



Newsletter of the Bert Miller Nature Club

The Rambler

Fall 2019

Welcome New Members

- Linda & Felix Barbetti
- Deb & Steven Brown
- Beth & Rolan Meisel-Jeffery
- Michele & Marshall Mullin and family
- Marion Jonassen

Upcoming Meetings

- **** SPECIAL TIME **** Monday December 16th @ 6:00 pm HOLIDAY POTLUCK & PETER FERGUSON - It's a Small World
- Monday January 20th Regular Meeting - KAYLA MARTIN - Four-wheel Diving Hawaii and The Seven Curses: The Fate of the Waome
- Monday February 17th Regular Meeting - CARLA CARLSON - Weeds Good and Bad
- Monday March 16th Regular Meeting - INGA HINNERICHSEN - Fungi
- Monday April 20th Regular Meeting - WIN LAAR - Wildflowers of the Niagara Glen
- ****SECOND**** Monday May 11th Regular Meeting - PAUL PHILP - Nature's Jewels

Upcoming Outings

- Sunday January 12th @ 10:00am - WALK ON THE WILD SIDE
- Saturday February 22nd @ 10:30am - WINTER TREE IDENTIFICATION FOR THE FAMILY
- April TBA - NATURE IN NIAGARA in partnership with the Fort Erie Public Library
- Sunday April 26th @ 10:00 am - HIKING MARCY'S WOODS
- Saturday May 2nd @ 10:00 am - NIAGARA GLEN HIKE with the Niagara Falls Nature Club

For more information, please refer to the club brochure or our website.

From the President's Pen

Autumn. Harvest. Shorter days. Pumpkins. Apple cider. Fall. Orange and red Maple leaves. Thanksgiving. Warmer socks. Planting bulbs. One last BBQ.

This time of year has always felt like the beginning of the year for me - a time of getting back into a routine after a summer of lazier days and holidays. A time of year to take stock and decide what's going to be important to me for the coming winter months. How will I spend those shorter and darker days? The garden is not beckoning me, my bike will stay idle in the garage and being outdoors is not as pleasant. Perhaps I will finally complete my photograph albums (what are those?), which has been a project I've put off for four winters now.

Some of the highlights of the past six months have been the Nature in Niagara presentation at the Fort Erie Public Library entitled "Plants Behaving Badly" on invasive species; the inspiring presentation by Geoff Green from Students on Ice to approximately 500 students at GFESS; our annual spring hike at Marcy's Woods; our June dessert potluck and hike at the Conservation Club grounds; the club's outreach at the Ridgeway Farmer's Market in July and September; the sponsorship of two students to attend the Ontario Nature Youth Summit in Orillia; and the informative speakers, delicious goodies and lively conversation at our monthly meetings.

I would like to sincerely thank everyone who pitches in to help with the running of the Club. What I do to support the Club is relatively visible each month, but there are many people helping "behind the scenes" who may not be as obvious. If you see someone making coffee or putting out chairs or setting up the computer/screen for the speaker or taking your membership information or bringing a dessert - please take the time to offer your appreciation. If you would like to volunteer your time, please speak to a member of the executive. We would welcome your assistance.

I look forward to the activities, speakers and outings planned for the fall and winter this year. Please come and join us as often as you can. Bring a friend along - share your love of nature by introducing a friend to the Bert Miller Nature Club.

Deb Sherk



Janet Damude and Rick Young at Shagbark Nature Park on a beautiful autumn day.
© Dawn Pierrynowski

2019 Ontario Youth Summit

by Summer Thomas and Konrad Jasman

We are Konrad Jasman and Summer Thomas, two environmentally active high school students from Hamilton, Ontario. We regularly volunteer our time to attend and help organize events such as community cleanups, tree plantings, and environmental youth workshops. This September, Bert Miller Nature Club sponsored us to attend the 2019 Ontario Nature Youth Summit in Orillia, Ontario. Summer had participated in the summit before, while it was Konrad's first time.

The summit consisted of five workshops, each with a unique focus. Participants submitted their choices in advance. There were several additional activities, including early morning birding and canoeing and the terrifying option of a polar bear dip on the last day, which neither of us was brave enough to do.



Freshwater Life workshop

© David Pugh

we chose, for the better of the lake ecosystem, to end the lives of these organisms to save the lives of native species. Children in the Woods, a workshop both Summer and Konrad attended, led a dozen youth to explore their surroundings in a way one would rarely do in their day-to-day life. A five-minute search in what seemed to have been an ordinary field proved to yield surprising results! The group found an array of local species, including Leopard Frogs, Garter Snakes, and a gravid Praying Mantis. After sharing these discoveries, taking photographs, and releasing the creatures back to where they were found, participants wandered off to the forest in search of new adventures. There, they were taught to view the forest as it is seen by children: with insatiable curiosity.

