling | 7,420 |
| Redhead | 61 | Rock Pigeon | 326 | Cedar Waxwing | 41 |
| Ring-necked Duck | 33 | Mourning Dove | 1,643 | American Tree Sparrow | 263 |
| Greater Scaup | 403 | Eastern Screech Owl | 6 | Dark-eyed Junco | 473 |
| White-winged Scoter | 132 | Great Horned Owl | 1 | White-crowned Sparrow | 41 |
| Long-tailed Duck | 53 | Belted Kingfisher | 5 | White-throated Sparrow | 27 |
| Bufflehead | 57 | Red-bellied Woodpecker | 41 | Song Sparrow | 11 |
| Common Goldeneye | 275 | Downy Woodpecker | 38 | Swamp Sparrow | 2 |
| Hooded Merganser | 1,145 | Hairy Woodpecker | 18 | Northern Cardinal | 127 |
| Common Merganser | 58 | Northern Flicker | 24 | Red-winged Blackbird | 6 |
| Red-breasted Merganser | 97 | American Kestrel | 21 | Brown-headed Cowbird | 11 |
| duck species | 74 | Merlin | 2 | House Finch | 103 |
| Ring-necked Pheasant | 1 | Blue Jay | 369 | Pine Siskin | 3 |
| Wild Turkey | 51 | American Crow | 118 | American Goldfinch | 211 |
| Common Loon | 1 | Black-capped Chickadee | 198 | House Sparrow | 390 |
| Double-crested Cormorant | 6 | Tufted Titmouse | 14 | | |
| Great Blue Heron | 7 | Red-breasted Nuthatch | 5 | Total number of species | 73 |
| Northern Harrier | 4 | White-breasted Nuthatch | 26 | Total number of individuals | 18,330 |

Journey from Lake Erie to the Arctic

by Bob Highcock

At the October 2023 PFN meeting, Adam Shoalts treated us all to a new adventure, a taste of his 3,400-kilometre solo canoe journey from Lake Erie to the Arctic following the route of migrating falcons.



All alone in a canoe. © Adam Shoalts

Adam Shoalts is a professional adventurer and Westaway Explorer-in-Residence at the Royal Canadian Geographical Society. Named one of the “greatest living explorers” by CBC and declared “Canada’s Indiana Jones” by the *Toronto Star*, Shoalts is best known for his long solo wilderness journeys, including crossing alone nearly 4,000 km of Canada’s Arctic. His other national bestselling books include *Alone Against the North*, *A History of Canada in 10 Maps*, and *Beyond the Trees: A Journey Alone Across Canada’s Arctic*, and *The Whisper on the Night Wind*. He has a PhD from McMaster University in history, and in his free time, enjoys long walks in the woods.

Adam’s journey was inspired by a Peregrine Falcon he observed flying over Norfolk County fields near Lake Erie, so it seemed natural to start his adventure at Long Point on April 24. Adam described his journey and experiences canoeing along the Lake Erie shoreline, down the mighty Niagara River and along the south shore



The route from Lake Erie to the Arctic. © Adam Shoalts

of Lake Ontario. He encountered storms, a gracious photographer and his family and helpful Niagara Parks Police officers. Over the entire journey, there were a total of 150 perfect strangers.

Adam spent his evenings sleeping in a backyard, on Navy Island and beneath the Burlington Skyway.

He kept everyone on the edge of their seats, what was going to happen next? Where would he get his next meal? Well, we would have to purchase his newest book *Where the Falcon Flies* to find out if he successfully reached the Arctic Ocean.

Where the Falcon Flies was a wonderful read and Jean and I will live up to the advice Adam wrote in our copy of his book, “Never stop exploring!”



In line for book signing. © Bob Highcock

Hoot-enanny at the PFN

by Ken Smith

The PFN held a hootenanny in November when Peter Thoem and Annick Gionet Rollick from The Owl Foundation spoke at our in-person meeting. Peter described how new technology has allowed scientists to discover fascinating new information on Snowy Owl migration. Snowy Owls have a more complicated migration pattern than the regular north and south movement of most other bird species. Using solar-powered tracking devices worked great for Snowy Owls since they are active during the day, but other options are needed for nocturnal owls that mostly hide themselves away



Eastern Screech Owl fledgling being returned to the nest. © Bob Highcock



Eastern Screech Owl. © Jean Hampson



Great Gray Owl © Jean Hampson

about her years as The Owl Foundation zoologist. When a PFN member asked if she sometimes sees the owls as being affectionate, she said that she prefers it when she sees their fierceness return to them.

