



# The Rambler!

A Newsletter of the Bert Miller Nature Club  
Fall 2012

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## Coming Up

### BMNC

All indoor programs held at Stevensville Conservation Area Clubhouse, W. Main St. & Ott Rd.

#### **Shagbark Nature Park**

Take a walk through the woods and help with our annual clean-up. Bring a plastic bag, gloves & binoculars.

Sun., Nov. 18, 10:00 am  
Contact: Dawn Pierrynowski,  
905-384-2476

#### **Wily Coyote**

Learn about these resourceful animals and how to reduce conflicts with them.

Mon. Nov. 19, 7:00 pm

#### **Holiday Pot Luck & Silent Auction**

Bring your own place setting & favourite dish. Beef on Weck \$5. Guest speaker, Bob DeLeon discusses Climate Change & Bird Migration

Mon. Dec. 17, 6:00 pm

## Reaching Out to the Community

One of the fundamental objectives of the Bert Miller Nature Club is to promote environmental education. As I look back over the last year and ponder initiatives being planned for the next, one thing stands out: we are definitely committed to this wonderful goal. Our hope is that increased knowledge will help to shape a better future for us and for future generations.

This has been a banner year for community outreach. It began with the spring partnership with the Fort Erie Public Library, entitled "Another Boring Insect." Both the presentation and follow-up hike on the Emerald Ash Borer invasion were well received. In late spring, a number of inner-city students enjoyed the activities and live water creatures that we provided during their school's Eco-Fair. The materials we had purchased previously for outreach programming came in very handy. At the other end of the spectrum, seniors from Garrison Place enjoyed two presentations: one on birds, and one on butterflies. I particularly enjoyed watching Ethan, who is our youngest member, show seniors different stages of a Monarch butterfly life cycle. The specimens were live, and the participants lively with interest. St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church's Vacation Bible School also enjoyed a presentation on local birds.



Photo courtesy of Paul Philp

The Lake Erie Coast project over the last 3 years has been terrific. Building a new database of species to compare with previous records has been a wonderful goal. As well, the interest shown by all the participants and local residents frequently encountered has given a

**BOS Christmas Bird Count**

Check the BOS website for date, time & location. [www.buffaloomithologicalsociety.org](http://www.buffaloomithologicalsociety.org)  
Contact: Marcie Jacklin, 905-871-2577

**Bird Brains**

Dr. Katherine Stoltz gives an overview of avian intelligence.  
Mon. Jan. 21, 7:00 pm

**Winter Tree Identification**

Learn how to identify local trees. Collect twigs to investigate in clubhouse afterwards. Bring a lunch, binoculars, & hand lens if available. Meet in parking lot at Stevensville Conservation Club  
Sun. Jan. 27, 10:00 am  
Contact: Paul Philp, 905-94-2723

**BOS Waterfowl Count**

Check the BOS website for date, time & location. [www.buffaloomithologicalsociety.org](http://www.buffaloomithologicalsociety.org)  
Contact: Marcie Jacklin, 905-871-2577

**Aerial Insectivore Research**

BSC Biologist Myles Falconer speaks about Bank Swallows and other aerial foragers.  
Mon. Feb. 18, 7:00 pm

whole new purpose to this study, leading to other initiatives such as the planting of Beach Grass. At the request of some Point Abino residents to learn more about their back yard, we had interested and knowledgeable people there to lead a hike through the area. The club's presence at Ridgefest was almost an Eco-Fest in itself with its varied activities, displays, and member interaction. Our continued involvement with the Niagara Envirothon helped to make this high school environmental challenge a success. And our involvement with the Beaver Creek restoration project has helped to bring a whole new meaning to municipal drains. Drains, if done properly, can be positive environmental features. Our partnership with the Town to create new signage will help illustrate this fact.

