
Nature Niagara News



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Niagara Falls
Nature Club

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NIAGARA LAND TRUST CANBY PROPERTY

Last year (2014) the Niagara Land Trust purchased a piece of property in Wainfleet from the Canby family estate. An extremely rich and diverse area of approximately 3.25 hectares.

The property consists of two regimes. The dry areas were dominated by Sugar Maple-American Beech forest but with examples of Yellow Birch among others and a specimen of Highbush Blueberry. The wet slough areas had many examples of sedges, grasses and rushes, plus Marsh Marigolds, an abundance of Cinnamon Fern and many other fern species.

Some other vascular plants of note were the rare Dwarf Ginseng along with Halberd-leaved Tearthumb, Wood Anemone, Hog Peanut and Mad Dog Skullcap.

Saprophytes noted were Pinesap, Beechdrops and Indian Pipe along with many examples of fungi.

Other sightings of note were a Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Spring Peeper, Wood Frogs and an interesting caterpillar, an Io moth.

There were so many sightings that cannot be included but the writer has lists of observations that may be viewed upon request.

This area is well worth a visit by naturalists both professional and amateur.

Rick Young



Io moth

SO I TASTED DIRT

Two conservation technicians, Erin and Sepi, from Ontario Nature were going to visit Mitchell Nature Reserve for three days in August and invited the stewards to join them. Unfortunately on short notice all we could arrange was for Rick and I to join them on the second morning.

It was a lovely day, slight breeze, mixed clouds and comfortable temperatures. Surprisingly the biting insects were only moderately bothersome.

We meet at the road and the rail-trail. After introductions we discussed what they had seen the day before and what was still to be accomplished. I was delighted to hear they had been able to follow our paint-marked trail while exploring the west side of the reserve.

In the ditch we noted Japanese Knotweed, an invasive and Wild Parsnip, toxic to touch. I am puzzled on how to handle them since technically they are not on our property but could be soon.

We walked along the rail-trail to the northeast corner, crossed the ditch and were in the cool woods. In some areas the ground was covered with plants, Sensitive Fern, Hog Peanut, Mayapple, White Baneberry and Halberd-leaved Tearthumb but in other areas mostly under the Eastern Hemlock vegetation was scarce. Young Eastern Hemlock did flourish. The wet areas were mostly soft mud. Lots of tiny frogs hopped about. We identified Wood Frog, American Toad and Spring Peepers. Crows scolded loudly from the treetops. Some small birds hopped quickly through the greenery. The only one identified was a Chickadee. There are a lot of Beech trees but fortunately very few Ash trees.

Sepi did a soil sample. I was fascinated. With a special auger she bored about a meter down and laid the samples out on the ground. Below the duff we decided there were four distinct layers.

Sepi showed me how to test each layer by feel then moistening, rolling, ribboning and finally tasting. So I tasted dirt. There was a difference. Surprising and interesting.

Erin and Rick were busy making notes re inventory and Ecological Land Classification. Apparently the management plan is to be updated soon.

Rick and I had to leave. Erin and Sepi were going to have lunch then gather more information to update the maps and ecosystems. They planned to check the south boundary between the Mitchell Reserve and the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority land the next day.

It was such fun to spend time with these knowledgeable and enthusiastic young ladies. A very enjoyable morning even with a bit of grit in my teeth.

Janet Damude



American Toad



Halberd-leaved Tearthumb

Toad & Tearthumb
At Harold Mitchell

REMEMBERING DON MILLS

One of our long time nature club members, Don Mills, passed away September 16, 2015. He and Gisele, along with Rick and Dora Young, joined NFNC around the same time, 1991. They quickly became fast friends, going out birding together almost every weekend, until Dora passed away May 23, 2012.

