

The Rambler

A newsletter of the Bert Miller Nature Club of Fort Erie

May, 2018

Earl Norman Plato U.E. (23 Oct 1931 – 14 Dec 2017)

by Tim Seburn

The club lost its founder, and dear friend, Earl, this past December. While it's hard not to be sad, he left us with many wonderful memories, and a rich tradition of sharing our enjoyment of nature. So, let me share a couple of my memories of Earl, and maybe you will recall one of yours.



My favourite times were the early days of the club. We would park at the Marcy's farmhouse, sign the guest book on the back porch, and carefully check Rick's Nature Sightings book before heading out. *"Friend Dave Marr was just in photographing hepatica. Look here. Lorne says he got to see a spring peeper actually calling. Hey man, do you know Ray Van Osh? He just saw a hog nose snake."* "Hey Earl, look at this, someone from Australia was just here."

Eagerly walking down the farm laneway, passing the old barn, we stopped only for the rarest of butterflies, until we reached the meadow. No blandings in the pond back then, only snappers.

and painted turtles. We would listen for grouse drumming and the upland's wolf whistle as we walked. And then, as we reached the Kennels, the first-heard winter wren would always stop us in our tracks.



*"Check the twin leaf. Any winterberries? Hey, the witch's broom!" "Yup, still there Earl." "Hey, a red head! Last year's yellow trillium is in the same spot! Remember the picture Peter took of the blue hepatica with the gold center? I wonder if it is still there. Scarlet cup! Wow, what a creation!" "And you're pretty good company too Earl." "Quiet, there might be a wood duck on the pond. Hear any wood frogs? Was that a leopard creaking? Boy, are those peepers deafening! How about taking the ridge trail and eating lunch on the bench in the basswoods?" "Good idea Earl. Rob told me he saw a pileated back there." "Ah sure guy. Likely story"...*so many good memories.

The club's Marcy's Woods outing this spring was my first visit to the woods since Earl's passing,



Marcy/DiCienzo Woods Hike (2017)

Posted by Lynda Goodridge

Thirty-six nature enthusiasts braved the cold weather to join us on our annual walk through Marcy's Woods. A few wildflowers were in bloom but many are waiting for warmer temps. We still enjoyed the day and even had some sunshine to brighten things up. Many thanks to the DiCienzo Family for allowing us to enjoy the wonders of this beautiful place.

Nesting Box

The new nest box at Marcy's was constructed and put in place by Dan Andrews and his son Dustin.

The photo was taken by Rick Doan.



In the photo on the left, Earl is wearing the famous sweatshirt. This is the executive in 1998 I think???

and wouldn't you know it, we found a pileated nesting cavity, Earl's nemesis bird. For years we teased him about how unlucky he was. The final incident happened during a club outing to Letchworth State Park. We had all seen several pileateds that morning, but not Earl. He never believed us, but, during lunch, he excused himself to use the facilities, and while he was gone, a pileated did indeed land right where he had been sitting. Helen, Joan, Pat, Ed - everybody. We all saw it! To commemorate the event, Paul arranged for the club to give him a sweatshirt. On the front it said, "Where's the pileated?" Meanwhile, clinging to the back of the shirt, was a large pileated woodpecker - with a broad smile. Finding a pileated nest in Marcy's this spring made us all smile, and think of Earl.

