

The Rambler

A newsletter of the **Bert Miller Nature Club of Fort Erie**

April, 2017



For 2017, The Bert Miller Nature Club Award Goes To Earl Plato.

by Tim Seburn



Photo by Ron Goodridge

As many of you no doubt know, Earl founded this club. It has been over 22 years since he put an ad in the Fort Erie Times asking persons interested in founding a nature club to meet him on January 19th, 1995, at the Crystal Ridge Library. Over 75 persons attended. And here we still are!

Earl wanted our nature club named after Bert Miller. I know Earl would want me to mention the big role that Bert Miller played in his life, and the lives of many others across Niagara. Earl first met Bert when he was 8 years old and sick with polio. Bert gave him a sketch book to draw birds

and, when he was well enough, took him on hikes to Point Abino and elsewhere with his brother Ed.

Through Bert, Earl learned a deep appreciation of nature as well as local history, and this, he feels, has greatly enriched his life. So much

so, that throughout his life, Earl has always felt indebted to Bert, and has worked to pay this debt forward.

Earl first obtained a degree in history from McMaster, and then a Master of Science in Education at Buffalo State University. Before he became principal, he taught a local history course at Bertie Senior Elementary School for 12 years, encouraging his students to develop a love of local history, as Bert encouraged him. Bertie born and bred, he volunteered for many years with the Bertie Historical Society, serving as Vice President and later President. He has written books on local history to encourage young readers.

Earl also would take his students on nature hikes. One of his most precious home movies is one of Bert Miller, at age 86, accompanying his senior class and parents to Point Abino.

After his retirement from teaching, Earl focused on his writing. He is probably best known for his weekly newspaper column, "WHEN NATURE CALLS", a column which continues today, and which remains very popular with readers. Encouraged and supported by his loving wife of 60 years, Earl has inspired all of us to better appreciate nature wherever we may be – even in our own backyard.

Bert and Earl

by Earl Plato

I want to reflect on my earliest relationship with the late Bert Miller. I was 8 1/2 when Bert first visited me. I had been quarantined with paralytic polio. I had been in a coma and almost died. My father worked with Bert at Horton Steel. Bert often asked my father about me. The red quarantine Polio sign finally came down. I was still very weak when Bert visited me. I was seated looking out at the old leaning snow apple tree. I was sketching a robin. I loved to draw. Bert asked me some questions. What is it? Where and when did you see it? He drew some lines on my page. "Son, keep a record." He put headings on my paper. A few days later my father gave me a gift from him. It was a little black notebook with a shiny black cover. It was from Bert. It had headings ideal for me to sketch and record.

Robins, Blue birds, Baltimore orioles, Purple martins, Crested flycatchers, and Downy woodpeckers. All were at our old leaning apple tree. Then later in our fields - Meadowlarks and Bobolinks. I had this book for years. Thanks to Bert Miller I was hooked on nature.

For several years on Saturdays My father and I travelled with Bert Miller. Niagara Glen, Point Abino, Fonthill, Wainfleet Marsh and at age 10 we walked Marcy Woods with Bert, my father, Brother Ed, and myself. We would return to the Woods on many occasions. I helped Bert and my father measure the giant Rose Hill Tulip tree. Great experiences!

Bert also loved Local History. I learned much about the early beginnings of the Niagara peninsula. Yes, he was a great influence on a young life.

"Bertie born and bred" Yes, I am old. I turned 85 last October. My roots go back generations in Bertie Township. I was a public School teacher for 35 years. Most of my teaching

career was in administration in Fort Erie schools. History! Love Bert. I have a B.A. in History from McMaster University and a M.Sc. Ed.(Master of Science) degree from Buffalo State University. Again I earned History options. My thesis was on the Palatine Germans who fled to Great Britain circa 1700. At Bertie Senior Elementary I taught a Local History Elective course for 12 years. I encouraged research and many students turned in great projects. Thanks Bert.



I was First Vice President of the Bertie Historical Society and subsequently President. Bert's influence Still gripped me. At age 86 he accompanied me, my senior class and parents to Point Abino. I was thrilled to have him along again. It was shortly later I called for a general meeting to form a Fort Erie Nature Club. There was a great response. A motion was made at Crystal Ridge Library Meeting Room to name the new club, the **Bert Miller Nature Club**. Thanks Bert.

Encouraging me and helping me all along was my great wife of sixty plus years, Elaine.

A Busy Year

by Lynda Goodridge

It's hard to believe that our 2016/2017 program season is almost over. We've had a great roster of speakers this year, and my thanks go out to Eliza Durant and Lorraine Brown-Joyce for their assistance in lining up the schedule.

During the past year, Marcie Jacklin has taken us on a virtual trip to Colombia, Sean James has given us tips for planting eco-friendly gardens, and we've learned about Ontario's only lizard – the Five-lined Skink. Tracy Gregg showed us the effects of asteroid impacts and Margaret Pickles introduced us to Newfoundland's Puffins and the natural beauty of this maritime province. We were all impressed with Deb Sherk's and John Weisz's presentation on "living the green life", followed by Cathy and Perry Barnhardt's wetland project to re-direct wastewater from their campground.

