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# Nature Niagara News



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Niagara Falls  
Nature Club

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## HOWARD MARTIN MEMORIAL AWARD

The recipient of this year's NFNC award in memory of founding member, Howard Martin, is Serena Lynn Atallah, a fourth year Bachelor of Music student at Brock University.

Serena demonstrated her "interest and involvement in the natural environment," a criterion of the award, through her volunteering with the Niagara Farm Project. The NFP concentrates on local organic farming, producing food that is donated to shelters and to anyone who lends a hand on the farm.

We wish Serena well on her journey towards becoming a professional pianist, and hope she continues her involvement in the natural world around us.

With the H Martin Award now being substantial and perpetual, your board of directors is suggesting that member donations be directed towards our Conservation Fund, which contributes to The Owl Foundation, Bruce Trail Conservancy, Haldimand Bird Observatory, Fatal Light Awareness Program, and the Adopt-a-Pond program at Toronto Zoo, among others.

Win Laar

## DUFFERIN ISLDS. OUTING

On a mild Sunday afternoon in early February our club had a pleasant trip round Dufferin Islands and along the Niagara River above the Falls.

We were treated to many sightings such as Tufted Titmouse, White Breasted Nuthatches, White Crowned Sparrow, Red Bellied Woodpecker and many others.

The young people and the not so young in the group enjoyed feeding the birds from their hands.

As we wandered through the wooded area the Red Osier Dogwood stood out while a few examples of Skunk Cabbage were seen.

On the river we had a good sighting of a Hooded Merganser plus Common Goldeneye and Bufflehead.

Rick Young



Club members & friends



Skunk Cabbage



Hooded Merganser

## A TRIP TO FISHERVILLE & SELKIRK PROVINCIAL PARK

Negative birding on a positively glorious sunny day in February.

Eleven members met in Fonthill—nine adults and two delightful girls, Maddie and Gillian. Carpooling in three cars we drove up to Canborough, than along the #3 and explored the Fisherville area. Very little bird life was observed.

One car saw Tundra Swans and we all saw Turkey Vultures, Starlings and Pigeons. In the Fisherville area we scoured the fields for Short-eared Owls. Were they gone or just not co-operating?

A walk through part of Selkirk Provincial Park produced a Red-tailed Hawk, a Robin, a Red-bellied Woodpecker and a lot of noisy American Crows. The Gray Squirrels were having fun chasing each other around the tree trunks and jumping from limb to limb. The rocks around the entrance to the park were pleasant for lunch and to enjoy the warm sunny weather.

This is farm country. The lambs were frolicking while mother watched. Piglets explored as the adults basked in the sun. We saw horses, dairy cattle and beef cattle. All glad to enjoy the weather.

Maddie spotted Leopard Frog in a pond along the road. Lots of windmills and transmission lines were of interest.

Returning, via Cayuga, we followed the Grand River into Dunnville. The first eagle's nest appeared empty. Gillian was astonished by its size. The second nest was also unused. Maybe we were too early. We spotted American Crows, Starlings, Canada Geese and a few Mallards.

Before returning to Fonthill Rick showed us the EC Brown Park, a flood plain of the Welland River that has been very nicely enhanced a by the NPCA.

Thanks Rick. You were disappointed in the birding but I took a poll. We all enjoyed the day, watching the countryside and enhancing friendships.

Janet Damude



NFNC members

## MARCH OUTING TO LONG POINT

Our club mid-March outing to Long Point was well attended by thirteen members and friends.

The outing is titled Tundra Swans however there was a distinct lack of Swans as only six were seen.

Nevertheless we were treated to a variety of waterfowl such as Redhead, both Scaup and a flock of Ruddy Ducks. Sandhill Cranes were also seen and a Bald Eagle put on a display as did a Northern Harrier.

Despite the lack of swans the group said they enjoyed the day.

