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# Nature Niagara News



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50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Year

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Niagara Falls  
Nature Club

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## HAROLD MITCHELL NATURE RESERVE

In 1970 Dr. Harold Mitchell of Buffalo, New York agreed to sell this property situated in Wainfleet township of the Niagara Region.

The Niagara Falls Nature Club raised \$4800 to acquire the land. Eventually it was passed to Ontario Nature as one of its reserves in order to preserve it in its natural state.

In the early 2000's, Ontario Nature asked NFNC to be stewards of the reserve and the club agreed. To date Win Laar, Gary King, Jim Grassie and Janet Damude have performed this task.

In this 14 hectare woodland there is a large stand of Eastern Hemlock, one of the few along the shore of Lake Erie. There are fine examples of Red Maple, Red Oak and Yellow Birch, while Spicebush dominates the shrubs. Unfortunately the Ash trees are dying while the American Beech's are in poor condition.

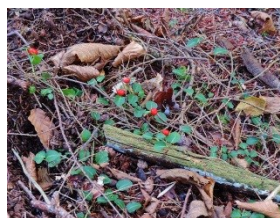
The vernal pools abound with water plants such as Water Arum while Cinnamon Fern is beautiful when the fertile fronds are in bloom.

Many vascular plants can be seen throughout the year. They include Partridgeberry, Starflower, Wood Anemone, Kidney-leaved Buttercup, Red Trillium, Spotted Jewelweed, Starry False Solomon's Seal, and Violets and many others.

Sadly invasive plants like Garlic Mustard and Barberry are appearing, and on adjacent municipal property there is a large clump of Japanese Knotweed. The property is relatively undisturbed and is a jewel.

2<sup>nd</sup> Sept. 2016

Rick Young



Partridgeberry



Water Arum



Red Trillium



Cinnamon Fern

## ADVENTURES IN SOUTH AMERICA

The September meeting of the Niagara Falls Nature Club featured Dan Doucette, a local resident, a graduate of Niagara College, and now an employee of the Niagara Parks Commission. He enjoys the opportunity to solo backpack from November to March to exotic, tropical countries exploring their flora and fauna.

The evening's presentation centred on his last winter's trip to Bolivia, Chile, and Easter Island. He began by mapping his journey in each area, offering insights into solo backpack travelling. His lodgings varied from steamy hostels, to lodges, to tenting; transportation by flying, boating, and hiking long distances sometimes lucky enough to hitch a ride.

He studies well in advance to locate special insects, even sighting them before his local guide does. His interest in orchids led him to spot forty species of orchid found in Bolivia. An unfortunate

bite on his foot by a Botfly allowed him to photograph and us to witness its painful removal.

Dan explored national parks identifying a peanut headed bug and a leaf mantis in Bolivia. In Chile's La Campana Park he viewed many Chilean palms. Also in Chile's Sugar Loaf Park, which may be the driest non polar desert in the world he saw massive clumps of cacti hundreds of years old. He sighted desert lizards and guanaco a type of camelid. Near to an ocean side tent site a beached whale exploded providing much food for gulls but a most unpleasant aroma. He visited a forest of up to 2,000 monkey puzzle trees indigenous to southern Chile and parts of Argentina.

On Easter Island (Rapa Nui) Dan hiked an 18 km. coastal trail seeing many of the island's famous MOAI (heads), some restored and on platforms and many still lying where they had been carved as well as remains of volcanoes, caves , and beautiful sunsets.

Despite suffering over the years from countless bites, parasites, leeches, food poisoning, and malaria Dan is an intrepid adventurer seeking out the most extreme tropical areas of the world.

Mary Houston

### OUTINGS

On the 18<sup>th</sup> of September Win Laar led an outing through the Niagara Glen. Eleven members joined us.

We were able to view fall flowering plants such as Zig Zag Goldenrod and Blue stemmed Goldenrod, both in good numbers. There were also fine examples of Pale Jewelweed, Pokeweed, Gt. Lobelia and Sneezeweed.

The Hemlock and Yellow Birch were in fine shape while a nice example of Bladdernut was found. Rick Young



Pale Jewelweed Sneezeweed & Gt. Lobelia

One week later on the 25<sup>th</sup> September ten members journeyed to the Long Point area for a day of birding and checking on fall plants.

We visited the Old Cut area and bird banding station, Big Creek Marsh, Lee Brown C.A., Bird Studies Canada property, Port Rowan sewage lagoons and Backus Woods.

The highlight of the day was a Sandhill Crane at Big Creek but we had other interesting sightings such as Northern Parula, Gray-Cheeked Thrush, American Redstart, Red-Breasted Nuthatch, and Osprey .

At the Port Rowan sewage lagoons both Yellowlegs were observed and an American Wigeon, plus a Green-Winged Teal.

At different locations there were fine examples of native grasses, namely Indian Grass, Big and Little Bluestem plus Switch Grass. In addition the Asters and Goldenrods were in their fine fall colours.