Don will be remembered for his sense of humour as much as for his birding knowledge. He did much behind the scenes, chairing our Programs and Outings Committee, controlling the lights at our meetings and producing the tickets for our annual dinners. He created a laminated cheat sheet with photos of ducks, which came in handy as he cheerfully drove his vanload of nature lovers on countless outings, setting up his scope and not leaving until everyone had seen all there was to see.

When there were jobs to be done, Don and Gisele could always be counted on to participate. Whether manning the display on Canada Day at Optimist Park in Niagara Falls, or talking with every person who attended Hawk Watch in Grimsby, they were there. And you knew what group they were affiliated with, for they always proudly wore their nature club shirts.

There will be a big space at the back of the room without Don with us, as we enfold Gisele in our circle of caring, and remember the gentle man with the twinkle in his eye who will remain in our hearts forever.

WIN LAAR



A TRIP TO KENYA

Tim Seburn and Marcie Jacklin made a fascinating presentation to the Niagara Falls Nature Club in September on their recent trip to Kenya in October, 2014. Before they committed to their journey, they considered the volatile political climate, with recent terrorism near the Somalian border, and potential health risks due to Ebola outbreaks in West Africa. Satisfied that the risks were minimal, they flew to Nairobi via Belgium to begin an exciting 17 day excursion, focussing on bird watching. Their guide was a local birder named Joseph, who Marcie and Tim became so close with that he travelled here to visit them this past May.

Setting off from Nairobi, their first stop was a sewage lagoon, which Marcie explained is very exciting to birders, as these areas are hot spots for birders. One of their first sightings was a Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird. That afternoon they made it to Mt. Kenya National Park, and the following day to Samburu National Park where they stayed at the Samburu Game Lodge. A sign outside their lodgings warned them to not leave the reserve between 6:30 pm and 6:30 am due to the dangers of nocturnal animals, and to stay in their vehicles even during the day. Here they saw elegant Superb Starlings and Red-billed Hornbills with striking black and white plumage. The Indigenous Samburu people live in a village outside the Park, fenced in to protect themselves and their cattle from wild animals, and like all the villages they visited, had no electricity or water. But every village had a market open daily, with stalls filled with merchandise from mattresses to clothing and food.

As the presentation proceeded, we quickly learned that this trip was full of more than just birds. Marcie said the feeling of seeing elephants in the wild for the first time was unbelievable. They were also lucky enough to see 3 species of giraffe, beginning with the Reticulated Giraffe, distinguished by the clear white outlines around their brown spots and the 2 horn-like head protrusions. They also saw endangered Grévy's Zebras, the largest zebra species, with a white belly and smaller striping pattern than others. Tim and Marcie were excited to see East African oryx and gerenuk, as well as a Red-headed Agama Lizard. Interestingly, there is a citizen science database online where anyone can report sightings

of various animals. This information has shown the presence of this species of lizard where it had not previously been known to exist and is also especially helpful in monitoring lion and snake distributions.

The first time Marcie and Tim saw lions, they were in a small pride, just a female, two juveniles and two young. They could hear the mother talking to her cubs through grunts. Joseph was very skilled at getting them close enough to view wildlife without disturbing it, and their scopes came in handy for getting them an even closer view. They also saw a leopard, wild dog, and a caracal, similar to a bobcat, eating a genet (a smaller wild cat).

But birdwatching was definitely the highlight: they saw 405 species in their 17 days. Included in their sightings were Namaqua Doves, Yellow-throated Spur fowl, a Tawny Eagle, and Eastern Chanting Goshawks. The Tawny Eagle was interesting because it was grounded and didn't fly away when they approached. Then they noticed the size of its crop and deduced that it had probably just eaten a large meal and was too full to fly. The most beautiful bird, in Marcie's opinion, is the Lilac Breasted Roller with brilliant blue underwings which they saw down by the Moro River in the Great Rift Valley. They were close enough to photograph the red eyes and yellow plumage of a Sociable Weaver and many Sunbirds, similar to the hummingbirds found in other parts of the world, and finally lots of owls were sighted, including a Spotted Eagle Owl pair with two different colour morphs.