Rick Young



Members and friends



TURKEY VULTURE

## R.W. SHEPPARD AWARD

2016

This award was established in 1986 to honour individuals or organizations who have made notable contributions to the Niagara community through efforts of conservation, education or research in the field of nature.

Previous recipients include Dr. Walter Klabunde, who won the first R.W. Sheppard Award, Drew Campbell, the St. John's Education Centre, Dr. John Bacher, Paul Philp, John Potter, Albert Garofalo and current members of the club, Charles Pryer, Patrick Davies, Win Laar and Kayo Roy. This year we are recognizing someone who has contributed much to the environmental and conservation programs of Niagara for many years.

As a child, Janet Damude enjoyed walking in the woods, and, always a reader, she enjoyed books about animals, even though often the animals talked and sometimes wore clothes.

Janet was a Girl Guide leader for 27 years and always took the girls for hikes to learn about plants, trees and insects. Don and Gisele Mills knew of this and suggested that she would enjoy coming on NFNC walks. Going on walks led to joining the Nature Club and to so much more. Janet has served as president and treasurer of the club as well as being the treasurer of the Peninsula Field Naturalists and a member of the Bert Miller Nature Club.

She also served on the Welland/Port Colborne board of the TD Friends of the Environment. Janet worked with a group, led by Joyce Sankey, on a Woodland Management Inventory in Niagara Falls city parks in 2013 and 2014.

She especially enjoyed working on the Ecological Survey of the Lake Erie coast from Fort Erie to Nanticoke led by Albert Garofalo. They rolled out beach access boardwalks and planted beach grass. Janet's contribution to the nature club goes beyond her work in the field. She has, for many years, been the refreshment convenor at the monthly indoor meetings. She makes sure we have fresh coffee and lots of goodies. Janet makes a point of talking to newcomers and always makes everyone feel welcome.

Janet's contributions to the Niagara Falls Nature Club and to the wider environmental community make her a worthy recipient of the R.W. Sheppard Award.

Rhonda Armstrong



Janet Damude  
with Rhonda Armstrong  
by Janice Haines

## HISTORICAL WETLANDS OF NIAGARA

With a full audience packing the room, Albert Garafalo, a local ecologist, was introduced as “a true hero,” before sharing his presentation on “Historical Wetlands of Niagara” at our March meeting.

With wetlands being a hot topic in Niagara's political climate this spring, many came to learn more about these seasonally or permanently flooded areas that are, “the fragile interface between land and water”. These productive zones provide flood control, carbon sequestration, groundwater cleansing and recharge, as well as precious habitat and migration routes. Albert emphasized that we need to start valuing the significant ecosystem services of these natural systems.

From the need for clean water or transportation routes, Albert explained that human civilizations have long been connected with wetlands and reliant on the valuable resources and services they provide. Threats to wetlands include outright loss, drainage, invasive species and pollution. Human intervention has now changed the character of Niagara's watercourses, often disconnecting them from their headwaters. For example, Lyon's Creek is disconnected from Wainfleet bog by the canal and the flow of the Welland River is reversed by hydroelectric installations.

Four broad wetland communities were described, each having a further series of more specific community types. Marshes have open water and are too wet for woody vegetation, whereas swamps are dominated by trees and shrubs.

## ANNUAL DINNER 2016

Bogs, like Niagara's peat dome in Wainfleet, are fed by rainwater only, tending to be nutrient poor, low in minerals and lacking nitrogen. Although species diversity is low, unique plants like carnivorous pitcher plant or sundew can survive by capturing insects to obtain nitrates. Three-leaved false Solomon's seal is one of the only herbaceous plants to grow here, while labrador tea, black spruce and tamarack are some of the native woody species.

Spring-fed fens are less acidic than bogs, resulting in higher plant diversity. A Niagara example can be found at the Hamilton Sanctuary near Fonthill.

Great Lakes Coastal Wetlands are linked to the fluctuating lake water levels where communities have organized around these features. Lake Erie's limestone pavement shoreline is a unique example with fossils of the Devonian period revealed in stone – that's history!

