



Newsletter of the Bert Miller Nature Club

The Rambler

Spring 2024

A Message from the Board

Like most Not-For-Profits incorporated in Ontario, over the past year, the Board of the Bert Miller Nature Club (BMNC) has been working to bring our charity into compliance with the legislative changes made by Ontario's Not-for-Profit Corporations Act of 2010. Lynda Goodridge, Tim Seburn, and particularly Viki Busche worked as a group on this throughout the past winter. New bylaws and a couple of minor changes in the Club's Articles of Incorporation were recommended by this working group and then reviewed and approved by the Board of Directors. These changes were formally adopted by the Club at its Annual General Meeting (AGM) held on May 13 and are now being forwarded to the Province for its formal approval.

The Board apologizes for the last-minute rescheduling of the AGM which was originally scheduled for April 8, the same date as the solar eclipse. The Board was aware some members were travelling out of Town for the event and that traffic in Fort Erie could be horrendous since Fort Erie sat directly on the line of totality. Most people who stayed in Fort Erie were able to get intermittent looks at the eclipse. Unfortunately for those on the beach at Waverly, our view of the eclipse was completely obscured at the exact moment of totality. Except for a ring of red around the distant horizon, it became as dark as the darkest night. You couldn't see the person sitting next to you. Hopefully, you enjoyed the eclipse too.

The BMNC also has members who are on the Town's Environmental Advisory Committee (EAC). This committee mainly reviews Environmental Impact Statements associated with new development proposals submitted to the Town of Fort Erie. EAC's comments and recommendations are passed through the Town's Planning Department to the

Fort Erie Council. The hope is that this advice can help to maintain a healthy, environmentally intact ecosystem for residents and support the retention of our quality of life and those characteristics of the Town that we would like to retain.



Cucumber Magnolia.

© Tim Seburn

Last summer the Town hired an Environmental Planner, Rachel Daniels, the first Environmental Planner hired by any municipality in Niagara. With substantial input from EAC, other members of the BMNC and the public, Ms. Daniels was successful in developing and drafting a Tree Bylaw that was considered and passed by the Council. Ms. Daniels

accepted a position with the Region late in 2023 and the Town has now hired Jessica Abrahamse as her replacement. The Nature Club is pleased with this Council's commitment to keep the Environmental Planner position staffed.

The Board is also pleased to report that the Niagara Parks Commission has planted a great variety of native trees along the Niagara River Parkway, at Gonder's Flats, and on the ground of Old Fort Erie. Members may recall Corey Burant's wonderful presentation to our Club last year. Corey no doubt played a big role in bringing this about. It is hard to overstate the importance of having an intact, healthy canopy along the parkway. Not only will the shade help cool picnickers and the water temperature, but the wide variety of native trees being planted is genetically protecting our natural heritage. This includes some of our rare species, like Cucumber Magnolia, which formerly was common along the Niagara River. The last Cucumber Magnolia in Fort Erie, which stood along the Niagara River at Emerick Street, was lost in the 1980s.

Lastly, we are still in need of a President, Vice President and two more

Welcome New Members

- Patti, Robert & Adam Pozzobon
- Mary Jane & Rob Paladichuk
- David Ruttan

Upcoming Meetings

- June 15 @ 10 am, Rain of Shine - Outing and Picnic at I CAN-T.E.R. Farm, 1234 House Rd, Ridgeway (bring a lunch)
- September 9 @ 7:00 pm - Jean Hampson & Bob Highcock - Polar Bears in Churchill.
- October 15 (Tuesday) @ 7:00 pm - Don Scallen, Naturalist - Hidden Life.
- November 11 @ 7:00 pm - Joseph Shorthouse, Author - Sands of the Great Lakes (on Zoom).
- December 9 @ 7:00 pm - Margaret Northfield, Niagara Bruce Trail Assn. - Preserving a Ribbon of Wilderness for Everyone (on Zoom).
- 2025 Meetings will be updated in our Fall 2024 Rambler.

Upcoming Outings

- Watch for email updates or refer to the Club's website or Facebook page for information on future outings.

Memberships

- September is the beginning of a new season for the club and we will start taking 2025 memberships at our meeting. We look forward to being together with old friends and meeting new ones. Everyone is always welcome. Between now and then, have a great summer! Safe travels for anyone who will be going away, and for those enjoying a staycation, be safe.