Thanks to the help of a local birder named Paul, they were also able to see a pair of Mackinder's Eagle Owls. Paul was a Master's student studying this species for conservation. At Lake Nakuru they stayed in a luxury tent and saw Cape Water Buffalo, one of the most dangerous animals in Africa. They also appreciated the cute and expressive Olive Baboons for their curious antics. The second zebra species they came across was the more social Common Zebra, with thicker stripes running horizontally on the rump, stripes right up to their nose and on their belly. Their sighting of the Rothschild's Giraffe was special as this species is highly endangered due to its continued hybridization with other giraffe species. This giraffe can be identified with its less defined spots and creamy, instead of white, outlines.

Marcie and Tim commented on the smiles and friendly nature of all the locals, especially the

children, despite the poverty of the villages they visited. Climate change was evident in the flooding of a resort at Lake Baringo. This and other flooded areas were costly to locals in the economic losses they caused to an already struggling economy. They visited a school to deliver supplies they had brought over with them and could see how excited the children were to go to school. They discovered a lot of that excitement was because at school they would get something to eat, like porridge for breakfast and lentils for lunch. Paper is a scarce commodity in Kenya, and the Canadians had taken some with them to give to the school. Shoes, too, were in short supply – some had been made out of old tires.

Masai Mara Game Reserve was the stop “at the end of the rainbow” of their trip. Here, you could stand in one spot and see up to 12 species of mammals, and many more species of birds. Literally, miles and miles dotted with different animals. They saw their third species of giraffe here, the Masai Giraffe with jagged brown spots. A male Lion sleeping on his back was not disturbed at all by their (distant) presence. A Cheetah with four kits wandered along, and even a radio tagged Spotted Hyena put in a cameo appearance. Marcie and Tim’s Kenya Tour presentation was filled with colourful photos of birds, other animals and the villagers they met on their journey. Their story is an inspiration to us to get out of our comfort zone and explore the wildlife of other places – or at least to get out of our armchairs and go to more Nature Club presentations. Thanks, Tim and Marcie!

Kiera Neman

NIAGARA’S WETLANDS & FORESTS WE NEED TO PROTECT NOW !!!

We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect.” - Aldo Leopold
Niagara is blessed with an abundance of wetlands; most of these are swamp forests. A large number of species require wetland habitat at some stage of their life and many of these species are already threatened. If we continue to see wetlands destroyed in Niagara, we will be poorer not just in places to enjoy nature walks but in the number of bird, amphibian, reptile and mammal species in

our world. Wetlands are important in maintaining our groundwater reservoir, in cleaning our air and water and in flood control. They provide many other benefits including having a stabilizing influence on the carbon cycle. Our wetlands in Niagara are threatened by policies on land use and it is vital that we let the policy makers know how important the wetlands and forests are to all of us. A policy called biodiversity offsetting is being considered by the province and by the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority (NPCA). This is a process where developers are allowed to destroy natural areas in return for an arrangement to restore equivalent space elsewhere. Wetlands cannot be created by digging a pond and planting wetlands plants; they are complex ecosystems that evolve over many years. The NFNC has submitted comments to the Ontario Wetland Consultation.

Representatives of the three area nature clubs wrote to and met with Allison Graszat of the Niagara Restoration Council (NRC) and later with Carmen D’Angelo, CEO of the NPCA, to express our dismay over the cutting of mature trees at the Wainfleet Wetlands C.A. We did not want to see conservation areas logged and with so many ash trees dying and needing to be removed as hazard trees, we were distressed to see other tree species being logged.

