



From the President's Pen

Happy Spring! I sincerely hope you've all had a healthy and safe winter. With warmer weather, more sunshine, longer days and vaccines being made available - it feels as though there is light at the end of the rather long tunnel we've been in for the past few months. Here's to brighter days for all of us.

The theme of this spring's newsletter is the importance of planting native species - whether that's a personal decision when you're planning what to grow in your garden or it's a city-wide initiative when staff decide what to plant in a new park or along the road of a new subdivision. As you read through this newsletter, you will learn more about this critically important idea about planting native species.

I want to put in a personal "plug" about planting a vegetable garden this spring. If you have space and the physical ability to plant and maintain a vegetable garden, I suggest you do so this year. Whether you have a planter on your patio with cherry tomatoes or a window box with parsley and basil, or you have a raised bed with beets, carrots and onions - I guarantee that you will enjoy getting your hands dirty with soil.

The benefits? Well, there are many. You get to eat vegetables that you know are pesticide, herbicide and fertilizer free. You minimize wasteful packaging. You can reduce your carbon footprint by walking to your garden to pick a tomato rather than buying one that was shipped across the continent to your grocery store. You can improve your health by getting the regular exercise of hoeing, watering, and weeding. You can share any extra produce with friends, family or your local food bank. You can freeze, pickle, can or preserve your bounty for the winter months. You can get enormous satisfaction from seeing the results of your hard work as you sit down to a meal of fresh green beans and home-grown tomatoes. The drawbacks? Well, I can't think of any. Can you?

In closing, I was wondering if you can name some native food-producing plants that we can grow? I thought of blueberries, cranberries, blackberries and fiddleheads. Can you think of any others? When we can meet in person, I look forward to hearing about your gardening adventures.

Deb

Welcome New Members

- Deb & Steve Brown
- Susan & Paul Chapman
- Rona Devreese
- Mary Ann Edmondstone
- Anne Warner & Douglas Reilly
- Diana & Rick Werezak
- Gerda Amoraal

Upcoming Meetings

- All monthly meetings for the foreseeable future will be held virtually via Zoom.
- May 10 - Fiona Reid - Stalking the Night Garden
- June 14 - To be decided with an announcement at the May meeting and follow-up reminder in early June

Birding Your Backyard

by Lynda Goodridge

After almost a year of living with the restrictions of COVID-19, the Bert Miller Nature Club decided to try something new to help people enjoy nature safely. The Club issued a challenge to the general public to look for birds in their backyard: the Backyard Birding Challenge.

Participants were asked to

submit their reports for as many days as possible from February 9 - March 9, 2021.



Rear L-R: BMNC President Deb Sherk, Patti & John Spencer, Minor Bros. store manager Alex Winger.

Front L-R: Debbie Wright, Joshua Mollicone and Past President Lynda Goodridge.

© Ron Goodridge

The important thing was to encourage people to watch for birds and then keep a list of the species they found. If none were seen, participants could still make a report. Since not everyone has the same type

Upcoming Outings

- Watch for email updates or refer to the club's website or Facebook page for information on future outings.
- When we are able, please join us on one of our hikes to collect seeds of disappearing species and help them to survive with the help of Sassafras Farms.



Birding Your Backyard continued

habitat on their property, it was decided to choose the winner based on the number of days that were reported. This levelled the playing field but still accomplished the goal of encouraging people to look for birds right in their own backyard.

Twenty-one individuals took on the challenge, representing 17 different families from various locations throughout Niagara: Fort Erie, Port Colborne, Niagara Falls, Fonthill, St. Catharines and Beamsville. Both adults and young people were invited to participate, with prizes given to a winner in each category.

During the 29 days of the challenge, 35 different bird species were recorded, including songbirds, hawks, waterfowl and wild turkeys. The most common birds were Cardinals and House Sparrows with Chickadees, Juncos, Woodpeckers, and Finches not far behind. A Pileated Woodpecker and Common Redpoll were the most unusual finds, to the delight of one of our challengers. Another participant had a flock of Wild Turkeys visiting her yard regularly.

Three people submitted reports for all 29 days at the end of the challenge, with several others close behind. As a tie-breaker, a draw was held, and the winners were selected. The top adult prize was a \$50 gift card donated by Minor Brothers Country Living Store in Stevensville. It was presented to **Patti and John Spencer** of Ridgeway by the store manager, Alex Winger. Patti and John regularly have feeders in their yard year-round and, as participants, kept detailed records of their sightings. They also enjoyed getting their granddaughter involved in feeder watching as well.

The second-place adult prize, a large bag of premium black oil sunflower seeds, was given to **Debbie Wright** of Niagara Falls. Debbie is a member of our Club, an avid birder and shares her photos on several Facebook pages.