A Message from the Board *continued*

Directors. If you or anyone you know is a member of the BMNC and might be interested in sitting on the Board, you are welcome to join us at a Board meeting or two as a visitor to see how we operate. Please contact any current board member, or email us at bertmillernatureclub@gmail.com. Board Meetings are

currently held online using Zoom at 7 PM on the first Monday of most months, excluding the summer months.

Enjoy nature,
Tim Seburn (on the Board's behalf).

2024 Bert Miller Nature Club Award Presentation *by Dawn Pierrynowski*

At the annual general meeting on May 13, we were honoured to present Mary Potter and her late husband Dr. John Potter with the Bert Miller Nature Club Award in recognition of their valuable contributions to restoring, preserving, protecting and improving the natural environment.



Plaque presentation to Mary Potter by Dawn Pierrynowski. © Dawn Pierrynowski

Nature organizations were and are privileged to have had Mary and John as members and leaders for many years. They were involved with the Peninsula Field Naturalists, the St. Catharines Christmas Bird Count, the Niagara Woodlot Association, the Owl

Foundation, the Niagara Restoration Council, the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority, the Niagara Parks Commission and Malcomson Eco-Park. Their work



BMNC Award closeup. © Dawn Pierrynowski

included weeding eleven pollinator gardens and eventually organizing volunteers to take over eight of them. Tree identification on hikes was a specialty of John's.

John led the annual Maple Syrup Walk hike in the Short Hills Provincial Park and of course, we joined him for the delicious pancake breakfast afterward.

Locally Mary and John were instrumental in the restoration work at Shagbark Nature Park in Ridgeway by organizing and ordering the native species of plants that were planted and then helping with the watering.

A great deal of gratitude is owed to this wonderful couple for all they have done.

As mentioned in our Fall 2023 issue of The Rambler, John passed away last September.

Let's Do Something!

The Bert Miller Nature Club initiated the "Let's Do Something Earth Challenge" in December 2023. It was something a little different from our usual events, not too onerous and meant to get members and the general public involved as a community. The purpose of the Challenge was to encourage members and the public to work together to preserve the earth by reducing the impacts of climate change and show that individuals can make a difference and make positive changes. The Challenge commenced in January 2024 and ran until the end of May. Each month there was a new type of challenge and participants were encouraged to try one, two or all of the suggested actions related to the monthly theme. The themes were: January - Home heating and efficiency, February - Environmentally friendly eating, March - Reduce plastics, April - Living local, May - Get gardening!

Approximately fifty people participated in the challenge with a good mix of Club members, nature club friends and the public. For many, they are already doing some or all of the suggested actions but hopefully picked up a few new ideas. The Fort Erie Observer published an excellent article about the Challenge in February 2024 that generated more interest, helping to gain more participants and raise the profile of the Club.

To make the Challenge even more enticing, a prize was

by Anne Mills

awarded each month by drawing participant's names from a hat. Prizes were kindly donated by individuals, businesses and the Club. The most recent prizes included a \$20 gift certificate to Wild Daisies consignment store in Ridgeway, a 10-pack of tickets for Fort Erie On-Demand Transit (April) and a \$25 gift certificate to the Mill Greenhouse, Ridgeway (May). Many thanks to the donors!

Overall, it has been a great success and a fun way to build community and, to "Do Something". All participants have been invited to come out to the Club meetings and outings. Participants have also been invited to celebrate the success of the Challenge at a year-end Picnic at I CAN -T.E.R. on June 15. The Bert Miller Nature Club team of volunteers is made up of Anne Mills, Christine Knighton and Deb Sherk.

Let's Do Something!!
Earth Challenge



Winter Waterfowl Outing

by Tim Seburn

Our day began at the small parking lot below Old Fort Erie, where Lake Erie enters the Niagara River. Our oldest waterfowler was Rick, and the youngest, was Nehemiah. Considering it was the 3rd of February, and the middle of winter, the weather was great for being outside. There was almost no wind, the temperature was above freezing, and getting around was straightforward since there was no snow cover. At this location, we had distant views of large numbers of Scaup, Red-breasted Mergansers, Goldeneyes, Buffleheads, Long-tails, and a few Mallards and Black Ducks closer to shore.