In his research of historical writing and maps dating to the 1800's, Albert found that Black ash, a swamp tree, may once have been a dominant tree in Niagara. Willoughby, was likely a tamarack swamp, despite none presently remaining. An ancient Black Gum trees here has been dated back 580 years.

Albert explained how important wetlands occur due to unique geological formations. For example the Onondaga escarpment of south Niagara contained water from flowing towards Lake Erie, it instead naturally collected in numerous wetlands such as Wainfleet Bog, Willoughby Marsh and Cranberry Marsh, creating headwaters for many creeks that flow to the Niagara River.

Niagara is historically home to a wealth of water logged communities, while much has been irreparably altered, prudent planning can protect and enhance the complexity of those that remain.

Kerry Kennedy



Saturday, April 9<sup>th</sup> was the annual nature club dinner at Betty's Restaurant. We had an enjoyable time socializing with old and new friends and our usual delicious dinner topped off with a slice of Betty's famous pie for dessert. We were then ready to sit back and relax while Jean Iron took us on a tour of Iceland, Greenland and the Canadian Arctic.

The presentation began with her eleven day trip to Iceland in July 2015. The country is filled with breathtaking scenery consisting of massive glaciers, volcanoes, lava fields, deep gorges and fjords, clay pits, ice caps, geysers and thermal pools, not to mention an interesting assortment of birds, animals and plants.

The national bird of Iceland is the Gyrfalcon, and the country is also home to three million Atlantic Puffins, which is ten times Iceland's population. Along with Atlantic Puffins there were thousands of breeding birds visible from their ship nesting along the bird cliffs. These included Common and Thick-billed Murre, Northern Fulmar and Black-legged Kittiwake. This is a great place to go for up close views of Razorbill for anyone who was not fortunate enough to see that solitary Razorbill in Niagara-on-the-Lake in 2006 (a recollection that still brings a pang of regret to some club members.)

Iceland is a mecca for Eurasian shorebirds such as European Golden Plover, Common Redshank, Common Ringed Plover, Black-tailed Godwit and Eurasian White-rumped Whimbrel. Also Eurasian land birds such as White Wagtails, Eurasian Redwings and Eurasian Blackbirds were brought to life for us with Jean's exceptional photographic skills and informative descriptions.

There is a wide assortment of Arctic plants such as Mountain Avens, Moss Campion, Trailing Azalea, Roseroot and Northern Green Orchid, all of which grow close to the ground due to their harsh environment.

While sailing along the dramatic coastline the tour saw Harbour Seals, Humpback and Minke Whales and on land they were treated to views of the only mammal native to Iceland, the Arctic Fox.

The next part of the presentation took us on a thirteen day tour of Canada's Northwest Passage which took place in August/September 2015. This trip was aboard the Akademik Ioffe, which is a Russian ship built for polar expeditions, and they followed the route taken by the Franklin

Expedition. This vessel is built for oceanic research and there is no sound or vibration on the ship, enabling it to travel noiselessly through the Arctic. At various times during the trip the group would board small Zodiacs for closer views of birds and wildlife ever mindful not to disrupt them in their natural habitat.

They saw forty-three polar bears including an extremely rare view of an adult male feeding on a polar bear cub. Male polar bears will kill a cub if they have the opportunity as will grizzly and black bears. Other wildlife included Musk Ox, Walrus and Bearded Seal. They were also thrilled to see the rare, endangered and endemic Northern Bottlenose Whale as well as Orca and Narwhal. The Narwhal is a very unusual looking medium-sized whale that has a large “tusk” protruding from its head. This spiraled tusk is actually an enlarged tooth which can grow as long as ten feet and is why the Narwhal is sometimes referred to as the “Unicorn of the Sea.”