Most of these ventures will continue during the next year. Our arms are open to interested members willing to help with our many activities. Some examples are: writing articles for the newsletter or website; assisting with presentations to schools or special interest groups; answering questions related to the environment; or assisting with the planning of programming. If you are interested in any aspect of the above, please speak to any member of the executive.

In conclusion, I am proud of our club and our many accomplishments. For a volunteer based organization, we have accomplished many wonderful things over the years.

Paul Philp

**Remembering Roger**



Roger Tory Peterson

We have been to the Peterson Audubon Institute in Jamestown, New York. I recall the building as impressive, as were the 27 acres of woods and wetlands. The easily walked trails have stands of hemlock, yellow birch, black cherry, and extensive plant

**Bringing Back the Dinosaurs – Alive!**

Brian Pihak presents some remarkable possibilities with cutting edge paleontology.  
Mon. Mar. 18, 7:00 pm

**NFNC**

Monthly indoor programs held at Niagara Falls Public Library, Victoria Av., 3<sup>rd</sup> Wed., 7:00 p.m. Speakers on a variety of topics. Complete schedule online:  
**niagaranatureclub.tripod.com**

**Ducks Along Lake Ontario**

Sun., Nov. 25, 9:00 am  
Bring a lunch & meet at the Tim Horton's at Prudhomme's Landing  
Contact: Gisele Mills,  
905-892-3973

**Gulls Galore**

Sun, Dec. 9, 9:00 am  
Bring a lunch & meet at the control structure above the falls.  
Contact: Kayo Roy  
905-892-4433

**Christmas Bird Count**

Thurs. Dec. 27, 2012  
Plan to participate in this important census.  
Contact: Kayo Roy  
905-892-4433

communities, including poison ivy. Poison ivy? I complained at the centre. The official reply: "Dr. Peterson wanted everything natural. Nothing has been changed or added." So much for my itching! Inside the nature store were various displays of artwork, sculptures, and original paintings, including Peterson's bird prints. It was here that, years ago, I saw the first squirrel-proof bird feeder! Worth the trip, but check first. There are countless school classes walking the trails, mainly in Spring and Fall.

Déjà vu: I was in Grade Seven at Garrison Road School. The year was 1942 - in the midst of WW2. The bustling Fleet Aircraft Company was a short distance to our north. C.J. Pearson was the innovative principal at the time. At the back of our Grade 5-8 classroom was a door to an outdoor elevated area that was ideal for plane watching. A pair of binoculars hung by the door. An attack by Nazi warplanes, and we would be the ones to spot them! If you finished your work first, and it was consistently correct, you went to the overlook with the binoculars. But wait! What did a Messerschmitt fighter plane or a Junkers bomber look like? The war plane spotter book showed silhouettes and wing angles. I did my best to be a plane spotter and studied the handbooks. Needless to say, we never spotted any Nazi war planes!

Writer's Note: During WW2 Roger Tory Peterson was drafted by the Army Corps of Engineers. Using his bird identification system, Peterson created "The Plane Spotters Handbooks." They helped to identify enemy aircraft. Thanks, Roger! You made my young life more exciting.

Admission to the Peterson Institute in Jamestown is free. Open Tuesdays to Saturdays 10 to 4 p.m. Sunday 1-5 p.m. Closed Mondays. Worth the trip.

Earl Plato

**Editor's Note:** Congratulations to Earl upon receiving the Niagara Region's Lifetime Achievement Award for his contributions to the environment. The announcement included the following quote: "Niagara Region is proud to recognize the tireless and passionate efforts Earl Plato has made in educating the world on Niagara's beautiful landscape through this lifetime achievement award."

**A Swift Return**

The Chimney Swifts (*Chaetura pelagica*) have packed up and left for their non-breeding range in the sunny south (refer to the map insert). Lynda Goodridge, Janet Kellam, Denise Ball, and I

**Waterfowl Along the  
Niagara River**

Sun., Jan. 20, 9:00 am  
Bring a lunch & meet in  
the parking lot at Dufferin  
Islands.