Rick Young



Sandhill Crane



Club Members

In Mid-October Win Laar once again led an outing. This time to Riverwood Conservancy in Mississauga. A peaceful enclave in the heart of a metropolitan area.

While the native flowering plants were past their best we were treated to examples of majestic old White Pines and Sugar Maples among Red Oaks, Hawthorn and Snowberry.

We were also treated to a view of over flying Cooper's Hawks. Other birds were White-Breasted Nuthatch, Red- Bellied, Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers along with the always present Chickadees. A most pleasant outing.

Rick Young



Tree Huggers



Win & Kal [Old Maple]

## BARN OWLS

Each time I go to The Owl Foundation (TOF) I learn more about owls. This year it was the Barn Owl that opened my eyes, even though I did not set eyes upon any of the six currently in residence. Barnabas, Barnaby, Barnadette, Barnard and Barnella are all offspring of Banjo and Soucy, who came to TOF many years ago from New Jersey. Soucy has since passed away. What is perhaps puzzling is that even though all the remaining six Barn Owls are quite healthy and capable of surviving in appropriate habitat, they are not able to be released.

Although Barn Owls live on every continent except Antarctica, in Canada they are at the northern limit of their range, and are both federally and provincially endangered. With a lack of feathering on lower legs and feet, they cannot tolerate severe winter temperatures. They face imminent extirpation, with only a few pairs surviving in extreme parts of southern Ontario and BC.

The Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry will not issue release permits for TOF's Barn Owls, because the chances of their survival are slim.

Historically as early settlers moved into Upper Canada they brought with them cattle and other livestock that were housed in wooden barns whose warmth and plentiful surrounding prey enticed the Barn Owls north. In more recent years, grassland habitats that supported rodents are being lost to urbanization and changing farming practices. Wooden farm buildings are being torn down and replaced by "bird proof" barns. The owls have lost food and shelter.

So how do the Barn Owls at TOF survive? Mice are provided, of course, and winter warmth. Instead of cattle providing radiant heat from below, low wattage light bulbs located beneath the bases of the nest boxes do the job. To prevent a population explosion, any eggs laid by the female birds are discreetly removed, boiled, and returned to the nest, where the parents eventually give up hope of their hatching.

The Barn Owl's white heart-shaped face and pale underparts, coupled with its hisses and toe-curling screams, have led to an association with banshees, a female spirit in Irish mythology whose shrieks herald imminent death of a family member. The European Barn Owl has even more white on its underparts, and often roosts in church steeples. Picture the scene, as you are walking late at night

past a graveyard, and a ghostly figure swoops silently past, then emits a terrifying scream. Is there cold fear in your heart, or joy that you have shared the night with your friendly resident Barn Owl?

Win Laar

## MIGRATION SECRETS

At the October general Niagara Falls Nature Club meeting, I had the privilege of presenting a slide show about migration. In fact, the title of my presentation was, "Secrets of Successful Migration, Starring the Monarch Butterfly".

In my introduction, I confessed that I am not an expert on migration itself. My interest, I said, stemmed from my research on the difference between summer monarchs and fall migrating monarchs. And so, my presentation focussed on how animals have adapted to the stresses and challenges of migration with specific physical and behavioural characteristics. These traits have made migrants particularly well-suited to the harsh demands of long-distance movements and enhance their ability to successfully reach their destinations.

Physically, migrating animals need fuel, a body size that can withstand the elements and carry that fuel, and appendages that reduce drag and increase their aerodynamic ability. In monarchs, we see these needs translated into higher fat content, larger body size, more pointed wings and even larger wing muscles. And these features are not limited to monarchs. Many other animals have similar adaptations. For example, an albatross, known for its long-distance migration has long, pointed wings and a large body size, while a non-migratory chickadee is small with short, wide wings. There are good reasons for these traits, as even slight differences in wing size and shape can increase an individual's performance in soaring and drag reduction, especially in high winds and over long distances. Fat content is also critical as a fuel source during these, often long, expeditions. Some animals even have the ability to change the way they metabolize fats as migration approaches, such that their internal physiology becomes more efficient at breaking down fats, as is the case with quail. Monarchs increase their fat content by up to 125% before migrating in order to carry extra fuel with them on their journeys.

Behaviourally, migrants are just as interesting. Perhaps the best-known change in behaviour of migrating animals vs. non-migrants is their urge to move, and keep on moving. They also have to be

## STILL TRYING AFTER FIFTY YEARS

able to navigate and steer themselves in the correct direction. While some animals, notably homing pigeons, use local features as one strategy in recognizing where they are, research has shown that in addition to this ability, many animals use other strategies as well. Sun and star maps have been known for a long time to aid animals in their migrations. New evidence is also pointing towards the combination of iron-rich magnetite crystals embedded in certain body parts, as well as cryptochrome proteins, that allow animals to use earth's magnetic field for orientation and navigation. Magnetite has been found in the thorax and abdomen of migrating monarchs and may partially explain their ability to migrate to very specific areas.