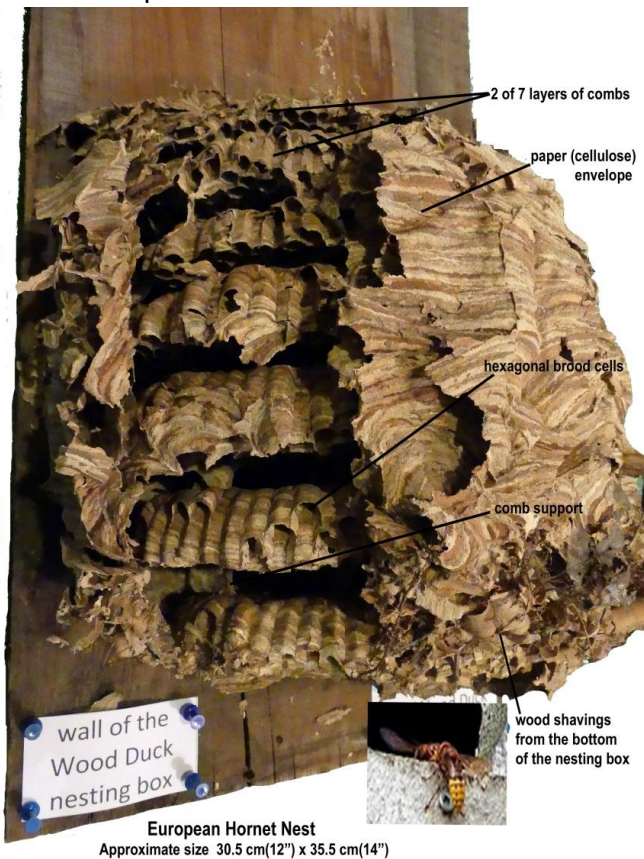
In recognition of Earl's legacy of teaching and sharing his love of nature, the club will be sending two Greater Fort Erie Secondary School students to the Ontario Nature Leadership course. There are some mighty big shoes that need to be filled. RIP Earl.



BUZZZZZZZZ

submission and photos by Dawn Pierrynowski

Looking up at the Wood Duck nesting box while gardening this summer I saw some unusual activity. It wasn't Wood Duck activity. Large yellow hornets were flying in and out of the hole. I found out that these were European Hornets (*Vespa crabro*) and are the largest and only true hornet in North America. They belong to the family of wasps called vespids which includes the Bald-faced Hornet. I let nature take its course knowing that the nesting box would get cleaned out in the fall in preparation for the Eastern Screech Owl that likes to take up residence there.

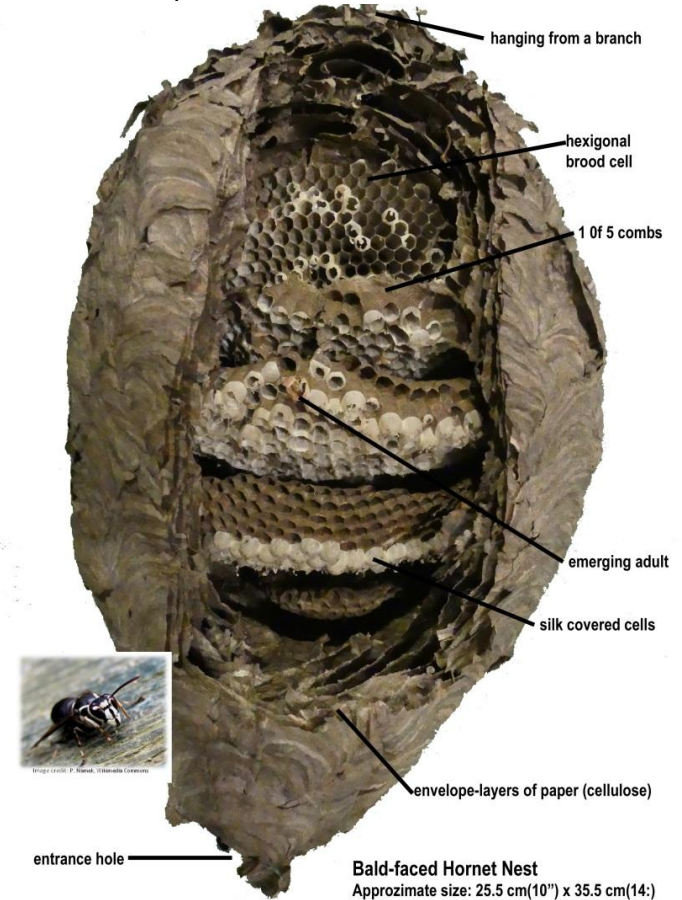


After a few hard frosts the only survivors would be some fertile queens that would be off hibernating in protected places like under loose bark, in tree cavities, wood piles and in the walls of buildings. These females would start new nests in the spring.