The third adult prize winner, **Maria Featherston**, another BMNC member, received a complimentary membership renewal for the coming year.

Our winning youngster, **Joshua Mollicone** of Fort Erie, is a Grade 5 student at Peace Bridge Elementary School. Joshua received a pair of binoculars for his efforts. Living on the Niagara River provided him with some waterfowl species to add to his sightings. His favourite bird is the American Robin, as they are "fun to observe and they are very friendly." The family has a nest above their sunroom door where the Robins come back regularly to lay their eggs. Joshua enjoys this opportunity to watch them raise their babies.

Kudos are extended to **Dan Cooper** of St. Catharines and Port Colborne residents **Roland Meisel** and **Beth Jeffreys**, who missed the draw by just one day. Your efforts are appreciated.

Many thanks to all who participated, and a special thanks to Minor Brothers for donating the gift card. This community-minded business has also supported our Club by offering members a 10% discount on birdseed. We hope that everyone enjoyed the opportunity to enjoy nature right in their backyards. Keep watching as the spring migrants are on their way!

Avian Art Contest BON21

by Kerry Kennedy & Dawn Pierrynowski



Eagle by Elizabeth.

The Birds on the Niagara binational winter bird celebration was held on February 13-14. The Bert Miller Nature Club and the Niagara Falls Nature Club organized an Avian Art Contest for all ages. The event wasn't a competition;

however, prizes from our

generous sponsors were awarded by draw. It was a delight to see the art submitted. There are two places to view the art that was submitted. Most are on the Bert Miller Facebook page under the Media tab or visit <http://www.birdsontheniagara.org/nfncbert-miller-avian-art-contest-bon21.html> to view a select few.

In addition to support from Niagara's three nature clubs, we wish to thank prize donors: Birds Canada, Book Depot, Caitlyn Black, Molson Canadian, Parks Canada Fort George National Historic Site, Niagara Parks Commission and Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority.

For more about this celebration, visit Birds Canada and read Amanda Bichel's blog. <https://www.birdscanada.org/to-all-buoys-and-gulls-thanks-for-flocking-to-birds-on-the-niagara/>

If you missed some or the entire event, you could view videos of the BON21 presentations at www.birdsontheNiagara.org



Mallard by Gerda.

Going Native

by Tim Seburn

As Citizens, we accept an accelerating loss of species, degradation in our water quality and air, almost without complaint. Each planning cycle, we again spend millions on municipal plans supposedly designed to improve the environment, perhaps by increasing tree cover, for instance. Yet, we always end up with fewer trees, and the degradation in the quality of our water and air and species loss not only continues but accelerates. While we continue to advocate for "A Better Niagara" and a more accountable government, it is time to adopt another approach.

During the battle over the future of Marcy Wood's, Rob Eberly and I went to hear David Suzuki speak in St. Catharines. Exasperated over the fight we feared we were losing, and looking for encouragement, Rob asked Professor Suzuki a question. "Even if we win this particular battle, we could lose the next one. Can any property ever be truly saved?" To answer, David told us the story of how he remembered being with his father as a child, riding a trolley in Toronto. He was at the age where he was learning to read. To impress his father, he said, "Daddy, that sign says DO NOT SPIT." David's point was that the habit of people spitting in public places had ended. A cultural change had taken place.

Examining satellite images of Southern Ontario, the Six Nations Reserve at Brantford has a noticeably healthier tree cover, and the Reserve has been able to sustain a more diverse ecosystem with comparatively less bureaucracy. How is this possible? The Six Nations have a tradition of planning over seven generations into the future. Elders are assigned responsibility for specific species that are considered essential. Their cultural approach seems to work.

Unlike traditional societies, today we live in a global capitalistic society, not so profoundly dependent on the natural resources in our immediate environment (Perhaps the pandemic is causing us to reconsider blindly relying on this global economy). Regardless, can we agree each human society has an ethical responsibility to care for the species and the environment under their immediate control? We can do much as individuals outside of government to help our society live up to this responsibility and help sustain our ecosystems and the critical services they provide. Once we accept this responsibility and it becomes integrated into our culture, our government institutions will begin to better reflect our long-term environmental interests.

So, what are the specific actions we should consider taking as individuals? Yes, we should continue to write to our political leaders to seek measures to improve the environment. And yes, we must be involved in community stakeholder forums related to planning. As well, people of faith can speak to their religious leaders about the protection of The Creation. But there is one more straightforward but highly effective thing almost all of us can do that you may not have thought of. Plant more native plants!

For more than the past century, the percentage of the landscape in Niagara covered with non-native and

invasive botanical species has increased dramatically. When I was young, native dogwood species, viburnums, and especially hawthorns, covered abandoned fields. European buckthorn was unknown to me. Now the native hawthorn has almost entirely been replaced by the highly invasive, non-native buckthorn, which seems to be everywhere. This steep decline in native vegetation spells trouble for native insects and species entirely dependent on insects, like bats, birds, and even humans. Non-native botanical species in Niagara will typically have few or no native insect predators.