Overall, between what we learned and the friendships we made, our weekend at the 2019 Ontario Nature Youth Summit was an unforgettable experience, and we would like to extend our thanks to Bert Miller Nature Club for making this possible.

The highlights for us included Freshwater Life, a workshop Summer attended that encouraged hands-on learning by letting participants loose in a lake and riparian habitat with nets and jars. Some of the fish, frogs, and invertebrates found were among some unheard of previously by the participants. Water scorpions, Toe-biters, Rock Bass, Rusty Crayfish, and Round Gobies were among some of the species that were found and identified. By the end of the workshop, participants were faced with a difficult question: Do we release the invasive species we caught back into the lake? In-depth discussions and debates were held. The answer was quick for invertebrates such as Zebra Mussels, which are difficult to sympathize with. But for things with eyes and faces, the answer was more difficult. This sparked further discussion over how values are placed on living things based on superficial traits, and how in the end, the Zebra Mussel was no less deserving of life than the Round Goby. Considering this,



New friendships made.

© David Pugh

Fall Outing to Shagbark Nature Park

by Dawn Pierrynowski



The group poses for a photo before heading off onto the trails.

© Dawn Pierrynowski

Sunny skies, warm temperatures, friendly people; what more could one ask for?

On the unseasonably warm day of October 20, 2019, we ventured out for the annual outing and clean-up of Shagbark Nature Park. We checked out the Chimney Swift



Prairie Cord Grass
© Rick Young

Tower and found that there was no nesting activity again this year. Rick Young found a Prairie Cord Grass plant in the meadow. As we walked the leaf-strewn trails, Peter BonEnfant reported some bird songs and sightings of Downy, Hairy and Red-bellied Woodpeckers, Eastern Towhee, House Sparrow, Black-capped Chickadee, Northern Cardinal, White-throated Sparrow, American Crow, Blue Jay, Eastern Phoebe and Brown Creeper. As we were leaving the forest, some of the group got a close-up look at a Dekay's Brownsnake.



Dekay's Brownsnake
© Lorraine Brown-Joyce

Notable Birds in Niagara March 2018 to August 2019 by Marcie Jacklin

I'll start this report off on a high note for me personally. I led an outing for the Niagara Falls Nature Club on February 25th, 2018, and we struggled to find birds. It was a very windy day, and I decided our last stop would be some ponds on Sodom Road close to the intersection with Netherby Road. Suddenly our fortune changed when I spotted a Eurasian Wigeon in the pond. A great bird for this date and a life bird for many of the participants. The bird stayed for three more days, and many people from Niagara, Hamilton and Toronto were able to view this bird.

Several species that used to be annual in this area have yet to be reported in 2019 - Long-eared Owl and Yellow-breasted Chat. This is probably due to habitat loss and human disturbance. Josh Vandermeulen had an exceptionally good find of a Bell's Vireo on May 10, 2018 on Port Weller East Pier. According to the eBird database, this is the second record for this species, with the first record having been recorded in 1994. Some great birds recorded in 2018 also haven't made an appearance yet this year - Snowy Egret, Cattle Egret, Willet, Wilson's Phalarope, Connecticut Warbler, and Dickcissel. Perhaps next year?

On November 16th, Ryan Griffiths located a second winter Black-legged Kittiwake at Point Abino. Several people were able to observe this bird as it stayed around until the next day.



Harlequin Duck

© Ron Goodridge



Northern Saw-whet Owl

© Ron Goodridge

Northern Saw-whet Owls were tough to find last fall, and only several birds were reported. Harlequin Ducks were reported from several locations last winter. Always a lovely bird to see! A Ross's Goose was found by Blayne and Jean Farnan on February 24th, 2019. Although an annual bird, they require careful observation to separate them from Snow Geese. Several Snowy Owls were reported last winter. Always a great bird to see but, hopefully, they weren't chased or baited to get good photos. They need to rest, eat to survive and return to the Arctic. Sadly, Short-eared Owls seem to be disappearing in our area. This is undoubtedly due to habitat loss and human disturbance. Greater White-fronted Geese made a nice showing in the late winter of 2019 with flocks of 8 or 12 being reported from several locations. Until a few years ago they were relatively uncommon in our area.