With some trepidation the decision was made to take down the nesting box to see what was inside.

The hornets had been busy chewing wood fiber to make cellulose (paper) to construct the

nest. There are some great videos on the internet to see how this is done. One wall of the nesting box was covered. Thankfully, nothing was alive. There were some dead larva and hornets lying on the floor of the box and some cells still had silk coverings intact. These pupae didn't have a chance to complete their life cycles. The Wood Duck Box was taken apart to save the nest which was made



available for display.

Last year I found a football shaped Bald-faced hornet nest hanging from a tree. I cut a window out and discovered that both hornet species construct nests much the same way.

WINTER TREE ID

Photos and submission by Paul Philp

A number of us had a most enjoyable day on our annual winter tree identification hike, which really was more of a ramble. And this year it didn't rain. We shared our knowledge to help us identify some of the various woody plants both above and below the escarpment. Identification clues varied from tree to tree. Bark, location, shape, leaves still

present or on the ground, and of course sometimes the buds were features that helped.

The hike began at the base of the escarpment along the Red Hill Creek. The trail is an easy walk, well at least until you get to the escarpment. There was the usual variety of lowland trees, poplars being the most prevalent. The creek flows all year and after a rain carries a significant amount of water.



After lunch we made a brief stop at Albion Falls where Red Hill Creek flows over the lip of the escarpment. It is a beautiful falls. Then off we went to Fletcher Creek which is a tributary of Red Hill Creek. The trail at Fletcher creek provided a nice variety of upland species of trees, and a good view of Stoney Creek.

I find it amazing how many natural (tongue in cheek) places there are that many of us haven't visited and I will continue to search out new hidden treasures.

See you next February for a sequel????



A Walk On The Wild Side

Posted by Lynda Goodridge

It was a great day along the Niagara river Jan. 14 for our Walk on the Wild Side. We had a good turnout and saw at least 12 species of duck and 2 species of swans.



Club Update

Submitted by Lynda Goodridge

The Bert Miller Nature Club Board was busy again this year trying to reach out to other members of our community, especially young people.

In September, we sponsored a presentation on biodiversity and species at risk for Grade 6 classes at Stevensville Public School. This May, we will sponsor three additional presentations for Grades 4 – 6 at St. Philomena School.

Waterfowl Watching for Kids was held in January in partnership with the Fort Erie Public Library and included an introductory workshop, followed by an outing to the Niagara River to view the birds.

Our Nature in Niagara Series this year, another partnership with the Library, featured Peter Thoem, from the Owl Foundation, presenting “Owls Around Us” to an appreciative audience.

We also are planning to sponsor two high school students for the Ontario Nature Youth Summit held every year in September. In addition to encouraging young people to become advocates for nature, this is a wonderful opportunity for them to network with other like-minded students and to develop their leadership skills.

These initiatives have been made possible through funds generated by our Bingo volunteers who represent us each month at Delta Bingo.

Unfortunately, we have been unable to recruit new board members to help us continue this outreach. We will be scaling down our activities and concentrating on our monthly speaker series and club outings. If our club is to thrive, we need more members to become involved. Currently, we are conducting business as a committee of the Board, with no president or vice-president. If you are interested and able to join our team, please speak to one of us and we will give you a warm welcome.

Finally, I would like to thank Paul Philp for editing our newsletters these past few years and for his continued involvement in our club as an outing leader. This will be his final issue of The Rambler and he has done a fantastic job. Future issues will only be forthcoming if another volunteer

takes on this responsibility. If you have some technical skills and are able to help us out, please step forward. The newsletter is a great way to share information and to promote our club.