Redhead Ducks.
© Debbie Wright

At this point, we mixed things up a bit. I had scouted the river the day before and didn't find any Tundra Swans, a favourite species for Viki. Since there was no snow cover, and Lake Erie had no ice cover, the swans were spending their nights in bays along the lake and flying to open fields to feed during the day. So next our group

headed to the end of Kraft Road and walked to the lake to see if we could catch some of the swans before they flew off to feed. Unfortunately, we arrived too late. There were no swans but there were several species of ducks close to us, so this time everyone had great looks without scopes. From this vantage point, we noticed that the Bald Eagle's nest at the end of Buffalo Road is quite visible. We noted the nest seems to be unoccupied this year. While we were there the sun came out. It was so nice to be on a beach in the middle of winter, enjoying the sun, that we didn't want to leave. But there were more waterfowl species to be identified, so we got back to work.



Group photo beside the Niagara River. © Debbie Wright

Common and Hooded Mergansers and one Ring-necked Duck as we moved north.

When we reached Emerick Avenue, we made another detour and discovered the Eastern Screech Owl in front of Lynda's house was sitting out at the entrance to his hole, sunning himself.



Eastern Screech Owl.
© Debbie Wright

able to see Tundra Swans. I think we were all happy with how the day went.

But first, we made another detour. We turned onto Edgemere Lane to check out the fresh handiwork of Pileated Woodpeckers in the old hydro poles that were being replaced. One pole had so many large holes in it that it was hard to believe it was still standing!

We finally returned to the river and had great looks at Canvasbacks, Redheads,



Nehemiah checking out the Pileated Woodpecker hole.
© Marcie Jacklin

Nature Centre Events

by Dawn Pierrynowski



Lynda and Dawn at the Niagara Glen Nature Centre.
© Dawn Pierrynowski

Lynda Goodridge and Dawn Pierrynowski volunteered to represent the Club indoors at two wonderful, well-attended events in February, Birds on the Niagara, at the Niagara Glen Nature Centre (<http://www.birdniagara.org/>) and Heartland Forest's Winterfest (<https://heartlandforest.org/event/winterfest/>)

Families enjoyed the Club's hands-

on activities involving bird matching and animal tracks.

At the Niagara Glen Nature Centre, we enjoyed the views, the displays of other nature organizations, live raptors and the beautiful Nature Centre itself.



Great Horned Owl from the Canadian Raptor Conservancy.
© Dawn Pierrynowski



Children enjoying the activities at Heartland Forest.
© Dawn Pierrynowski

Try to visit these two venues whenever you can. You won't be disappointed.

(<https://www.niagaraparks.com/visit/attractions/niagara-glen-nature-centre>)

At Heartland Forest's Winterfest celebration, there were many activities both inside this great nature centre and outside along the universally accessible trails.



Display setup at Heartland Forest.
© Dawn Pierrynowski

River Otters at Point Abino

by Tim Seburn

First Beavers, then Fishers and now River Otters make their return to Point Abino.

It is amazing how resilient nature is when given a chance. River Otters began to be spotted along the Niagara River about 15 years ago. Then there were reports of sightings along Six Mile Creek, and last year, while kayaking, Debbie Wright captured an amazing video of a pair on Ussher's Creek. Now a pair has been captured on a game camera in Point Abino.

River otters live primarily along rivers, lakes or ponds with a wooded area nearby, but will also roam far from water. As you are hiking in Niagara keep a close eye out for any sign of them including mudslides and borrows along the bank of a creek. You can also listen for their vocalizations which include a warning whistle and, during mating season, a shrill chattering call.



White Pelicans on the Niagara River

by Tim Seburn

Much bigger than the brown pelican, the white pelican is an impressive bird to behold! Birders were thrilled to see this bird up close at the foot of Beatrice Street on the Niagara River in mid-April.



© Marcie Jacklin

This species winters in Florida, which is where people from Niagara normally happen to see it. However, it is a bird that breeds in many places in Canada. In Ontario, the Rainy River District has historically been its main

breeding location. However, a few years ago pelicans began nesting on an island at the western end of Lake Erie. There are several spots at this end of Lake Erie and in the Niagara River that would seem to be suitable locations for it to breed. Wouldn't it be cool if the white pelican became a species we got to observe as it returns here to raise its young every spring? Keep your binoculars handy and your fingers crossed!