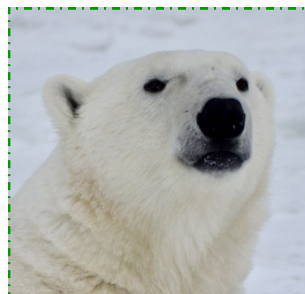
When an owl starts to feel better and starts to give her warning snaps then that is a sign that its strength has returned and it might be suitable for life in the wild. She also likes to see the orphaned owls learn from their foster parents that snapping at humans, even the humans taking care of them, is the correct response to people entering their enclosure. Overall, it was a great presentation from a great organization.

The Importance of Sea Ice to Polar Bears by Mary-lou Davidson

January’s PFN meeting was a full house to hear Jean Hampson and Bob Highcock give a presentation on their trip to Churchill, Manitoba to see the Polar Bears.

They wisely decided to go from Winnipeg to Churchill by train. They observed deer, bald eagles, red foxes, northern hawk owls, and ruffed grouses from the comfort of their dome car, and they also witnessed the fabulous Northern Lights.

At their destination in Churchill, Jean and Bob took a helicopter tour, and showed us



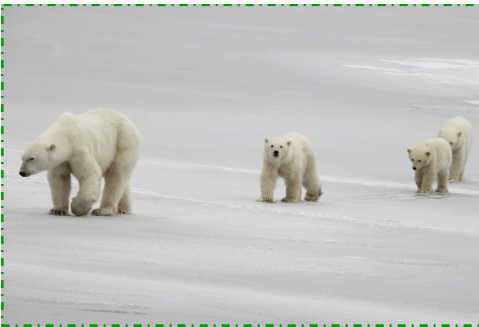
Sub-adult male. © Jean Hampson

photographs of the ice formations. Then we got what we all wanted to see - Polar Bears!

Churchill has 900 to 1,000 bears but the numbers are declining. This may be because the bears are moving to better locations. However, the grim projection is that by 2040 it may well be the end of Polar Bears due to the lack of sea ice. The ice cover keeps the ocean temperatures down and provides resting areas for the Polar Bears, so they don’t have to swim out so far. Having to stay inland longer means less food. The

The Importance of Sea Ice to Polar Bears

continued



Mama bear with triplets.

© Jean Hampson

Ringed Seal is their preferred dinner.

Polar Bears have wide "snowshoe" feet. A male can weigh 600 to 1200 pounds and be five feet at the shoulder and seven to nine feet standing. Cubs are born in late

December and at birth weigh only one pound. The average number of cubs born to the sows is two but there can be one or three.

Polar Bear Jail is for the troublemakers. It's a holding facility until the sea ice forms and the bears can be

released.

Jean and Bob were on the tundra buggies for two days, impressing us with wonderful photographs of the bears, especially a mother bear with triplets. They also saw Arctic Fox, Red Fox and Willow Ptarmigan.

Everyone thoroughly enjoyed the presentation and the photographs. If going to Churchill, Manitoba to see the Polar Bears wasn't already on your bucket list, it should be after hearing about the fantastic time Jean and Bob had.



Sub-adult males wrestling.

© Jean Hampson

Journey to Antarctica

by Ken Smith

It is possible to swim in the waters of Antarctica! That's what the PFN members learned when retired physics professor John Black and freelance science journalist Philip Downey presented their trip to the very bottom of the Earth. Philip and John embarked on their once-in-a-lifetime expedition with Quark Expeditions from Ushuaia,



Philip Downey (left) and John Black.
© Philip Downey

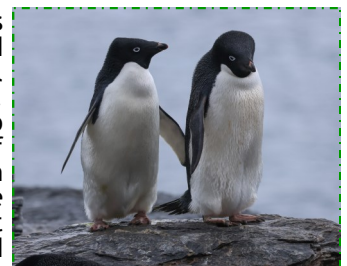
Argentina on a ship with 128 fellow passengers. They travelled to the Falkland Islands, South Georgia, the South Orkney Islands and finally Antarctica itself. There were many interesting birds to see, not only at the island destinations but also on the

ocean itself, where birds such as the Black-browed Albatross and the Cape Petrel would fly above the ship. John and Philip were also able to see many species of penguins, along with Humpback whales, Blue whales, dolphins, Elephant seals, and Leopard seals.



Weddell Seal.

© Philip Downey



Adélie Penguins.