A Wonderful Owl Experience

Written by Linda McKellar

Though I'm not bird specialist, about 10 years ago I was coming home down Dominion at midnight and saw something flopping on the road. Made a U-turn and it was an owl (Saw-whet). I picked it up because it seemed disoriented and couldn't fly and took it home assuming it had a head injury from hitting a car. It stayed with me in a cage about 2 months even though I would take it out regularly in the evening but it never flew away. One night the talons dug into my glove and off it flew. Two years later I was working on my deck at night about 10 pm and suddenly guess who lands on my shoulder? It flew a few feet to a tree and I took a photo. It went to a couple more trees, always at my eye level so I followed to get some photos with my cheapie camera. Finally it led me to a tree in my front yard and I was able to get a photo. I went right up to them and they never moved. After a couple of minutes they flew away. Had to be my rescue owl.

Peachtree Christmas Bird Count

Submission by Dawn Pierrynowski



I had a successful Peachtree Christmas bird count today and thanks to a wonderful driver and her co-pilot I got to see some Snowy Owls for the

first time. Better yet, I got some pictures. One was far away on a pole and the other right beside the road on the snow fence. What a great day.

Bert Miller Award 2018

Written by Tim Seburn

At the March meeting of the Club, the Bert Miller award was given to Ian Twyford. Ian was born in London England and was raised on a farm in Devon, S.W. England. He received an Honors degree in Chemistry from the University of London and went on to post-graduate training in soil science at the Aberdeen University and the New Zealand Soil Bureau. Ian's first posting was to Fiji for 7 years, to conduct a soil survey. He then moved to the College of Tropical Agriculture in Trinidad, where he mainly worked on the adaptation of soils for bananas. He developed and ran a banana research institute which included a research station and laboratory on St. Lucia.



For this work, Ian was awarded the Order of the British Empire (OBE) by the Queen. Subsequently, Ian went on the work in Ghana, Iran, Malawi, and ultimately did a nine-year tour in Pakistan.

Ian moved to Canada in 1980 and bought a small farm in Stevensville. He has been involved with The Friends of Fort Erie's Creeks for many years including two terms as its president. He has designed a water quality survey for all of the creeks in Fort Erie. Additionally, FOFEC has trained Niagara College students and High School students in soil quality, water quality and drainage.

Ian also sat on the Town of Fort Erie's Environmental Advisory Committee when this committee was created. His education and experience with soil types and drainage made him a key member of this committee. Upon receiving his award, Ian gave a brief talk in which he stressed the importance of the natural collaboration between the Friends of Fort Erie's Creeks and the Bert Miller Nature Club. We wish to thank Ian again for his service to our community. Rick Stockton

A Warm Welcome To Our New or Rejoining Members

Debbie Wright

Alison Kells

Sharon & Steve Malone

Rick Doan

Cathy Herbert

Wyndmill and Denise Hoskin

William Raplay

Dan Andrews

Jim Merrick

Christine Knighton

Karen McDonald

Doug Gillard

Sara Handrigan

Cathy Messier

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

A Few Memories of Past Events

Submitted by Dawn Pierrynowski



Walks at Shagbark Nature Park



Chimney Swift Tower at
Shagbark Nature Park



Junior Naturalists planting
the meadow at Shagbark
Nature Park



Winter Tree ID with Paul



Fond Memories of the
Ridgeway Summer Festival
over the years.





Albert Garafalo along the
Lake Erie Shore.



Butterfly Festival Festivities

Certificate of Appreciation

Posted by Lynda Goodridge

The Bert Miller Nature Club was pleased to present Shisler Bros. of Sherkston with a certificate of appreciate for their efforts to provide habitat for bank swallows, kingfishers and bluebirds. Here is a picture of the habitat.