The nature clubs have in the past felt privileged to support NRC programs and the wonderful work they have accomplished to enhance our environment in Niagara. Thus it was a sad occasion when the boards of the three nature clubs voted to rescind our support of the Conserving Niagara’s Forests for the Future program. Nature club members visited one of the woodlots that we heard about. I quote from the letter sent to the NRC and cc’d to the NPCA – “Earlier this year, the Clubs received reports that forests were being damaged by the logging of healthy, ecologically and commercially valuable trees on properties involved with the program. ---- regardless of the lack of any formal relationship between the program and the logging, we have reason to believe that a number of forests have been substantially damaged by logging conducted only after the owners agreed to participate in the program. It appears to us that, far from being restored or enhanced, those forests have been left worse off for having been involved with the program.”

The NFNC commented on the Conservation Authority Act Review. We urged the province to

go back to the makeup of the boards where five members and the chair were appointed by the province so that the boards of Conservation Authorities would not be totally under the control of municipal politicians. We asked that more funding come from the province and argued for more openness in and oversight of conservation authorities.

The nature club also submitted comments on the province's Co-ordinated Review of the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, Greenbelt Plan and Niagara Escarpment Plan. We wrote to the province urging them to pass a Lyme disease strategy. We met with the NPCA on the Cave Springs Management Plan and commented on other local initiatives.

The fight to preserve Niagara's wetlands and forests will only become more difficult with so much pressure from sprawl and development. We all need to make sure that the voices of those who value our natural environment are heard.

Joyce Sankey



Logging damage in
a woodlot
in Lincoln township



SEPTEMBER WEEKEND OUTING MC.GREGOR PROVINCIAL PARK SAUBLE BEACH & OLIPHANT FEN SEPTEMBER 11-13, 2015

A mystery began to unfold in early September and suspense hung in the air as a varied cast of characters gathered on a bright, blustery Saturday morning near MacGregor Point Provincial Park's visitor center. As our group embarked to explore the boardwalks of the park, we were prepared for a myriad of investigations to learn more about the varied elements of the area. Some were ready with cameras to capture images unique to this Lake Huron shoreline community, others hauled field guides in the hopes of identifying unfamiliar vegetation. With binoculars strung around necks, expectant birders listened and scanned the horizon, while other enthusiasts were at the ready to spot smaller insects, frogs or unique geological features. As members of the Niagara Falls Nature Club we all looked forward to exploring and discovering species adapted to living near the windswept coast of this great lake.

Boardwalks led us from wetlands to the shore, where fall wild flowers bloomed. Standout herbs, delighting the botanists of the group, included white Grass of Parnassus and purple Fringed Gentians. Sticky tofieldia, topped with red seed capsules, indeed had gummy feeling stems. We discovered Upland white aster, now reclassified as a goldenrod (*Solidago ptarmicoides*), to be adapted to this calcareous habitat. Coastal shrub vegetation included Bearberry, Buffaloberry, Sweet gale and Ground juniper. It was also in this location that we first encountered a mystery plant, with pinkish flower and hairy purplish flower clusters, its name eluded us as we searched guide books for clues hinting at its identity.

Just inland from the shore, we found marl wetlands, physically cut off from the coast and covered with mucky whitish clay made of calcium carbonate. One such wetland had a multitude of pitcher plants, a carnivorous species that supplements the low nutrients of its habitat by digesting insects or any small creatures lured into its 'pitcher' shaped leaves.

After lunch a hike along Tower Trail led us to a bird observation platform overlooking an expansive Ducks Unlimited wetland. Canada darter and Meadowhawk dragonflies entertained

along the way. Our day also rewarded birders with sightings of Great Egrets, Belted Kingfishers, Northern Flicker and Turkey Vultures.

A highlight to culminate the day was a windy evening beach stroll through prolific purple and white blooms near Port Elgin, followed by a fabulously colourful sunset and a shared meal together in a cosy log cabin.

On Sunday, after a pit stop to check out shore dunes in Sauble Beach, our caravan moved north to explore the Oliphant fen, another harsh shoreline habitat. Many species here seemed dwarfed in size to how they more ordinarily appear. Again, the mystery plant taunted, leaving us in suspense to determine its identity. After wrapping up the weekend with a picnic lunch, we were a very contented gang of “thieves” – proud to have stolen so many moments of wonder at the natural beauty of Saugeen Shores.