© Philip Downey

This was in addition to showing us pictures of beautiful glaciers and the current champion for the world's largest iceberg. From icy plunges in freezing water to wondering why penguins spend so much time standing around staring at each other, there were a lot of amusing anecdotes and beautiful bird pictures to keep the PFN audience entertained and interested.

Power Glen Walk

by Jean Hampson

On September 16, 2023, fourteen PFN members met at Rotary Park on Pelham Road and followed various trails through Power Glen. We hiked on portions of the Laura Secord Trail and Bruce Trail, observing birds such as Blackburnian Warbler, Black-capped Chickadee and White-breasted Nuthatch.



Walking on the trail.
© Jean Hampson



The cemetery is located on land granted to John Turney (1744 - 1818), a Lieutenant in Butler's Rangers during the American Revolution.
© Jean Hampson

We reached the pedestrian bridge that crosses the Twelve Mile Creek and there we admired a family of Mallards, some beautiful wildflowers and many Meadow Katydid. Then we climbed the switchback trails to the Power Glen neighbourhood to make our way back to

the park. As we passed by, a property owner called us and asked if we were interested in seeing the 19th-century cemetery in her backyard. With a resounding 'yes', we all went to observe the Turney Family Burial Ground (often referred to as the Boyd, Turney, Christie Cemetery).

The Patriarch, Lieutenant John Turney, was a member of Butler's



While no stone to John Turney survives, there is a stone for his daughter Jenny (1774-1812), wife of William Boyd (? -1837).
© Jean Hampson

Rangers. He and at least ten other family members are interred here. It's interesting how a nature walk turned into a local history lesson that we all thoroughly enjoyed.

Morgan's Point Conservation Area Walk

by Jean Hampson



Bald Eagle. © Jean Hampson

The last day of September 2023 was slightly overcast but beautiful as our club ventured to Morgan's Point Conservation Area in Port Colborne.

Our best treat happened at the beginning of our visit.

As we walked to overlook the shoreline of Lake Erie, we noticed a beautiful adult Bald Eagle perched above us. We saw at least one hundred Common Mergansers on the lake and two American Pipets flew overhead. We walked on the boardwalk through the woods. Here we



The group walking along the beach on Lake Erie. © Jean Hampson

observed both Ruby and Golden-Crowned Kinglets as well as Magnolia, Yellow-rumped, Blackpoll and Black-throated Blue Warblers.

Some Green Frogs, insects and native plants were added to the PFN iNaturalist project.

Morgan's Point is always a wonderful place to explore.



Meadow Katydid. © Jean Hampson

Short Hills Provincial Park Outing

by Doug Gillard

The PFN planned our Short Hills outing for Sunday, October 15, and as it turned out, the Niagara Falls Nature Club had an outing there on the same day. They contacted us to see if we wanted to do a joint outing.



Cleaning our boots/shoes before entering the park. © Bob Highcock

We were expecting a larger-than-average group and had plans to deal with it. For some reason, only Win and Kal Laar showed up from the Niagara Falls Nature Club. Thirteen of us enjoyed an overcast, 9 C morning outing in Short Hills Provincial Park at the Wiley Road entrance.

Before I lead an outing, I try to find some information on the history or interesting facts about the area. I

found lots of information on the natural history of Short Hills, but I still can't find any history information. I know John Brown from the Brown Homestead on Pelham Road, owned part of Short Hills and that is the extent of what I know about the history of this area. I don't know what the early settlers did with the land if anything at all. The path leading from the Wiley Road parking lot looks like it may have been a road or driveway at one time. I will have to keep digging.

The natural history of this 660-hectare or 1600-acre provincial park is very interesting. The hilly, rolling landscape was defined thousands of years ago by glaciers. During the Wisconsin Ice Age (approx. 12,800 years ago), the area of Short Hills was flooded by the body of water known as Lake



Down the trail... © Bob Highcock

Warren, which would eventually, become known as Lake Erie. As the glaciers retreated, they left behind large deposits of sand and rock. Eventually, as the water in Lake Ontario receded and levelled off and rivers and streams provided routes for glacier melt, the once-flooded area became lush and green. During this retreat of the melt waters, the fast-flowing Twelve Mile Creek cut into the sedimentary deposits creating the deep valleys we see today.



Asian Lady Beetle © Bob Highcock

This time of year is not the best to see a large number of bird species, but we did manage to see seventeen. We saw a few Ruby-crowned and Golden-crowned Kinglets, Carolina Wrens, White-breasted Nuthatches, White-crowned and White-throated Sparrows. Jean spotted an American Redstart that we all were able to see. We also saw five Yellow-rumped Warblers during our outing.