Contact: Gisele Mills  
905-892-3973

**Dufferin Islands**

Sun., Feb. 17, 2:00 pm  
Meet in the parking lot at  
Dufferin Island. **Family  
friendly.**

Contact: Carol Horvat,  
905-687-8562

**Tundra Swans at  
Long Point**

Sun., Mar. 10, 8:30 am  
Bring a lunch & dress  
warmly. Meet at Fonthill  
Shopper's Drug Mart.

Contact: Don Mills  
905-892-3973

**PFN**

Monthly indoor programs  
held 4th Monday, 7:30  
p.m., at Mountainview  
United Church, 150  
Glendale Ave., St.  
Catharines. For details on  
speakers and outings, visit  
[www.peninsulafielddnats.c  
om](http://www.peninsulafielddnats.com)

**Christmas Bird Count**

Sun. Dec. 16, 2012  
Annual census for the St.  
Catharine's area, followed  
by pot luck supper.  
For details, contact Marcie  
Jacklin, 905-871-2577

continued monitoring these interesting urban birds from May 14<sup>th</sup> to August 18th and found the same areas popular for Swift activity. It was exciting to hear the flocks of cigar shaped Swifts as they chattered in the sky above downtown Fort Erie, flying with rapid bat-like movements. The best place to observe them during the summer is the area around 30 Courtwright St. Unfortunately, there were fewer of these fascinating aerial foragers to watch this year. On a positive note, during the Ridgeway Festival, a new site was discovered at the United Church in downtown Ridgeway. Rob Eberly and Rick Stockton volunteered to monitor this chimney and watch for other activity in the area.



Source: <http://birding.about.com/od/Bird-Maps/ss/Chimney-Swift-Range-Map.htm>

Swifts breed in the southeastern part of Canada and the eastern part of the United States. Their preference seems to be large old brick chimneys and abandoned smokestacks. Pairs of breeding birds do an aerial courtship before they build their nests on the vertical wall of the chimney. Chimney swifts have tiny feet and cannot perch as other birds do, so they cling to the wall and balance on their stiff tails. Only one breeding pair will occupy the nesting site, but other adult birds (nest helpers) may assist with the incubation of the eggs and the feeding of the hatchlings.

Swifts roost communally during the spring and fall migration, with non-breeders continuing to do so during breeding season. What a sight to see over a hundred birds dive at high speed, one at a time, into a chimney! A confirmed fall roosting site in Fort Erie is in the chimney at the former United Church at the corner of Dufferin St. and Central Ave. Sadly, the count for this year was down by >30% in late August and September, compared to the same period in 2011. Let's hope that this species at risk will recover from its decline in numbers.

For a detailed discussion and pictures of chimneys and Chimney Swifts, link to:

**Duck Count**

Sun. Jan. 13, 2013  
For details, contact John Black, 905-684-0143

**12<sup>th</sup> Annual Maple Syrup Fest**

Saturday, March 9, 2013, 10:00 a.m.

Meet at the Roland Road entrance to Short Hills Provincial Park for a winter walk followed by a pancake lunch at White Meadows Farm.  
Contact: John Potter 905-892-2566.

**Annual Peninsula Hawk Watch**

Friday, March 29, 2013, All day.

A fine opportunity to see many species of raptors and meet birders from all over at Beamer Conservation Area on Ridge Road south of Grimsby. Especially good for beginners!  
Contact: Carol Horvat 905-687-8562.

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**Welcome to our New Members**

Cam Williams & Susan Merrit

John Stevens

<http://www.mcilwraith.ca/PDF/SwiftFactsheetApr2012.pdf>:  
“Chimneys and Chimney Swifts in London, Ontario”

If you would like to volunteer to be a Chimney Swift monitor in 2013, please contact me.