[photo caption]

With a tip off from Albert Garafalo, Rick Young identified the mystery plant as Glaucous White Lettuce (*Prenanthes racemosa*). The stems having a whitish (glaucous) sheen similar to the skin of a plum.

Kerry Kennedy



Club Members at Mc.Gregor Prov. Park



Ruby Meadowhawk



Lance-tipped Darner
By Carol Horvat



Glaucous White lettuce



Grass-of-Parnassus



Bearberry

**ECUADOR - FROM THE ANDES TO THE
AMAZON
WITH LEV FRID**

The Niagara Falls Nature Club enjoyed an evening learning about the diversity of life in Ecuador by a very lively presenter in October! Lev Frid originally visited the area in 2010 as a tourist and was left with a love of Ecuador and a promise to return. By 2012 he was ready to return and work as a guide, one of the few places that can boast crossing the equator every day to get to work! Lev walked us through the different levels of elevation and remarkable levels of diversity that can be found in this small country, which is only the size of Newfoundland or Colorado.

Starting at the top, nearly 4000 feet above sea level, Ecuador provides a rich, volcanic soil that is full of nutrients. Nutrients and water equal lots of life! Birds at this height tend to be bigger in size so as to keep warm and live comfortably in the mountains. Lev showed us an array of large flowers and birds, including the aggressive Sword bill hummingbird, which made for fun times refilling the feeder

As we progressed down the mountain through the world of photography we were introduced to a more lush environment. Trees, flowers, including orchids, and insects are more abundant as one closes in on sea level. Some interesting habits can be observed, such as finches, feeding almost entirely on nectar, using their hooked upper mandible to pierce the nectar chamber. Although this is a tasty meal, it is of little use to the flower, cutting out any pollinating and simply stealing the goods! Lev told us how some of our Canadian favourites, like the Canada Warbler can be found vacationing here as well.

Perhaps some of the most interesting and fantastic species can be found in the cloud forest, where during a 6 week stint, there was only 2 days of sunshine. This area is well known for the antpittas, (the birds that look like baseballs with Popsicle stick legs) and the oil bird, Ecuador's only nocturnal fruit eater. This bird can echo locate similar to a bat and also can be found living in caves. And of course the star of the show is the hummingbird. At this lower elevation there are 22 species full of colour and sparkle to be found.

We left feeling as though we had a bit of a vacation ourselves and enjoyed the beauty and awe of nature found in Ecuador!

Tara Darling

**HAROLD MITCHELL
NATURE PRESERVE**

[note previous article.

So I Tasted Dirt]

This preserve is owned by Ontario Nature and the Niagara Falls Nature Club are stewards.

Led By Janet Damude we regularly check the property for wind damage, vandalism and litter.

We also take note of the various vascular plants, graminoides, fungus, ferns, trees and shrubs.

It is a partial wetland and has a wonderful stand of Easter Hemlock.



Water Arum [spring]



Red Trillium [spring]



Red Oak [fall]



Carex sp.

NOTICES

Presentations wanted.

The excellence of our December members' meeting depends on contributions from you. Along with goodies we look forward to sharing insights and stories that have tickled your fancy over the previous year. If you would like to show a few photos on the big screen, or to bring along a nature collection to dazzle us all, please be in touch with Win at 905-262-5057, or winkal@sympatico.ca .

CONTRIBUTIONS

Your editing team would like to thank you for your contributions that make this an interesting and valuable newsletter.

Please send contributions to:

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BOOK & JIG-SAW SALE

At our January meeting bring along your old books and jig-saw puzzles.

You may find that book or puzzle you have been looking for.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Freda loach
TomSimunovic
Yuki & Leo Tomotomi