Still to come are three more exciting programs, including our final Dessert Pot Luck and Members' Share Night. I hope that all of you will be able to join us each month for these informative and entertaining programs.

In addition to organizing our regular club activities and events, the Bert Miller Nature Club board continues to advocate on behalf of our natural environment. We have submitted comments on the various provincial policies under review, including the Wetland Conservation Review, the Conservation Authorities Act and the Combined Greenbelt, Niagara Escarpment and Oak Ridges Moraine Review. We have written letters to the Premier of Ontario, various provincial ministers, and regional councillors, expressing our concerns about biodiversity offsetting, the Thundering Waters development, and the need for a forensic audit of the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority.

Locally, we have two members on the Town's Environmental Advisory Committee, and several of us have provided input to various town projects, including the Waterfront Strategy and the new Crystal Ridge Park.

We can all be proud of the achievements of our club and the contributions it has made over the past year.

Bert Miller Nature Club Board

Lynda Goodridge

Each meeting night, BMNC members arrive to a room set up with comfortable chairs and coffee, tea and refreshments ready to savour in anticipation of the evening's presentation. This does not happen by chance. It is the result of the hard work put in by members of the BMNC Board. I can truthfully say that there is not one member who does not contribute. We also are fortunate to have two former board members who have continued to volunteer their time as Membership Chair (Deb Sherk) and Newsletter Editor (Paul Philp).

The dedication of the BMNC Board is outstanding, but we are all getting tired and a bit burned out. We need new blood to continue the fine work for which our Club is known. If we are to move ahead with a bright future, we need people to step up to the plate and help keep the momentum.

Please consider becoming a member of the Board. We will welcome you with open arms! For more information, feel free to contact any one of us.

At our February Annual General Meeting, the following BMNC Board members were installed for the coming year:

President: Lynda Goodridge

Past President: Dawn Pierrynowski

Vice President: (Vacant)

Secretary: Peter BonEnfant

Treasurer: Rick Stockton

Directors: Viki Busche, Eliza Durant, Janet Kellam, Alida Osborn

Many thanks to these hard-working volunteers for all their help and encouragement over the past year.

Tree Identification at Beamer

by Paul Philp

We held our annual "Winter Tree Identification" hike at Beamer Conservation Area this year. On the day before a notice went out indicating "April showers bring spring flowers but



Photo by Dawn Pierrynowski

about the raptor migration along the escarpment visit

<http://www.niagarapeninsulahawkwatch.org/>.

I have always found identifying trees in winter a challenge so look forward to these hikes every year. There is always new information that comes out of our group discussions that adds to my bucket list of winter tree ID tips. Now just to remember them for next year.

As the years go by I appreciate more and more the value of natural spaces. Thank goodness for the local Conservation Authority lands, the protection of the Niagara Escarpment, and the Greenbelt initiative. Without these conservation minded initiatives natural areas would soon disappear.

may cause havoc with the outing to Beamer Memorial Conservation Area, Saturday, March 25th." On the morning of the hike the satellite imagery showed some "windows of opportunity" so we decided to go ahead with the hike. It ended up being a very wet one but also very enjoyable for the 7 of us. At least we did get to warm up at our apartment after the hike.

We were able to identify many of the woody plant species. Bark colour, texture, and variation from young to old bark are often the first thing one notices. Or should it be the alternate or opposite branching? Or what about bud colour, shape, and the scales as clues? I always remember John Potter looking a tree up and down before anything is said. A lesson learned as it often takes more than one feature to correctly identify a tree or shrub.

Also thanks to Bruce MacKenzie we learned about some of the physical features of the area which includes 2 waterfalls, the resulting gorges, and some interrelationships between various aspects of the unique environment at Beamer. There were discussions on tree tip-ups and the mini-environments they create, the relationship between some tree species to the topography and soil, and between a few local animal species within the environment there.

One of the most fascinating aspects of Beamer is that of hawk migration. In a nutshell this point of land with the deep gorge of Forty-mile Creek is an ideal location. It is the closest to Lake Ontario of any point on the escarpment creating strong updrafts from on-shore winds. As a species of bird who rely on soaring, these winds really do help with migration in the spring. To learn more

A Warm Welcome To New or Rejoining Members

Gary King

Tina Masmeyer

Rhonda Armstrong

Diane & John O'Brien

We are happy to have you join with us in celebrating our natural heritage.

JANUARY WATERFOWL

by Peter BonEnfant

Members and non-members alike joined some of our winter birding enthusiasts for two waterfowl outings along the Niagara River in Fort Erie Saturday, January 7, and Sunday, January 15, 2017.