Greater White-fronted Geese

© Ron Goodridge

Several flocks of Common Redpolls were reported in January and February of this year. Nice to have these northern visitors stop by. On May 5th 2019, Ryan Griffiths found a White-eyed Vireo on Homer Road in NOTL. This bird is not a frequent visitor to Niagara and congratulations to Ryan for checking



Barred Owl

© Ron Goodridge

areas that don't receive very much regular attention. Barred Owls are a sensitive species, so their breeding areas are not reported; however they do seem to be on the increase. Please do not disturb these birds during breeding season.

Certainly one of the highlights of spring migration was a Summer Tanager Bob Highcock and Jean Hampson reported from Mary Malcolmson Park in St Catharines on May 7th, 2019. Remarkably, another Summer Tanager (or the same bird?) showed up in a backyard adjacent to Forty Mile Creek where many people were able to observe it. It was reported there until May 14th. Even more remarkable was the third report on May 24th from a backyard in St. Catharines.

Another highlight was the Brown Pelican spotted by a birder while he was driving on the QEW past Jordan Harbour. The bird stayed off and on for several hours, and many people were able to view it. American White Pelicans appeared in several locations this spring, and it is hoped that they may start breeding in this area soon.

several people were able to see it and get it as a life bird.

On August 13, 2019 Lisa Bacon, a local photographer, took a photo of a bird she didn't recognize at Dufferin Islands. The bird was identified several hours later as a Marbled Godwit, the first record for Niagara. A remarkable find! This bird was very tame, and most people could get stunning photos. Congratulations Lisa.

On that high note, I will end this report and encourage everyone to get out and enjoy the birds.



Marbled Godwit

© Ron Goodridge

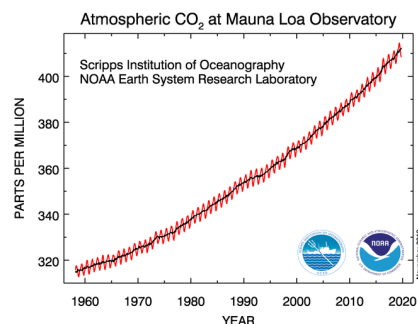
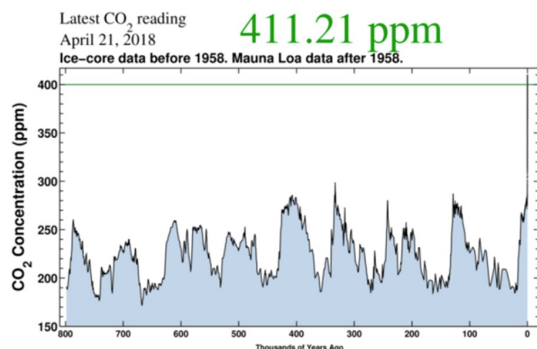
Climate Change

by Rick Stockton

One often hears someone say they “believe or disbelieve” in climate change - they are misguided. Global Warming is a result of physical and chemical processes, not beliefs, and the world is warming because of the actions of people. This will continue for millennia no matter what we do! If humanity chooses to act, we still can reduce the extreme impacts of warming and also prepare ourselves for what will inevitably come.

Joseph Fourier (1824-7) first calculated that it was the insulation by the atmosphere that caused the earth to warm. The American scientist Eunice Foote (1856) and John Tyndall (1859) made the connection between atmospheric warming and CO₂. Svante Arrhenius (1896) calculated that a doubling of atmospheric CO₂ would cause a 3 - 4 °C rise in the earth's temperature and that this was mainly caused by the burning of fossil fuels. Thus the mechanisms of what is now known as global warming have been understood for over a century! (figs)

© NOAA and Scripps Institution of Oceanography



Global warming is expressing itself in many ways all over the earth: increasing average temperatures, increasing sea temperatures, decreases in summer arctic sea ice, melting glaciers and ice sheets, increased intensity and duration of wildfire seasons, northward movement of mammals and fish, increasing extent of animal and plant diseases, rising sea levels, etc.

We now live in the Anthropocene era in which humans have disrupted many of earth's dynamical systems, and many of these changes also interact with global warming, e.g. habitat loss, diminished biodiversity, increased invasive species, increased toxic pollutants, etc. These impacts cannot continue. Our own survival, as well as other species, is at risk.

What can we do now?

1. Change our thinking and behavior - Richard Feynman said that “science is what we do to keep from fooling ourselves.” We need to educate ourselves, and those upon whom we can have an impact, to understand the science and its implications.
2. Rapidly reduce the use of fossil fuels - most scientists and economists think that this can best be done with a tax on CO₂, use electric vehicles and heating, install solar cells, reduce waste, etc.
3. Lobby for a political change that places the environment at the forefront - current politics, funded by the fossil fuel industry, has stalled the implementation of the necessary physical and social changes for 30 - 40 years. We now have about ten years to change our society radically.

