

Nature Niagara News



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Niagara Falls
Nature Club

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WEDNESDAY EVENING WALKS AND SUMMER OUTINGS

Our club evening walks this past summer were once again successful and well attended. We visited parks and conservation areas from Fort Erie, Wainfleet, Niagara Falls, St. Catharines and Lincoln. We found many interesting items.

Poke Milkweed at Louth C.A., Prairie Cord Grass at Shagbark Park, Long Spurred Violet and Sharp Lobed Hepatica at Marcy's Woods, Highbush Cranberry at Merrit Island in Welland, Perfoliate Bellwort and White Wood Aster at the N.C.C. property in Fonthill. Plus a Green Frog at Legends on Niagara.

Rick Young



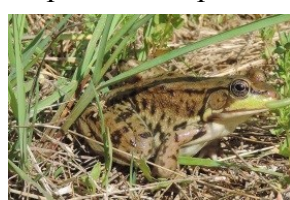
Poke Milkweed



Long Spurred Violet Sharp Lobed Hepatica



Highbush Cranberry



Green Frog

RED BAY WEEKEND 8TH TO 10TH SEPT. 2017

The evening light lay golden across the meadow marsh of Petrel Point on Lake Huron, as eleven club members moved slowly along the boardwalk. We greeted the Shrubby Cinquefoil, Sweet Gale, Bog and Ohio Goldenrods and Grass-of-Parnassus as familiar friends, but puzzled at a tall grayish furry plant that reminded one perhaps of lettuce, but not quite. Lorraine later remembered it was Glaucous White Lettuce, which we have not seen elsewhere.

As the sun lowered, the various grasses and sedges seemed to glow from within, as did the vivid carmines and oranges of Pitcher Plants, which entrap and digest unwary insects that wander inside. Too dark now to see much, we returned to home base, Evergreen Lodge, on Red Bay. Our plan had been to visit Singing Sands at Dorcas Bay on Saturday but that was closed until spring 2018 for "complete site renewal," a great excuse for returning another year. Instead, on Saturday we headed up to Bruce Alvar, where velvety mushrooms and intriguing lichens, with protuberances like mini golf tees, lined the path through the lush cedar and Jack Pine forest. Out on the open alvar a strange Blue-green Bacteria Algae looked wet, but was dry and rubbery to touch. Red fruits of Bearberry looked inviting, but were dry and mealy inside. Soft blues of Harebells and dainty Kalm's Lobelia enhanced the palette of rich ochre, cinnamon and deep orange in the mosses on the dolomite pavement.

Thence to the Visitors' Centre at Tobermory, where Gisele was first to climb the 6 story viewing tower, where we looked out over Georgian Bay and the docked Chi-cheemaun. We smiled at a sign announcing no shuttle bus to the Grotto, inside joke, very rough trail. A much

easier trail took us to another viewing platform overlooking Little Dunks Bay, then back to a relaxed meander through an excellent museum. Some evenings staying put is best, and so we did, finding Water Snakes curled basking in the sun, and numerous Leopard Frogs in the shallows of Lake Huron by the lodge. That night the stars were as numerous as when we were kids, dusting the sky with constellations and wonder.

On our last morning we drove south to Oliphant Fen, finding tiny white Nodding Ladies' Tresses and creamy Tuberous Indian Plantain. The wavy edges of Fringed Gentian cast shadows on its deep blue flowers. We linger, trying for the perfect, elusive photo.

And then it is time to head toward home, some going directly, others pausing for lunch at Spirit Rock Conservation Area, where we note the delicately striped and bristled caterpillar of the Io Moth, and another, more subdued, the caterpillar of the Great Ash Sphinx. It had been a good weekend with good friends.