© Marcie Jacklin

Marcy's Woods Hike 2024

by Tim Seburn

Although the forecast was sketchy, fifty-two participants showed up and were treated to perfect weather for our rain-or-shine hike of Marcy's Woods. We were thrilled to have Patty Marcy (Richards) join us this year. Our outing began with ensuring everyone

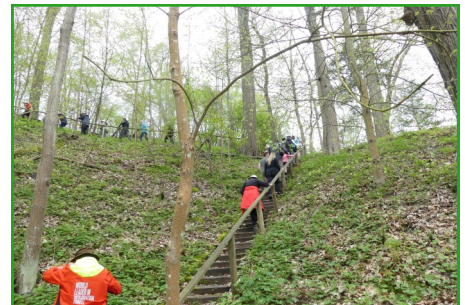


The group is ready to start the walk.
© Dawn Pierrynowski

was registered and signed a release. Unfortunately, our orientation for the hike included education on the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid (HWA), a recently arrived invasive pest species attacking our Hemlock trees. Dawn demonstrated to hikers how to decontaminate their equipment and clothing after the hike, with supplies kindly loaned to us by the Niagara Falls Nature Club. The large group was divided into two, with less mobile hikers taking the lower trail and the others, the upper trail. The lower trail group took the shoreline trail to return.

Knowing which weekend to schedule our Club's annual hike of Marcy's Woods is always a bit of a dilemma. Will there be an early blossoming of spring ephemerals or late? This year it was scheduled for May 4, which proved to be a bit late. Bloodroot and Hepatica had finished flowering, and even most of the Red Trilliums were done. However, the White Trilliums put on a great show along with the Spring Beauty, the two Toothworts, and several species of violet and Watercress. There was still some Squirrel Corn and Dutchman's Breeches in bloom. We also saw plenty of Columbine and Blue Phlox in bloom, species we wouldn't have seen if we had held our hike a week earlier.

Having our hike a week later also gave us a chance to see some spring migrants. Although there was no big movement of birds through the woods, there were Red-headed Woodpeckers, Baltimore Orioles, Carolina, Winter and House Wrens, which are migrants. There also



Heading up the long staircase to the upper trail. © Dawn Pierrynowski

Marcy's Woods Hike 2024 *continued*

sightings of Wood Ducks and a Barred Owl, a new species for the Point Abino Peninsula.



Tim Seburn.
© Dawn Pierrynowski

Several Garter Snakes were sighted, but no Hognose snakes. Frog species we heard included Spring Peepers and Gray Treefrogs.

The Club expresses our sincere appreciation to the DiCienzo family for their conservation of the forest and for kindly allowing us to hike it each year. We hope

everyone enjoyed their hike of Marcy's Woods, and that

everyone felt like the forest was indeed with them on May the 4th.



Life continues to grow on this uprooted dead tree's roots.

© Dawn Pierrynowski

World Migratory Bird Day at Gonder's Flats

by Lynda Goodridge

A sunny morning greeted us on Saturday, May 11, as approximately twenty people gathered to learn about the Gonder's Flats restoration project located on the Niagara River near Townline Road. The property was conveyed to The Niagara Parks Commission (NPC) in 1930 by descendants of Michael Gonder, who settled in the area in 1799. This gift was part of the construction of the Niagara Parkway during the Great Depression.

Over the past several years, the property has undergone restoration to enhance the wetlands and improve the shoreline. These enhancements have increased the biodiversity of the area, attracting more birds as well as other wildlife.

With May 11 being World Migratory Bird Day, Gonder's Flats was the perfect choice for celebrating this global event. The focus this year was insects and their importance to birds, especially during migration. Some of the migrants come from great distances, as far away as South America, and need to rest and refuel before continuing to their breeding grounds up north. Since insects are a crucial part of their diet, this food source is essential. The restoration efforts at Gonder's Flats have provided the biodiversity that will promote this symbiotic relationship.

Corey Burant, Project Manager with the NPC, was on hand to lead participants on a guided walk to showcase some of the things that have been accomplished. Several disease-resistant American Elm trees have been planted in the grassy area south of the parking lot. As we walked along the trail, Corey pointed out the pollinator garden that has been planted and appears to be flourishing. As the path turned north at the river's edge, we were able to see the fish habitat that was created for the "young of the year" (juvenile fish). The current in this part of the river is extremely fast, so efforts were made to slow it down using submerged Christmas trees, limbs, rocks and other barriers that help to provide a safe habitat for the fish to breed.