Editorial and Other Things

by Paul Philp

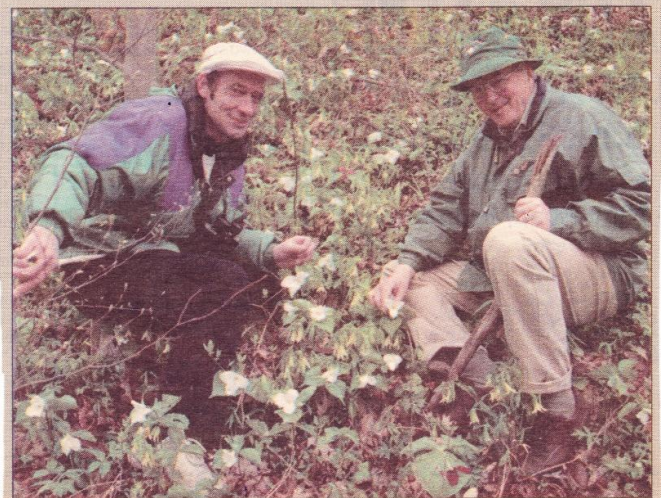
Karin and I have really enjoyed our membership with the Bert Miller Club. There were many, many, wonderful nature experiences that are still so vivid to us. The friends we have made over the years are treasured. And, our increased appreciation of the natural world is evident not only in our minds but our actions.

Since that very first meeting at the Ridgeway Public Library until our move to the shores of another lake, we not only enjoyed being a member, but our involvement in so many different projects and board positions.

This being my last newsletter for the club, I would like to share some glimpses into the past by including some random photos, headlines from a few newsletters (2000-2004), an agenda from 1996, and the first page of Earl's very first Rambler.

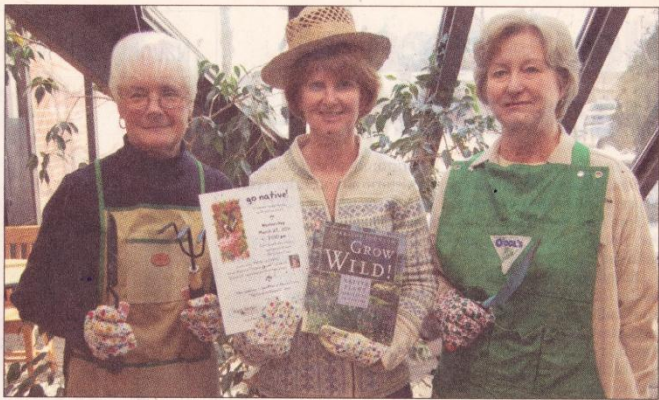
I leave you with the words of Baba Dioum when in 1968 he addressed the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources. "In the end we will conserve only what we love, we will love only what we understand, and we will understand only what we are taught.

Nature's rewards



Members of the Bert Miller Nature Club of Ridgeway get in touch with nature through the large white trillium, Ontario's provincial flower. The club recently received an award from the Niagara region's Ecological and Environmental Advisory Committee. Shown are Paul Philp, left, and club president, Earl Plato.

BRIAN PRICE/For the Review



KRIS DUBÉ Fort Erie Times

Bert Miller Nature Club program organizer Lynda Goodridge, left, Fort Erie Public Library board chair Ann McLaughlin and Bert Miller Nature Club vice-president Dawn Pierrynowski are encouraging the public to attend a seminar this Wednesday on the importance of native plants.



Bert Miller



Tim Seburn, left, and Rick Stockton, hold chunks of bark shed from a tree they found in Fort Erie, which is infested with the emerald ash borer, a destructive beetle that recently made its way to town.

Annual Calendar - Nature Club Mtgs. 1996 - 3rd Monday of the month.

January 15th - Geology - Bert Murphy

February 19th - Hawks - Drew Campbell

March 18th - Wildflowers - Link Nutting

April 15th - Owls - Christine Jamieson

May 20th - Butterflies - John MacDonald

June 17th - Backus Woods - t.b.a.

July 15th - Annual Picnic - Paonessas - 6 p.m.

August - No regular meeting - see you in Sept.

September 16th - "Sharing Night" - executive

October 21st - Doug Bassett - naturalist

November 18th - Melvin Dell - Butterfly Proj.