Win Laar



Kalm's Lobelia



Lichens



Club Members

FLORA AND FAUNA OF ZIMBABWE

On Sept 13, we started the Indoor Speaker Program season with Dan Doucette, who took us on a visual trek across Zimbabwe, Africa. Dan's slideshow featured the flora and fauna of this diverse and stunning landscape. The trek started with perhaps the most well-known feature of Zimbabwe (actually located on the border of Zambia and Zimbabwe), Victoria Falls. Dan was

lucky enough to take a helicopter tour over this landmark, celebrated as the largest water fall in the world with a width of 1,708 m and a height of 108 m. Victoria Falls is also notable from a nature perspective because it creates a "mist" forest much like a tropical rainforest, even though surrounding areas are quite dry in comparison. The mist forest and surrounding area is home to unique plant species like red hot poker (also called torch lily), Dutchman's pipe, and the *Vernonia* species *Clematis vellosa*. The otherworldly veiled stinkhorn fungus is also found here. Animal species near Victoria Falls include tiny Spiny backed orb weaver spiders, Amata tiger moths and large Silvery cheeked hornbills.

About the size of a housecat (but with longer legs), the Blue Duiker antelope is one of the more timid animals in Zimbabwe. They are mainly found in the Hwange National Park about two hours from Victoria Falls. Dan told us a story about seeing a Blue Duiker in the brush as he was hiking, but upon closer examination saw that it had been caught in a snare. He freed it from the snare, only to have it run away and get caught again in another snare. Of course, he freed it again and hopefully it stayed that way! Other flora and fauna he caught on camera included the Earthstar fungus, Falling stars flowers (*Crocsmia aurea*), the finger-sized Elegant grasshopper, and Many-headed Slime fungus. Dan also saw Samango monkeys, one of only two primates found in Zimbabwe.

The presentation was wonderful, not just for the natural history, but also for the human history lesson. Dan told us that in the late 1980's and early 1990's there was internal conflict in Zimbabwe against white people. He showed pictures of a hotel that had been burned out – this was a time when many whites fled to South Africa and England. The economy suffered from the violence and tourism died out. However, both the economy and tourism are on the rise again and Dan found that local people were concerned and hopeful that tourism would continue to thrive as long as the cities remain safe for visitors. Despite a few rough experiences in his excursions around Zimbabwe, Dan seemed to have had a great time and his pictures were proof that this would be an ideal place to visit for nature lovers. To see some of his spectacular photos, from Zimbabwe and all over the world, visit <http://doucettesphotos.com>.

Kiera Newman

HAMILTON'S SPECIAL WETLANDS

For Bruce Mackenzie of the Hamilton Naturalists Club, wetlands are his favourite places in the Hamilton watershed, unique areas in southern Ontario that remain pristine while close to human activity.

Bruce looked at five types of wetlands: marsh, swamp, fen, bog, and disturbed wetlands.

A marsh is an area high in nutrients with water flowing through it. It often has cattails, emergent vegetation, and submergent aquatic plants.

A swamp is a treed area submerged for some period of the year or with saturated soil.

Thundering Waters is one example.

A fen is an area low in nutrients with water flowing through it, and has sedges, grasses and mosses; ie, Oliphant Fen.

A bog is an area low in nutrients with water only from rain, no flow. It has acidic conditions suitable for Black Spruce and heath shrubs.

Disturbed wetlands are common in southern Ontario, and generally resemble marshes with vegetated ponds, such as former quarries, mined peat bogs, and areas where drainage has been blocked by roads.

Fletcher Creek Ecological Preserve is home to the only fen in the watershed of the Hamilton Conservation Authority. The adjacent Galt moraine formation allows rain to percolate down through piles of gravel left behind by receding glaciers, recharging the aquifers and emerging as springs. Where bedrock meets the toe of the moraine, water goes sideways, and comes out in springs. The water temperature is between 8 and 10 degrees Celsius year-round. Frogs can often be found in mid winter in the springs. Speckled Trout are found right into these springs which are one of the sources of Spencer Creek, the main creek in the HCA watershed. Fringed Gentian and Labrador Tea occur side by side in the nearby cedar swamp. Calcium dominated soils neighbour acidic soils of the cedar swamp that lies on 2 meters of peat.