There were bird cliffs teeming with Common and Thick-billed Murres. Once a Murre chick is ready to leave the nest it jumps off the cliff edge towards the water. The males could be seen waiting below the 915 metre cliffs for the young to jump. Once at sea, the male Murre stays with the chick and continues to provide food for it for approximately eight more weeks.

Other birds seen during the trip were a white morph Gyrfalcon, Rock Ptarmigan, Common Ringed Plover, Purple Sandpiper, Brant, Dovekie, Northern Wheatear, Hoary Redpoll and Snow Bunting. We all know how Jean loves gulls and there were plenty to be found including Glaucous, Iceland and Thayer's. They also saw the very rare and beautiful Ivory Gull which is a gull that even I could get excited about.

They were fortunate to find Purple Saxifrage still blooming which is the territorial flower of Nunavut. Other plants observed were Bulblet Saxifrage, Arctic Bilberry, Arctic Poppy, Arctic Cotton Grass and Alpine Azalea.

At the end of a day spent exploring the Arctic and witnessing such awe inspiring natural sights, there still remained the Northern Lights to make this trip even more unforgettable, if that could be possible. What a pleasure for us to be taken on this expedition through the Arctic. Even though we were all very tired of the winter weather, I'm sure we would have gladly donned our cold weather gear one more time for a chance to go on such an

amazing adventure, especially one with Jean Iron as the leader.

Paula Clark



Picture by Janice Haines

## WINDOW TREATMENTS

### PARACHUTE CORDS FOR BIRD SAFETY

For years I have cringed to hear the thud of yet another bird hitting a window. Our freezer held (no longer) an illicit collection of migrants: Hummingbird, Flicker, Wood Thrush, Cedar Waxwing, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, to name a few. Only the lovelies; never a House Sparrow or Mourning Dove.

I put up silhouettes of diving falcons or bunches of sticks, and pulled the curtains closed; nothing mitigated the slaughter. The outside of the windows reflected the safety of trees and clear skies.

After a particularly disastrous two weeks last fall that saw five birds killed, we finally took action. Following a suggestion from Paloma Plant of FLAP, we purchased parachute cord from Michael's. Kal then attached a horizontal 1 by 3 inch board at the top of the worst window, with screws four inches apart along its length to hold the hanging cords.

All was fine until the wind blew, when the loose cords got entangled in adjacent vegetation, leaving spaces bare of protection. We were continually using a long pole to straighten the cords, but the main thing was, not one bird hit the window. With spring migration upon us, I have refined our technique, by running a thin twine through the bottom of the cords with a darning needle, and attaching the twine to the sides of the window. The cords still move gently in the breeze, but can no longer get tangled. When it's time to wash the

windows again, I have only to pull the twine through, push the cords aside, do what's needed, then rethread them again.

The best part is, with no dusty birds smacking into the windows I won't have to wash them again for another five years at least.

Win Laar



Parachute Cords

## NIAGARA LAND TRUST CANBY PROPERTY

On a Saturday in late April a few trust members took a trip out to the property in Wainfleet.

Liette Vaseur had constructed some Salamander planks and these were placed at various locations. The purpose was to hope that Salamanders would use these to take cover. Easy to open rather than lift rotten logs to observe these creatures the group is hoping they will be successful.

The early spring flowers were in bloom, Spring Beauty, Trout Lily, Blue Cohosh & Marsh Marigold. The Spicebush was also in fine form.

Of particular note was the abundance of Dwarf Ginseng, a relatively rare plant.

Rick Young



Dwarf Ginseng

## NFNC

### THE SECOND DECADE

In the February edition of NNN we saw how in its first few months our club established the foundations for traditions that have continued throughout our fifty years. In this issue we'll look at extracts that invite comparisons with the present.

For example, our first annual dinner meeting, in March, 1968, had 150 members present, at \$2.50 per person, and our most recent, had 65 people, at \$30.