Both events were blessed by what has been a true rarity for the Club's winter outings along the river in recent years: beautiful, virtually windless weather. With that and with several telescopes available on both occasions, we all enjoyed and learned from ample close-up views of a variety of birds in their colourful breeding plumage, as well as tips on identification and other information from the more knowledgeable birders in the group.



At one point, approximately thirty persons were in attendance January 7th. We spent most of our time that day viewing several species of waterfowl from the parking lot on Lakeshore Road, opposite Old Fort Erie. The other particularly productive stop was our final one, at the Niagara Parkway and Anger Avenue, where the River was a veritable duck soup. Apart from gulls, the group saw Common Goldeneye, Bufflehead, Red-breasted Merganser, Common Merganser, Hooded Merganser, Long-tail Duck, Mallard, Greater Scaup, Ring-necked Duck, Redhead, Canvasback, Black Duck, and Horned Grebe. Two rarities seen by some before and after, but not during, the event itself were King Eider (before) and Harlequin Duck (before and after).



On January 15th, we started opposite Old Fort Erie once again, but this time the larger numbers of waterfowl were downstream, beyond what locals call the North End. Attendance reached about twenty-five persons, and the list of waterfowl species observed was similar to the list from the previous week, minus the King Eider and the Harlequin Duck, but this time we added a Horned Grebe, a Belted Kingfisher, a couple of Mute Swans and several Tundra Swans.



The events were well covered by area newspapers, and enjoyed by all who participated. By the end of each event, some relative newcomers seemed dangerously close to getting hooked on winter waterfowl.

Many thanks to all who participated. Perhaps we'll do it again next winter. In the meantime, if only we could get the warblers to slow down to duck speed, ...

Music & a Message: Lyme Disease

By Tim Seburn

On Saturday, June 17, the Niagara Land Trust invites residents, business owners, health professionals, educators and conservationists to join us at the Riverstone Conference Centre in Welland, Ontario between 5 p.m. and 9 p.m., for

this year's annual Music and a Message on the topic of Lyme Disease. The agenda will include live music by local jazz players, a light meal, silent auction, and an evening of information and discussion. Funds raised will go towards the acquisition of Cardinal Woods, a woodland in West Lincoln where *Lobelia Cardinalis* (cardinal flower) grows along a small stream.

Our guest speakers and panel of experts will offer insights on understanding Lyme Disease and the creature that carries it; the Tick. What is the health impact of Lyme disease on our families and our pets? What can we do about the Tick problem? How can improving the environmental biodiversity help mitigate the problem?

Katie Clow, DVM, PhD Candidate, Department of Pathobiology, Ontario Veterinary College, University of Guelph will join us as keynote speaker. There will be a panel discussion including a Lyme Disease survivor, doctor, veterinarian, and environmental expert. Niagara Land Trust will offer insights on the benefits and challenges of improving biodiversity in Niagara, and what can be done to help.

Lyme disease is an infection caused by the

Borrelia burgdorferi bacteria. The disease transmits through a certain species of ticks that attach themselves to humans and animals; feeding off their blood. Not a common disease in the past, the numbers of Lyme disease cases are now growing at an exponential rate. In the U.S., 30,000 cases of Lyme Disease reported each year, and the CDC believe this number is much higher; 10x higher.

Research shows that climate change, the decrease in biodiversity, and fragmented forest areas are contributing factors to the expansion and growth of Lyme Disease. With these changes in our environment, it has resulted in an increase in tick carrying creatures, such as the white field mouse. Warmer winters mean greater survival odds for the animals. Fragmented forests are not a concern for mice, as they can live in grassy areas, roadside ditches, and backyard gardens. While the mice flourish, their natural predators are slowly being pushed out; decreasing in numbers.

**Save the date and
we'll see you there!!**

**Hear Ye! Hear Ye!
Come One! Come All!**

**2017 Butterfly Festival
Sunday, June 11th
11:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m.
Stevensville Conservation Area
2555 Ott Rd. Stevensville**

Displays
Kids' Crafts
Food
Fun
Guided Hikes



A Pictorial Editorial

Photos by Paul and Karin Philp

The 2 stacks of the
Nanticoke coal powered
generating plant are now
silent.



This shoreline photo of Wolfe Island shows some of its
86 wind turbines. Preparations for 26 turbines that are
50-stories tall are underway on Amherst Island which is
a significant birding spot.



Wind turbines are extremely large and
sometimes so are the hydro poles for
these wind farms.



Properly designed buildings are better choices for solar projects than farmland.



Various sounds from this turbine which is now operational, can be heard from the Station Road Naturalization Site parking lot.



Many rural roadside/front yard trees have been replaced by transmission lines and protective guardrails.

Turbines are responsible for many bird deaths. So are lights. In 10 years over 22,000 birds were killed by flying into the floodlights illuminating the stacks at the Lennox Generating Station in Kingston.

Finally, in 1983 the floodlights were replaced by strobe lights and the mortality rate dropped to only a few birds per season.