In a naturally occurring fen, often created 9,000 years ago, organic debris has collected in a shallow body of water, like a soup bowl, with a creek flowing across the top of the organic materials of the fen.

In another part of the property a photo of an old quarry showed steep limestone cliffs at the back, then clear water. The cliffs were knocked down to make a shallow wetland, but in 15 years no aquatic plants have appeared.

Contrast that to Valens Lake Conservation Area, where flooded farmland yielded lots of nutrients, resulting in lots of cattails, birds, amphibians, and turtles. Nearby is the Valens Hardwood Swamp, where one can find the northern plant, Partridgeberry, as well as Wood Frogs, a species indicative of a healthy forest.

At the big curve on Hwy 52 near Copetown is the Summit Bog, at the summit of Dundas Valley, dividing the Lake Ontario and Lake Erie watersheds. The bog was formed after glaciers left a big chunk of ice there 9,000 years ago. The bog's only water source is rain, with no water flowing through. Floating aquatic vegetation grew in from the edges, which in time filled in, leaving vegetation in the middle surrounded by a moat. At present it is a floating mat bog, high in the middle, so rain water flows out to the side, with very dense peat at the bottom, and the centre composed of sphagnum moss, a carpet on which other plants grow. Sphagnum moss holds a lot of water for its weight and actually elevates the water level in the centre of the bog.

Plants have adapted in various ways to the scarcity of nutrients in the bog. Labrador Tea has leathery leaves with fuzzy bottoms to reduce water loss through transpiration. Bog Rosemary has tightly curled leaves to retain water, and it and Labrador Tea hang onto their leaves all winter since there are so few nutrients for leaf replacement. Pitcher Plants get nutrients from the dissolved bodies of trapped insects.

And then there's the curious case of the Red Osier Dogwood, very gnarled and browsed by deer in the winter where it is found growing on the bog, but relatively untouched by deer on nearby land. It would appear that the deer must be benefitting from micronutrients from the dogwoods growing only on the bog.

Bruce's love of the wetlands of Hamilton was evident, as was his willingness to lead an outing for NFNC someday in the future. We look forward to experiencing his observations and discoveries first hand.

Win Laar

CRAWFORD LAKE NFNC OUTING

In mid-October six club members took a trip to the Crawford Lake Conservation Area in the Halton Region of Southern Ontario.

At first we walked around Crawford Lake, a body of water that is meromictic. The bottom layers in a meromictic lake lack oxygen, and therefore preserve residue that enters, such as hundreds of years of pollen.

Around the perimeter there is an abundance of Eastern White Cedar, Paper Birch and Yellow Birch. Of special interest to us were some fine examples of Marsh Scouring Rush.

Later in the day we walked around the Escarpment Trail, a rather rough trail. We did however find much of interest such as a late flowering Canada Violet, some Running Strawberry, Polypody Ferns and Bladdernut. Finally we ended at a lookout affording us a fine view across the escarpment.

Rick Young.



Running Strawberry



Marsh Scouring Rush



Oyster Mushroom



Carl, Lorraine, Doug, Win & Janet

IN MEMORY OF SACHIKO ISTOK

We mourn the passing of long time NFNC member, Sachiko Istok, who died October 19, 2017. Sachiko had a keen interest in the world around her, both natural and human. She especially liked exploring the Niagara Glen and Dufferin Islands, where she noticed and photographed all manner of interesting flora and fauna, seeking assistance in identifying curious unknowns, and sharing her discoveries both locally and with her Japanese community. Sachiko brought two firsts to our club, the first time anyone volunteered to set up and maintain a website for us, and the first time we experienced a musical component at our annual June potluck. Sachiko played the taisho koto, a Japanese stringed instrument, in company with guests from Japan, who performed a requiem for the victims of the earthquake and tsunami that struck Japan in 2011.

Sachiko's warmth, sense of humour, and eagerness to learn about the natural world around her, will long be remembered.

Win Laar



Sachiko

Your editing team wishes to thank you for your contributions that help make your newsletter interesting.

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