Bird sightings of 40 years ago reveal greater numbers and diversity than we would find today. R.W. Sheppard writes in April 1979, "That shy and wraith-like spot-breasted bird, the Hermit Thrush, may be expected in almost any Niagara suburban garden with sufficient cover. At least two of these thrushes have already shown up in my garden." In June 1980 Connie Kitney and Mary Deer reported "large quantities of Indigo Buntings in the trees at Woodend." Helen Lothian found 10 species of warblers at Dufferin Island one afternoon, and Charlie Pryer saw one Bobolink behind Brock University, noting they used to be plentiful there.

Dr. Walter Klabunde reported 2,476 hawks April 29, 1979 at Beamer, the majority within a 2 hour period. Dr. Klabunde was the first recipient of the R.W. Sheppard Award in 1986, and became the Honourary President of Peninsula Hawkwatch. He died in 2002, age 95.

In 1980, Pat Davies' 3 projector film production, "A Niagara Year," was shown at a Niagara Falls council meeting, receiving congratulations from the mayor and aldermen.

Helen Lothian wrote about flying over Mt. St. Helens on May 17, 1980, the pilot remarking that it was quiet that day, with no smoke visible from the fumaroles that had given the peak a widow's cap of grey ash. Next day, safely on the ground, Helen watched the huge mushroom cloud of the eruption, similar to pictures of Hiroshima. It was called the greatest natural wildlife disaster in American history, with the loss of 1.5 million birds and small mammals. Fish in the Turtle River jumped onto the banks to escape the scalding water. Helen was among the last to see the exquisite beauty of Mt. St. Helens's perfect formation.

In June, 1980, another eruption, as the Globe and mail reported "angry ratepayers threatened violence and waved placards calling for the

abolition of the Niagara Escarpment Commission.” The Coalition on the Niagara Escarpment, CONE, an alliance of groups and citizens dedicated to the protection of Ontario’s Niagara escarpment, provided balance at hearings where the aggregate industry and developers resisted all restrictions.

Our newsletters provided regular updates on the hearings, and our club presented our own brief to the commission in 1982, accompanied by a slide presentation by Patrick Davies and John Cooper. The first Niagara Escarpment Plan was published and adopted by the government of Bill Davis in 1985. Davis committed \$1,000,000 a year for the next ten years for the acquisition of land along the Niagara escarpment.

A 600 year old Red Oak, possibly the oldest and largest in Ontario, came tumbling down on King Street, Niagara-on-the-Lake, in July, 1982.

That year the pot luck supper at Woodend after the Christmas Bird Count was so popular they had to establish a waiting list.

The presentation at the May 1984 dinner meeting was Patrick Davies’ “Hedgerows.” “The wonderful lives of the flora and fauna in the hedgerows around his home were followed over a period of 17 years.” Denise and Patrick still live in that same home, but the hedgerows that bordered Optimist Park have been torn out and replaced with a strip mall.

NFNC hosted “Nature Niagara ’84” in Jordan, featuring eight speakers on a wide range of topics, plus an evening banquet. That year Kay and Larry McKeever were made Honourary Presidents of NFNC.

A contest was held to choose a new name for our newsletter, previously called “The Bulletin.” Nature Niagara News was the winner. Gerard Williams redesigned the front page, incorporating Peter Stephani’s drawing of a gull flying over the falls. Helen Lothian and Mary Stewart were its editors.

Along with many canoe trips in the 1980’s, in 1985 our club visited the ornithological lab at Cornell University in Ithaca NY, as arranged by Kayo Roy. We listened to the complex songs of several bird species in their bird song library, and learned that a nuthatch weighs about 20 grams, less than the weight of a letter. (Remember letters?) A stop at Montezuma Wildlife Refuge yielded 68 species.

In December 1986 we had a joyous birthday party, attended by eight former presidents and the

rest of us, as our club celebrated twenty years together. The many reminiscences and stories “culminated with an inspiring reminder that clubs such as ours have the power and bear the responsibility to preserve the natural world.”

Win Laar

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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