During every outing, there is always something we see or hear that, for me, gets tagged to that outing. Whether seeing Ravens chasing a Great Horned Owl as we saw on our Cherie Road Park Spring outing or seeing baby Carolina Wrens up close as we saw on our Martindale Area Evening outing, there is always something. For me, on this outing, it was listening to two Eastern Towhees calling back and forth. They were both very close to us, one on either side of the trail. We just stood there, quietly listening to them, enjoying their songs.



... and over the bridge. © Bob Highcock

Cherie Road Park Fall Outing

by Doug Gillard

It was cool at 9:30 am on October 28, for the start of our Cherie Road Park Fall Outing, but the bright sun warmed it up nicely. We saw twenty species of birds, including five species on the waters of Lake Ontario. The birds we saw on the lake included twenty Red-breasted Mergansers, five Bonaparte's Gulls and a few Ring-billed and Herring Gulls as well as two Double-crested Cormorants. Some of the other birds that we saw were two Red-bellied Woodpeckers, one Ruby-crowned Kinglet and three Golden-crowned Kinglets. We also saw a White-breasted Nuthatch, a Carolina Wren, three Dark-eyed Juncos and four White-throated Sparrows.



Doug leading the outing. © Jean Hampson

The morning of our outing was the sixth day of the strike on the St. Lawrence Seaway. The strike stopped the big freighters from navigating the Welland Canal, so they had to anchor in the lake to wait it out. As we reached the top of the cliff looking out over the lake, we were greeted with the sight of eleven ships anchored just offshore. That's something you don't see every day. Also on the lake, we saw a guy enjoying his morning windsurfing.

Sometimes on our outings, I am surprised at what we see; sometimes it's something that happens that brings a smile to my face. As we were looking for birds, I stopped and looked back to see how everyone was doing. Only to see about three or four of our gang had stopped to talk to a man walking his dogs. I started to laugh, here's Melissa with the man's old black lab on its back, with Melissa rubbing its belly.

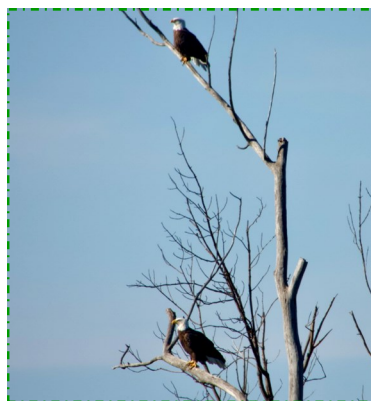
We go on these outings to be with fellow nature lovers and check out birds and other nature-related things that we can find. But sometimes, something else might happen that brings a smile to your face.



The group looking at the ships on Lake Ontario. © Jean Hampson

Still Searching for the Purple Sandpiper

by Don Stevenson



Bald Eagles. © Mary-Lou Davidson

On November 5, 2023, a group of naturalists walked along the East pier of the Port Weller entrance to the Welland Canal. The day was dry, sunny and warm. The search for the Purple Sandpiper was not a success. There had been no sightings earlier in the week either.

Twenty-five species of birds were seen which included Dark-eyed Junco, Bald Eagle, Ring-billed Gull, White-breasted Nuthatch, Common Tern, Common Merganser, Bufflehead, Peregrine Falcon (seen on the West pier), Mallard, American Black Duck, Dunlin, Spotted Sandpiper, European Starling, Double-crested Cormorant, Cooper's Hawk, Northern Flicker, Common Loon, Ruddy Duck, Snow Bunting, Long-tailed Duck and White-throated Sparrow.

One lonely yellow butterfly was seen. Sweet Cherry trees, most likely a result of seed dispersal by birds, were observed. Cottonwoods were located around the pond. There were no Eastern Grey Squirrels seen.

It was a good day in the Carolinian zone.



Duntins.

© Mary-Lou Davidson



The group walking along the trail.

© Debbie Wright

Total 2023 Species Tally and More

by Ken Smith

The year 2023 was a fantastic year for PFN outings. In 2023 our club saw 134 different species of birds. That is more than half the number of bird species reported by all birdwatchers in Niagara this year. Some bird highlights include a Blackpoll Warbler, a Black-billed cuckoo, a pair of Osprey, a Red-headed Woodpecker, a Snow Bunting, a Peregrine Falcon, and a Great Horned Owl being chased by Crows. We also saw more than just birds. There were Red-backed Salamanders, White Suckerfish, American Bullfrogs, White-tailed Deer, Cottontail Rabbits, and a family of Raccoons. We used iNaturalist to identify more than 100 plants, mushrooms, lichens, and slime moulds. We also pet numerous dogs along the trail, had many conversations, and discovered a hidden Pioneer cemetery.