Dawn Pierrynowski

**Another Bend in the Creek**

Those attending the Bert Miller Nature Club’s March 2012 meeting with Nick Mandrak may recall that there was some discussion of future research and educational opportunities for the Grass Pickerel project on Beaver Creek. We are now pleased to report that the BMNC has agreed to partner again with the Town of Fort Erie regarding the Grass Pickerel project in two new ways.



Photo courtesy of Ron Goodridge

Relying primarily on the extraordinary botanical skills of Albert Garofalo, we have agreed to conduct bio-inventories at three locations along Beaver Creek. A location within the area of the drainage work was selected to identify the plant species and the rates at which they re-colonize the bare soil. A second area being bio-inventoried is below the drainage work. It will be interesting to compare the species list of this site to lists of species at the first location as the years progress. We hope to identify whether there is any change in species composition at this second site as a result of the drainage work, as well as any change in the rate of flow. The third location selected is above the drainage work. Here we hope to establish whether there is a change in species composition due to the lower water levels resulting from the drainage work. Faunal species are being noted wherever they are observed along the creek. This bio-inventory work began in the Spring of 2012 and is expected to continue for many years.



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**The Rambler**

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Peter BonEnfant

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forwarded by email to  
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Visit the BMNC  
website at  
[www.bertmillernatureclub.org](http://www.bertmillernatureclub.org)

Recently the Bert Miller Nature Club also agreed to partner with the Town of Fort Erie to develop educational signage regarding the work being carried out on Beaver Creek. These signs would be located at accessible sites along the creek where students and visitors can observe the work that has taken place. Educational print material would also be made available. We hope to have more information on this aspect of the Grass Pickerel Project in the near future.

It seems clear, already, that the grass pickerel, turtles, and frogs along Beaver Creek have benefited from the project. Although the summer of 2012 was extremely hot and dry, the deep pools created along the channel continued to hold water and provide habitat for these creatures.

The Grass Pickerel Project has clearly become an important drainage project and is now setting a high standard for other municipalities seeking to re-naturalize creeks and drainage works. Our club gave an award to Brett Ruck, Drainage Superintendent at the Town of Fort Erie, who is leading this project, but we should also note the complete list of partners involved, along with the organizations providing the funding:

Other Partners: Ministry of Natural Resources, Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food & Rural Affairs, Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority, University of Guelph, Niagara College, Land Care Niagara, Urban & Environmental Management Inc., LCA Environmental, K Smart & Associates, Suda & Malesyk Surveying Inc., cooperative Fort Erie landowners.

Funders: Water Smart Niagara, Eco Action and Ontario Trillium Fund (via Friends of Fort Erie's Creeks), Ministry of Natural Resources Species at Risk Fund, OMAFRA's Environmental Sustainability Directed Research Program, and the Great Lakes Sustainability Fund

For more information on the Grass Pickerel Project, visit <http://www.forterie.ca/WebSite/tofeweb.nsf/581bf97a8d391eae852572ab0052c840/f48ec46aaeb51f09852579dc005271a3?OpenDocument>

Tim Seburn

## Coasting Along

The Bert Miller Nature Club's Lake Erie Coast Project started in 2010. The goal of this project is to inventory parts of the Lake Erie coast that lie in the Haldimand Clay Plain

Physiographic Region in order to identify the occurrence and distribution of species at risk and their habitats. To date, hundreds of species have been identified in the study area along the Lake Erie coast.

During the first field season (2010), the section of the coast between the Niagara River and the Town of Fort Erie / City of Port Colborne border were inventoried. The second field season (2011) continued inventories west along the shoreline from the Niagara River to the Grand River. The third and current field season has focused inventories west of the Grand River towards the end of the study area near the Town of Port Dover.

The Niagara Frontier Botanical Society recently completed a "Botany on the Beaches" survey of the Lake Erie shoreline in Western New York and contacted the Bert Miller Nature Club of Fort Erie in order to partner and assist in continuing this survey along parts of the Canadian shoreline in the Regional Municipality of Niagara and Haldimand County. This project linkage is an excellent model of international cooperation to support the stewardship of a shared ecosystem.