Following the path a bit further, we were able to see the



Group heading towards the Niagara River.
© Ron Goodridge

large pond which is one of the main features of the property. We were entertained by Common Terns who demonstrated their expertise in diving for food. The Kildeers, also abundant, made their presence known with their familiar calls as they scurried along protecting their young. Although they weren't present during the walk, it is not unusual to see both Bald Eagles and Osprey circling overhead.

Last fall, The Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority and Land Care Niagara teamed up to plant an abundance of trees, bushes and shrubs along the berm that surrounds the pond. Given a few

years, these plantings will grow and provide additional biodiversity for the area.

All these enhancements have made this an excellent area for both plants, animals and people. If you haven't already discovered it, be sure to check it out. Many thanks to both Corey Burant for leading the walk and Marcie Jacklin for providing her birding expertise.



Listening to Corey Burant speak beside the river.
© Ron Goodridge

Bert Miller Nature Club

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2023 - 2024 Executive

President •vacant
Past President •Deb Sherk
Vice President •vacant
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Treasurer •Rick Stockton
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Directors •Eliza Durant
•Lynda Goodridge
•Anne Mills
•Dawn Pierrynowski
•Tim Seburn

The Rambler Newsletter

•Newsletter contact: Tim Seburn
•Editor: Lorraine Brown-Joyce

The Bert Miller Nature Club is a charitable organization formed in January of 1995 by a group of people interested in sharing their enthusiasm for nature. Earl Plato, a local naturalist and history buff, was the founding president. The club is named after a well-known naturalist and resident of Fort Erie, Bert Miller, whose passion inspired all those who participated in his many rambles throughout the Niagara Peninsula. Since its inception, the Bert Miller Nature Club has been committed to preserving, protecting, restoring and improving the Niagara Peninsula's natural environment. Through monthly meetings, field outings and advocacy activities, the Club strives to foster an understanding and awareness of our natural heritage and its value in enhancing the quality of life. It also promotes cooperation with other organizations having similar interests.

In conjunction with the Town of Fort Erie, the BMNC maintains stewardship of the Shagbark Nature Park. This rehabilitated natural area features a woodland with marked trails and interpretive signage, a meadow containing native plantings and a chimney swift tower. The Park is located on Burleigh Rd between Nigh and Dominion Roads in Ridgeway.

Meetings are held the second Monday of the month at 7 p.m., in person for September, October and April to June, and virtual via Zoom for November through March. Field outings may be scheduled periodically. Please visit our website, www.bertmillernatureclub.org for more information on our club and a complete list of activities.

The Rambler newsletter is published biannually in the Spring and Fall. Members are encouraged to submit articles, nature events or experiences, photos and outing reviews to bertmillernews@gmail.com. Items submitted may be edited and will be used subject to space allowances. Thanks to the many members who take the time to contribute to making a newsletter for everyone to enjoy.

Join the "Swifties"

Members of the Bert Miller Nature Club are inviting you to become a "Swiftie" this summer. No, we are not talking about the popular songstress, Taylor Swift. The BMNC Swifties are those of us who keep tabs on the number of Chimney Swifts that roost in our area each summer.



Chimney Swift.

© Ron Goodridge

Chimney Swifts are "aerial insectivores", which means they spend most of their time in the air, feeding on insects. Unlike other birds, they do not perch on branches in trees. The only time they land is when they drop into their chimney to either feed their young or rest for the night. They are incredible flyers and fun to watch.

Each summer from late May through August, our group monitors several chimneys in downtown Fort Erie, as well

by Lynda Goodridge

as two chimneys at Niagara Christian Collegiate. It is easy to learn what to look for and a great way to spend an hour on a summer evening. Most of our monitoring takes place one evening, every two weeks, during June, July and August. We meet a half hour before sunset and monitor until a half hour after sunset.

Initially, you can just watch with another Swiftie until you feel confident to try it yourself. We usually work in pairs or small groups so you will never be alone. Why not come out and see what is involved? We will be happy to have you as a guest - with no obligations. For more information, contact Lynda Goodridge at lgoodridge219@gmail.com. Hope to hear from you!

In closing, here's a whole lot of cuteness for your enjoyment, taken recently at the end of Highland Ave in Fort Erie, a female Common Merganser with ducklings.



Female Common Merganser with ducklings.
© Ron Goodridge