Migrations are amazing phenomena. How animals prepare and execute long-distance travel is interesting as it involves adaptations in their physiology and behaviour that enable them to better meet the challenges of this critical activity. Through the study of monarchs and other migrating animals, we can learn the differences in migrants vs. nonmigrants and better appreciate the strategies they employ in order to successfully complete their annual life cycles.

Kiera Newman



**MONARCH**



**CATERPILLAR**

The Niagara Falls Nature Club was begun fifty years ago by Mary Moses and others who wanted to save Woodend from development. Now, fifty years later, the fight goes on and is all the more intense as we have already lost so many of our woodlands, wetlands and grasslands. The good news is that within the last two years many others, young and old, have joined the fight.

Recently the provincial growth plan, greenbelt plan and Niagara Escarpment Plan came under review and your club has submitted comments on these plans as well as on the Region of Niagara's growth plan. We are asking for the same things as I am sure were asked for fifty years ago – more protections for our natural areas and the habitat of the species that dwell there. We are asking that new subdivisions go into already built up areas including brownfields instead of tearing up more forests and wetlands. We are again asking that the mid-peninsula highway not be built.

We will soon be submitting comments on the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB) review. The OMB is a very essential review board that would be made more effective if it were made more useable by community members who do not have the vast resources of developers and city planners.

The Ontario Wetlands Conservation review comments are due on November 16<sup>th</sup>. If you would like to know more or would like to comment on this plan, Ontario Nature's website has a wealth of information.

Thundering Waters hasn't been in the news much lately, but the studies required from the developer are being worked on. Activists are still meeting and emailing and writing. We have hope that one day this forested swamp complex will be a park for all of us to enjoy and a source of ecosystem services for Niagara.

As always, if you care about preserving our natural heritage in Niagara, let your elected officials know.

Joyce Sankey

## NOTICES

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### NOVEMBER MEETING

On this evening we will be celebrating our fiftieth anniversary .

We will have CAKE with our logo etc.

We will also have old newsletters and pictures from the past on display plus slide presentations.

### DECEMBER MEMBERS NIGHT

Short (5 minute) presentations are welcomed from members for our December members' night. Share memories from the club's early years, or recent discoveries and adventures. Contact Win Laar, 905-262-5057 or [winkal@sympatico.ca](mailto:winkal@sympatico.ca), if you would like to contribute. This is our refreshment bonus night, when everyone brings in a treat, and punch is provided.

### CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS

A great big thank you goes out to **Kayo Roy**, who has been the compiler for the Niagara Falls Nature Club's Christmas Bird Count for the last 32 years. Kayo works with Willie D' Anna from the New York side of the count, as well as with numerous birders from other clubs as well as our own members.

This year Marcie Jacklin will take over the NFNC bird count, which takes place December 27. To participate, contact Marcie, [mjacklin@brocku.ca](mailto:mjacklin@brocku.ca) or 905-871-2577.

St. Catharines (PFN) Christmas Bird Count: December 18, 2016 – Contact Bob Highcock ( [905-688-1260](tel:905-688-1260) ) re Birding;

After-Birding Roundup at North Pelham Youth Centre—contact Mary/John Potter ( [905-892-2566](tel:905-892-2566) )

Port Colborne-Buffalo (BMNC) Christmas Bird Count: December 31, 2016

IBA Gull Census: November 19, December 10, and January 21. For more details (map & dates),and to sign up, contact the Census Organizers Bob and Jean at [bob.jean@sympatico.ca](mailto:bob.jean@sympatico.ca)

Peach Tree Xmas Bird Count  
Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2017  
Contact- Bruce Mackenzie  
[Kintail52@gmail.com](mailto:Kintail52@gmail.com)  
905-973-4869

### MEMBERSHIP

Memberships for the coming year are now due. The club has many fixed expenses, and we count on your active participation to be able to continue to bring you excellent speakers, walks and outings.

Memberships are \$35 for a family, \$25 for an individual, and \$15 for a student.

Gisele accepts payment at the door, or mail to NFNC, P.O. Box 901, Niagara falls, ON L2E 6V8

Your editing team wishes to thank you for your contributions that help make your newsletter interesting. Please send your contributions to Rick Young [rick.y@sympatico.ca](mailto:rick.y@sympatico.ca) or Carol Horvat [chorvat1@cogeco.ca](mailto:chorvat1@cogeco.ca)

### MEMORIAM

Everyone's friend Margaret Campbell sadly passed on September 5, 2016 just a few days short of her 91<sup>st</sup> birthday.

Margaret started attending NFNC meetings about five years ago to help with the refreshments.

She enjoyed our meetings and tried to have a little visit with everyone.

Her family has many "birders" including Drew who organizes the Port Colborne Christmas bird count. We shall miss her service and her smile.

Ed Burke, husband of Lorreta Burke passed away on 3<sup>rd</sup> October this year. Although not a member himself he did attend some of our events along with long time member Lorreta.

We extend our condolences.