December - no regular meeting. See you in '97.





Joyce receiving the Bert Miller Award



Our annual Owl Prowl



A hike at Marcy Woods many years ago



Looking at various twigs and buds

Collecting and examining native seeds

The Junior Nats visit a bird banding station.



Hail to "Mr. Navy Island"

by Earl Plato

Gene Muma loved trees. The Bert Miller Nature Club members travelled with him countless times to Navy Island and places such as Backus Woods and wooded places in the Niagara Peninsula. One week, we even visited what I call the world's largest grapevine measuring 10 1/4 inches across, on Navy

"Old Tree, Very Old Trees"



Here we are on Bruce Kershner's outing in January. It is at the newest New York State Park, the former home of Seymour Knox. I did an Earl and taped the outing. Included are the unedited direct quotes.

An interesting group of people assembled. There were members of the Niagara Restoration Team, NPCA, Bert Miller Nature Club, Director for the Seymour Knox State Park, and the Western New York Old Growth Survey Team of

Buffalo(which started in 1989)

- Zoer Valley has the second tallest or oldest tree in NA, a sycamore
- People on old rich estates liked the trees, or didn't need money from logging so didn't cut them down.
- Coring a tree takes 45 minutes with 3 people.
- One in New York tree had 5 inches of rings with 93 years of growth and was 18 inches in radius which was 315 years if it grew at the same growth rate.
- Elsewhere one black walnut had a 35 inch diameter.

RIDGEFEST A SUCCESS, ONCE AGAIN!

Submitted by Lynda Goodridge

From butterflies to buttons, there was something for everyone at our Ridgifest display this year on July 6th & 7th. It was truly a group effort, with members contributing their time, expertise, display items and good will. A large banner sporting the name, "Bert Miller Nature Club", not only identified us but also made our booth look professional, thanks to Rob Eberly.



Vice-president Rob Eberly introduced scientist Bob McDonald of CBC's Quirks and Quarks. About 100 club members and friends were enthralled. If you think McDonalds is great on radio, you have to experience him in

Don't Ditch the Ditch Part 11:

As previously mentioned the Point Abino Drain is a unique ecosystem. Where else can you go and see over 20 wood duck? It disturbs me how a local

We Aren't Alone

We are members of F.O.N.(The Federation of Ontario Naturalists). It is a great organization with many services and programs available for us as a club, for individuals who wish a personal membership, and for the general public. Here is a bit of trivia.

NIC Tour

Saturday, May 19/01

The B.M.N.C. May field trip was held today at Dave and Sandy Mitchell's property on Sumner Road.

What a glorious day and what gracious hosts we had, for a truly fantastic birding and environmental outing. What a property!

Just Ducky

P. Philp

Another program sponsored by the Fort Erie Public Library was a great success as the many members of our club who were present can testify to.

The program was a two part presentation on waterfowl conducted by Marcie Jacklin from the Bert Miller Nature Club. The first part was a power point presentation which gave us identification clues that

Shagbark Trail Park in Ridgeway

Earl Plato

is a sizable piece of greenery. It needs help to develop it into a great nature setting. Guess what? The old Shagbark sign at the entrance has an added title. Routed recently into the wood sign it reads: STEWARDSHIP PROJECT OF THE BERT MILLER FORT ERIE NATURE CLUB.

Preserving Forest a Chance to Perform Unselfish Act

by Earl Plato

It was here before me - it's with me now - and I hope that it will still be here long after I pass on. On the lower trail of Marcy's Woods it stands: *Liriodendron tulipifera*, the tulip tree. My old friend is magnificent in its towering beauty.

Junior Naturalists

P. Philp

In the last couple of months, the junior naturalist program has included owl prowling on more than one occasion, tree identification, snowshoeing (thanks to the Fort Erie Conservation Women's Auxiliary), and most recently, amphibian studies to prepare for early spring calls of the wood frog, chorus frog, and spring peeper.