Great Golden Digger Wasp. © Jean Hampson



Pale Jewelweed. © Jean Hampson



Eastern Phoebe. © Jean Hampson



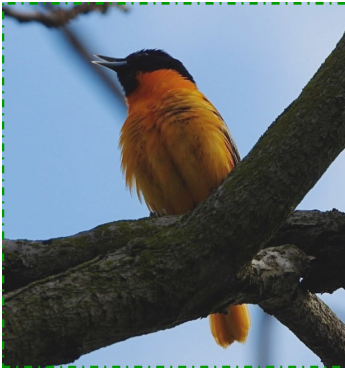
Red-backed Salamander. © Jean Hampson

Cherie Road Park in the Spring

by Doug Gillard

On May 4, 2024, seventeen of us got together to look for spring birds at Cherie Road Park. Cherie Road Park is a beautiful little park in north St. Catharines that is very familiar to everyone in our group except one person. So, it was a pleasure to show this park to one of our newer members.

It was a little cool first thing in the morning when we started, but the day turned out to be nice. We managed to see or hear forty-one different species of birds during our two-hour and fifteen-minute outing. When we heard a bird, we tried to get a look at it. Most times we were successful, but we looked and looked and couldn't find the Blue-gray Gnatcatcher that was singing high in a tree.

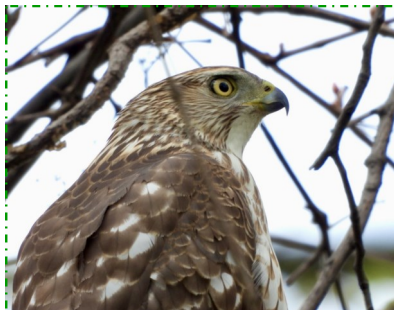


Baltimore Oriole. © Jean Hampson

tried to find it and get a look at it, like we usually do. In the small trees above the Catbird, were several Blue Jays making a lot of noise. At first, I thought they were harassing the Catbird until someone saw the Cooper's Hawk. Sitting just above the bush that the Catbird was in was a Copper's Hawk trying to catch breakfast. After a few minutes of being harassed by the Blue Jays, it decided to leave.

We all enjoyed getting together on a beautiful Saturday morning for the PFN Spring Bird Walk at Cherie Road Park.

There were two highlights on this outing. The first was getting a close look at a pair of Mallards with their twelve babies on the creek. The babies were very small, maybe only a few days old. The second highlight happened a little farther down the path. It involved several different birds. We heard a Gray Catbird in the thick bushy area along the path, so we



Cooper's Hawk. © Jean Hampson



White Suckerfish © Jean Hampson

*The Peninsula Field
Naturalists' Club*



PO Box 23031, RPO Carlton
St Catharines, ON
L2R 7P6

www.peninsulafielddnats.com

email: info@peninsulafielddnats.com

2024 Executive

President ~ Bob Highcock

Vice President ~ Carol Horvat

Secretary ~ Jean Hampson

Treasurer ~ Doug Gillard

Membership Secretary ~ Barb West

Directors ~ Mary-Lou Davidson

~ Ken Smith

~ 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.

Currently, our meetings are held at 7:00 pm on the fourth Monday of each month from September to April (except December) at Bethany Community Church, 1388 Third Street Louth, St Catharines. We may offer various popup 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!

In Closing... Enjoy Our Photo Gallery



Turkey Vulture.

© Jean Hampson



Arctic Fox.

© Jean Hampson

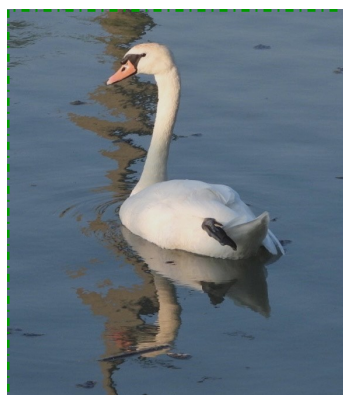


Bold Jumping Spider.

© Jean Hampson



Yellow Warbler © Jean Hampson



Mute Swan.

© Jean Hampson



Rockhopper Penguin.

© Philip Downey