The top expert in this area is Dr. Doug Tallamy from the University of Delaware. His 2007 book "Bringing Nature Home" has had a significant impact across the United States and Canada. The resources he provides can help homeowners select native species for their yard, tailored to the specific species of native bird they would like to attract.



Tim under Papaw and Cucumber Magnolia trees in downtown Toronto © Matt Seburn

Many cities are now "going native," including Toronto. The movement started with a lady, whose name I don't know, who lived north of Danforth Street near Greek town. She convinced all her neighbours to "go native." Now, the old brickyard has become the city's location for growing out their trees and shrubs from seeds, and "going native" has become city policy. Let us individually set an example for the Region of Niagara so that one day they will sense the public will and similarly adopt the planting of native species on its lands as its policy. As Professor Tallamy states, "We can do this (restore biodiversity), one person at a time."

With science at its core and our transcendent moral obligation to the rest of life at its heart, the Half-Earth Project®, led by Professor E.O. Wilson, is working to conserve half the land

and sea to safeguard the bulk of biodiversity including ourselves. In Niagara, we have set aside about 2% of the landscape. To meet this 50% target, we must individually accept this challenge and begin the journey to protect our biodiversity for future generations. Together, one native plant at a time, we can do this.

Professor Tallamy's website
<https://homegrownnationalpark.org/>

Presentation by Doug Tallamy
<https://youtu.be/H3X6wWCWm0A>

Nature Plant Finder (zip code 14222 for Buffalo)
<https://www.nwf.org/NativePlantFinder/Plants>

Value of Trees Quantified
<https://www.fastcompany.com/3033675/trees-are-heroes-they-save-hundreds-of-lives-a-year>

Fort Erie Environmental Advisory Committee Native Species Pamphlet
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1nXcvz4p6EqkqIU7u974G9b8bre8dbJG7/view?usp=sharing>

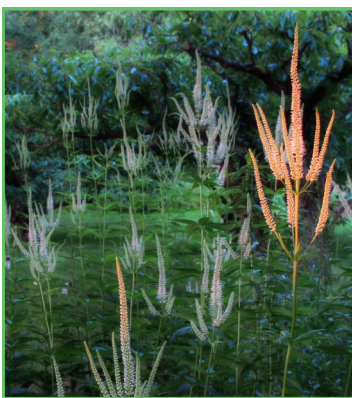
Half-Earth Project | E.O. Wilson Biodiversity Foundation
<https://www.half-earthproject.org/>

“You’re Not the Boss of Me!”

by Win Laar

During my many years of gardening with native plants, I have experienced frustrating failures, satisfying successes, surprising discoveries and quiet joy. Along the way, I have learned to listen to my plants, and what they say is, “You’re not the boss of me!”

In 1975 we purchased a two-acre cherry orchard on a rolling hill at the base of the escarpment. The requirement of a level area for the septic system tile bed entailed moving around vast amounts of earth, leaving us in a sea of mud. Faced with deep erosion after heavy rains, we planted whatever would stabilize the slopes: Crown Vetch, Periwinkle, Pachysandra, English Ivy. I can hear your groans. However, these invasive aliens did the job they were assigned. We would make different choices today.



Culver's Root (white) (*Veronicastrum virginicum*) © Win Laar



Woolly Bear on Blazing Star (*Liatris spicata*) © Win Laar

Outings to Ojibway Prairie in Windsor and Walpole Island planted the seed for a new perspective. Walpole Island First Nation still has one of the largest intact prairie remnants in Ontario. Here a tapestry of towering grasses and colourful wildflowers spreads across thousands of acres. I fell in love with the pewter blues and purples in the waving stems of Big Bluestem Grass, with the elegant spires of Blazing Star *Liatris*, with the white candles of Culvers Root, and determined to emulate such a garden in my own yard.

I wanted it all: prairie, woodland, wetland. I planted Cardinal Flower, Great Lobelia, Boneset, Turtle Head, Wild Ginger, Prairie Smoke, milkweeds, and they all died. They told me they didn't like the juglone from the Black Walnut, which we had planted as a four-inch



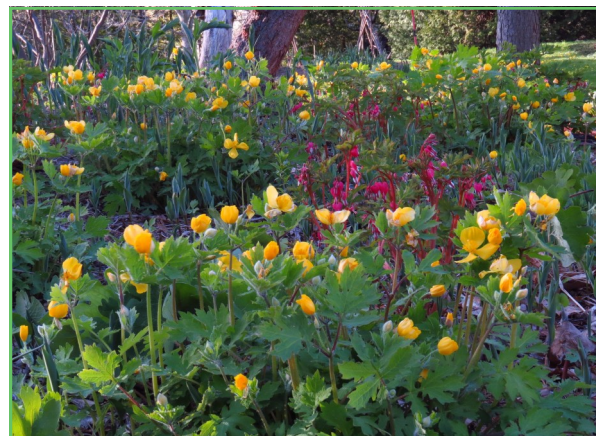
Beebalm (*Monarda didyma*), Purple Coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*), Early False Sunflower (*Heliopsis helianthoides*). © Win Laar

sprout, but which now towered above them. It took years for me to listen.