Harold Hampel has helped supervise and lead this

Niagara Falls Invitation

The Niagara Falls Nature Club (our cousin) has graciously invited any of our members to join in their evening walks. These walks are to a variety of natural places in the area. Their outline looks very interesting

Tim, Jeremy and I found a Snowy Owl sitting on the rocks off Waverly Beach in Fort Erie yesterday, Sunday Nov. 18th.

all the best
Marcie

We've only been a club for 6 years. It is absolutely amazing how this little club is affecting our lives. Let me indulge in a personal example. Six years ago I didn't know what a Breeding Bird Atlas was. Four years ago I bought one and began reading it. Now there are 15 of us participating in the 5 year collection of data for the next atlas. That is significant

Will Thrill

Thanks to Bob Chambers, about 25 of our club members saw and heard a number of Whip-Poor-Wills. This outing was in partnership with the Buffalo Ornithological Society. Bob not only arranged it but also did a phone out to the entire club. Thank you very much Bob.

Port Colborne's IBA Needs Help!!

An Important Bird Area (IBA) is a site providing essential habitat for one or more species of breeding or non-breeding birds. These sites may contain threatened species, endemic species, species representative of a biome, or highly exceptional concentrations of birds.

Port Colborne is an IBA site which needs help in developing a plan and carrying it out. In 1990, 48,000 pairs of Ring-billed Gulls were estimated nesting there which may represent as much as 5% of the estimated North American breeding population. In addition to Ring-billed Gulls and Common Terns, about 175 pairs of Herring Gulls nest at colonies, and in 1997 a pair of Great Black-backed Gulls nested there for the first time.

Tree Identification

Along with over 30 others Vicki Featherstone attended our winter tree identification outing at Shagbark. A great outing!

However Vicki unlike the rest of us kept an accurate record of sightings. She learned a lot and hopefully will earn another badge.

Canadian Important Bird Area

Point Abino

Habitats: mixed woods, freshwater lake and marsh, artificial island and landfill

Land-use: primary - recreation/tourism

Threats: major - substrate alteration, interspecific competition; local - housing development, drainage, deforestation, filling in wetlands, disturbance of birds, non-native flora

IBA status: nationally significant

IBA criteria fulfilled: endangered species and landbird concentrations

Protection status: none

Last updated: December, 1999

Wainfleet Bog Excursion

Saturday, August 19th dawned clear, cool and crisp, a prelude to fall and a great day for a walk into the bog. Tim Seburn did a marvelous job leading the day long hike, which was attended by individuals from several area nature clubs. In attendance were Vic and Dora Young, Marcie Jacklin, Bob Chambers, Joyce Sankey, Jim Grassie, Janet Damude and Gerry Winger.

Bert Miller Nature Club of Fort Erie

P.O. Box 983

Ridgeway, Ontario, L0S 1N0

The RAMBLER

Vol. 1: No. 1

March, 1995

Dear Club Members,
What a great feeling it is to look at the cover picture of our first newsletter and realize that spring is not far away. What do you see in the drawing that stirs your "nature juices." Is it the snake, the water lilies, the heron, the majestic trees, the rushes, the ducklings, the turtle, or the terns? What turns you on?

We will have outings on a regular basis this year. We want you outdoors enjoying yourself and learning and sharing. We intend to have times when we simply share our observations with one another.

We intend to have our May meeting at Marcy's cabin. We will announce the time and day. What a setting for a nature club meeting!

Notice our name. It has been changed by a motion of the Executive. Why? Bert Miller was a great naturalist. He was a botanist, birder, environmentalist and a great teacher. Some of us were forever affected by his caring about us as individuals and his desire to preserve our environment. Bert Miller loved God's creations and wanted us to respect His handiwork too.

Read the article about Bert attached and remember he was knowledgeable in all areas of nature. As members of this new Club let's be like Bert. Be willing to learn new aspects of our great outdoors. May you enjoy your membership as an active member.

Sincerely,
Earl Plato, President