Sea Rocket - Photo Courtesy of Rick Young

A number of species observed during this inventory have coastal affinities and are disjunct in their distributions from their major coastal range along the Atlantic Ocean.

This means that in addition to their occurrence on the Great Lakes shoreline they are more typically found on one or more ocean coasts. In the Great Lakes basin, these species are extremely restricted to the shoreline or coastal areas and are absent immediately inland. These include Beachgrass (*Ammophila breviligulata*), Beach Pea (*Lathyrus japonicus*), Sea Rocket (*Cakile edentula*), and Seaside Spurge (*Euphorbia polygonifolia*).

The Lake Erie coast is a hotspot for biodiversity and supports a number of species at risk. To date, this project has observed 21 species in the study area that are considered to be at risk. The Committee on the Status of Species at Risk in Ontario (COSSARO) ranks 6 of these species as endangered, 7 as threatened, and 8 are considered of special concern.

These significant species could not have been documented without the help of the many volunteers who have devoted their time, interest, and keen observations in the field. Special thanks go out to all those who have contributed. This project aims to inspire and enable people to become involved in species at risk stewardship through outreach and volunteer opportunities. If you would like to contribute or participate in these surveys, please contact the Bert Miller Nature Club.

The project partners in this study include the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, the Natural Heritage Information Centre, the Royal Botanical Gardens, the Eckert Herbarium at Buffalo State College, the Clinton Herbarium of the Buffalo Museum of Science, the Niagara Community Foundation, the Peninsula Field Naturalists, the Niagara Falls Nature Club, and the Niagara Frontier Botanical Society of Buffalo, New York.

Albert Garofalo

## In Memoriam

Over the past 6 months, our club has had the sad task of saying good-bye to three of our members.

Dora Young, an active member of all three nature clubs in Niagara, passed away on May 23<sup>rd</sup> – a great loss for the naturalist community. She served on the Board of the Niagara Falls Nature Club for many years and participated in various botanical inventories. She was a regular on the NFNC Wednesday evening walks and other activities and supported the BMNC both as a member and active participant. We will all miss Dora's great sense of humour and endearing Scottish brogue, as well as her knowledge of the natural environment.

On June 8<sup>th</sup>, Ray Wilson passed away, leaving 6 children, 18 grandchildren and 21 great grandchildren. A farmer for most of his life, Ray was interested in many things and loved to attend our meetings to learn more about the natural world. We will miss his questions and insightful observations which often had an agricultural or historical perspective.

Long-time member Helen Sherk passed away on August 24<sup>th</sup>, surrounded by her loving family. Helen was one of the inaugural members of the BMNC and served on the Board for many years. Her quiet, upbeat manner endeared her to all who knew her. She shared a life-long passion for nature with her family and friends and was always willing to lend a helping hand at our club's activities. Helen's legacy continues, as her daughter, Deb, is now a member of the BMNC Board. Helen was a committed volunteer and was involved in a number of other community organizations.

We extend our sincere condolences to the families of these three members.

## Sightings

We're starting a new feature in our newsletter: highlighting special sightings that members submit. These can be either flora or fauna. For this inaugural listing, we are featuring two very important nest sightings. One is a Bald Eagle nest located on the old Inco property in Port Colborne off Reuter Rd. One eaglet was hatched and survived the destruction of its nest during high winds. This is the first sighting of an Eagle's nest in Port Colborne.



Young Bald Eagle – Photo courtesy of Ron Goodridge

The second sighting is an Osprey nest located on a cellphone tower on Bertie St. between Pettit and Sunset in Fort Erie. Two young Ospreys were hatched and fledged, making this the first ever successful Osprey nesting in Niagara.



Young Osprey – Photo courtesy of Ron Goodridge