How A Strange Encounter With A Turtle Changed My Life by Tim Seburn

I believe we, including all life, are connected. And the life of every naturalist consists of unique pathways for learning these connections based on the trails they take, mentors they happen to encounter, doors their curiosity causes them to knock on, the books they read, and sometimes, pure happenstance. This is the story of one of my personal pathways. I hope you find it interesting.



Bert Miller was great with kids. He had a saying, “Learn something new every day and smile at a child”. © BMNC Archives

Like Earl Plato, I feel grateful for having known Bert Miller. He happened to be my Sunday School teacher and a family friend. When I was a child he would take me on outings to find rare plants and to tag trees for the Niagara Parks Commission. Although I was young, I did absorb quite a bit about plants and mammals from him.

When I was 15 years old, I did a class project on our native butterflies, which I thought was quite thorough. It was not until I was turning 30, while on a hike with my young family, that I happened to see a butterfly that I didn't recognize. It proved to be a Great Spangled Fritillary. I wanted to understand why I didn't find a Fritillary when I was 15.

I learned Fritillary caterpillars eat violets, a forest plant. I had missed many species of butterflies by focusing on only one habitat, a meadow. At the main library in Buffalo I found a very old book written by an early Niagara lepidopterist, listing butterfly species of the Niagara Frontier. Of the species I had missed, only one amazed me - Zebra Swallowtail. How could this butterfly

How A Strange Encounter With A Turtle Changed My Life continued

occur in Niagara when its food plant was a southern tree? Could there be Pawpaw trees in Niagara?

Bert Miller had long since passed away, but I knew his daughter, Mary Sauder, lived on the Niagara River Parkway. I reached her on the phone and asked if she knew if there were any Pawpaw trees in Niagara. She said there were, and that it was a highlight of her childhood to be taken by her dad each fall to collect Pawpaw. Her father had co-authored an academic paper on Pawpaw in Niagara. She told me if I wanted to know where the Pawpaw grew, I would need to visit her.

When I arrived, she pulled out three or four boxes of Bert's books and photos and asked me to take them. I was quite overwhelmed, both by the honour and the responsibility I felt in accepting Bert's books.



Bert Miller's collection of Pawpaw fruit in 1956. © BMNC Archives

The next summer I had fun with my hiking buddies at the time, Earl Plato, Ernie Giles and Bob Goldenberg, finding several of Bert's many Pawpaw patches, and many of the other rare species he had recorded. One record for Witch Hazel interested me. Not that this is a particularly rare species, but Bert had listed it for the old Oakes Estate forest, behind Rio Vista Golf Course. I knew these woods like the back of my hand since I often took my kids there. I had never found any Witch Hazel. I made a mental note to visit the forest the following October, which is when Witch Hazel blooms. That would help me find it!

A sunny October day arrived, perfect for a fall ramble. Entering the forest, I smelled sulphur as I passed the spring - a long-forgotten tourist attraction. I balanced briskly over the humongous oak tree that had fallen perfectly across the creek, and climbed to a knoll above the big bend in the creek. Yes. There it was! A single shrub of Witch Hazel, spectacular with its yellow spider-like blossoms. Satisfied, I found a sunny spot to enjoy the moment. Sitting quietly alone in a forest is something I strongly recommend. How else can you hear the Witch Hazel nuts popping out their seeds?

Leaves rustled. Motionless, I looked for movement. It took a moment to make sense of what I was seeing. A turtle! I picked it up and took a closer look. "Why are you so far from water? You look more like a tortoise. Who are you?" I thought.

Once home, I checked my guidebook and determined it was a Carolinian Box Turtle. Curiously, its range didn't seem to reach Canada. Is it possible there is an isolated population of Box Turtles in Fort Erie? I tracked down Barbara Froom, author of Ontario Turtles. She wasn't sure. But she said, "Why are you calling me when you have one of North America's top experts living in your hometown?" She gave me the phone number for a man named Harold Axtell, a name I recognized from botanical records in one of Bert Miller's books. Within minutes I was on the phone with Harold. Harold informed me it was possible, but very unlikely, as the nearest known population was 60 miles south of Fort Erie. More importantly, turtles aside, Harold was interested in me. Later, I came to learn he was like this with everyone he met.



Tim's Box Turtle. © Tim Seburn

Being introduced to Harold was one of the most important moments in my life. This first phone call lasted for over four hours. Harold became a dear friend and an important mentor to me. In our subsequent, never brief, conversations he taught me about ecology, psychology, philosophy, music, advocacy for nature, and so much more. It is not an understatement to say he completely changed the way I thought about life.



Harold Axtell. © Kayo Roy

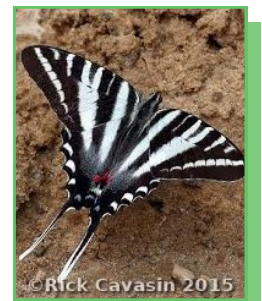
He even tried to turn me into a birder, a word he coined for the world. A rare Sabine's Gull had shown up on the Parkway near the Peace Bridge. When we arrived, there was a large group of birders already assembled. I said enthusiastically to Harold, "There's a seagull!" He gently took my elbow and whispered in my ear, "If you're going to be birding with me, those are gulls."

Harold passed away in 1992. Several years later, another dad and I followed my daughter Rachel's school bus on a class trip to the Toronto Science Centre. The other dad's last name was George. I asked him if he grew up in the George family farmhouse on Thompson Road, and whether he was familiar with the old Oakes Estate forest. He told me he had, and that he was in the forest all the time as a child. I asked him if he knew what a Box Turtle looked like, and whether he had ever found one as a child.

He replied that he did know what a Box Turtle looked like, but there were no Box Turtles in that forest. After conversation lapsed for a bit, he suddenly looked at me and said, "You know, as a child I kept a Box Turtle brought in from the United States that got away!"

So, mystery solved. Fort Erie does not have a population of Box Turtles. However, I still visit Pawpaw patches every year, hoping to see my first Zebra Swallowtail in Ontario - and to get some delicious fruit of course!

Earlier this year, Ernesto Reinhart, Mike Clarkson, John Black, Kayo Roy, Dan Salsbury and I participated in a 30-minute biopic made by Chris Darton on Harold Axtell's life. It is titled "Essence of Goodness" and screened on Cogeco this fall. If you missed it, it's now available on [YouTube](#). Anyone is welcome to visit the Axtell [archive1](#) and [archive2](#) online. These archives can be made available to researchers by contacting me at timseburn@gmail.com.



Zebra Swallowtail -summer form (longer tails). Used with permission © Rick Cavasin

Bert Miller Nature Club

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2019-2020 Executive

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 •Tim Seburn

The Rambler Newsletter

Co-Editors
•Lorraine Brown-Joyce
•Tim Seburn

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 natural environment of the Niagara Peninsula. 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, a rehabilitated natural area that 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.

Indoor meetings are held the third Monday of the month, September through June, and are open to the general public. Field outings are scheduled periodically. Please visit our website, www.bertmillernatureclub.org for more information on our club and a complete list of activities.

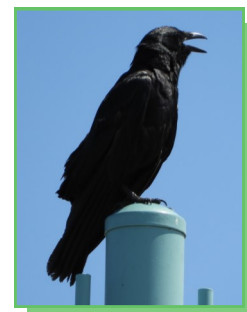
The Rambler newsletter is published biannually in the Spring and Fall. Members are encouraged to submit articles, nature events or experiences, photos and outing reviews to bertmillernews@gmail.com. Items submitted may be edited and will be used subject to space allowances. Thanks to the many members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

Student Education Fund Established

The Bert Miller Nature Club has established a fund for underwriting environmental education for students. The Student Education Fund could be used to sponsor a student to attend the Ontario Nature Youth Summit or send a student on an educational expedition to the Arctic or Antarctic with Students On Ice for example. Please consider bringing a gently used item you are willing to donate to one of the club's monthly meetings and place it on our donation table to see if the item can be sold to raise a few dollars. Monetary donations will also be gladly accepted, and upon request, a tax receipt will be issued for any donation over \$10.00

Are You Interested in Birds? The Birds Need You...

Bird counts are conducted at various times throughout the year and birders at every level are welcome. Not only is it fun, but bird counts are important for understanding bird populations. Why not get out in nature and help Citizen Science at the same time. It's also a great way to meet fellow birders and learn about some of the lesser known birding spots near you. You may even find your new favourite spot! If you are interested and would like to find out more, contact Marcie Jacklin at 905-871-2577 or mjacklin@brocku.ca.



Fish Crow
© Lorraine Brown-Joyce

SwiftWatch volunteers count Chimney Swifts in the evening at roost sights on four pre-determined Spring dates, as part of a national roost monitoring program. Volunteers also search for and report new nest and roost sites. The evening monitoring continues on any date during the summer to determine whether the chimneys are used for nesting, roosting or both and for how long each season. Our local volunteers observe chimneys in the downtown Fort Erie area and it takes approximately an hour and a half around sunset time. If you'd like more information, contact Lynda Goodridge at 905-871-5856 or lgoodridge219@gmail.com.