Still, under the walnut, I planted a single Ostrich Fern, and it thrived. Unnoticed and uninvited in the pot were also little shoots of Mayapple and Bloodroot. This trio set out to claim an ever-expanding territory. I fight to restrain them and allow room for the gentle Wild Geraniums and Golden Alexanders, the Woodland Sunflower, the Wild Bergamot and Mountain Mint. Cut-leaved Toothwort and Trout Lily immigrated from the escarpment.

NFNC May plant sales yielded many treasures. Rare Wood Poppy spreads its golden sunshine from mine into friends' gardens; Starry False Solomon's Seal simply spreads. Green and Grey-headed Coneflower, Cup Plant and asters provide nectar for pollinators and later plentiful seeds for Goldfinches. Butterflies, bees and hummingbirds are drawn to the voluptuous reds and pinks of Beebalm and Purple Coneflower.

Also thriving under the walnut are male and female



The yellow flowers of the Wood Poppy (*Stylophorum diphyllum*). © Win Laar

Spicebush, on which the Spicebush Swallowtail laid eggs, Redbud and Pagoda Dogwood, in company with Kentucky Coffee Tree and Hackberry.

Surprises included the unexpected appearance of Great Lobelia and healthy Wild Ginger, Prairie Smoke and milkweeds when moved far from the walnut. A tiny snippet of Pussytoes has developed into a silvery green carpet, which nourished a family of American Lady butterflies. Button Bush and Swamp Rose Mallow approve of their watercourse home. Prairie grasses now ripple and sway in the autumn winds and bounce with feeding juncos and sparrows after winter snows.



Pussytoes (*Antennaria* sp) with American Lady (*Vanessa virginiensis*) larva. © Win Laar

(Continued on back)

What is a Municipal Natural Asset Plan?

by Sandy Laken

First, let's start with an explanation of asset management. All municipalities in Ontario are required to inventory their assets, evaluate their state and prepare and implement a plan to maintain and replace those assets. This information forms an Asset Management Plan, which is then tied to the financial planning for the municipality, allowing for informed decision making and responsible budgeting. The assets typically included in an asset management plan are infrastructure such as roads, bridges, sewers, etc.

Natural assets are ecosystem features that provide or can be restored to provide the same services as traditional engineered assets. Some examples include parks, forests, wetlands, and shoreline areas that provide water purification, flood protection, climate regulation, soil quality, and stability while acting as a landscape and neighbourhood amenity. Natural assets have traditionally not been valued by municipalities for the services they provide and are not included in asset management plans. Natural assets can outmatch engineered assets in value and service and are resilient

and adaptable in the face of climate change. Natural assets can serve vital engineering functions while also being enjoyed for recreational purposes.

What if the key to preserving our local forests, streams, wetlands and shorelines is formally recognizing the inherent value they bring to us rather than viewing them as impediments to development? A Municipal Natural Assets Plan would assign a financial value to our natural assets' services and direct investment to improving their long-term health and maximizing the benefits provided.

Municipal Natural Assets Planning has been successfully undertaken in several municipalities across Canada and locally in Peel Region, Oakville, and Oshawa. Given the amount of development presently occurring in Niagara, now is the best time to implement Natural Assets Planning and evaluate our natural assets before they are lost. So what are we waiting for Niagara (Fort Erie)?

For more information about Municipal Natural Assets Initiative, visit mnai.ca.

A Call for Corridors

How do you protect biodiversity where the habitat is already significantly fragmented and interspaced with urban development? One solution to this problem is biological linkages or corridors between the remaining pieces of habitat. Creating these linkages requires both ecological knowledge and a planning process that meets the needs of the resident biota.

Questions include: what species will use the corridor (large mammals, small mammals, birds, amphibians, pollinators and other insects, plants, etc.); will humans be sharing in its use; what is the current use and topography of the land; what is the width and length of the linkage (the general rule is that as the width increases so must the length to minimize the effect of edges); what are the ecological features of the habitat fragments that are to be connected; and is there a larger core area nearby.

Fort Erie is already rich in one of the essential types of corridors - riverine corridors, running along the streams, creeks, drains and wetlands. These types of passages tend to support a high level of biodiversity. The most important quality for these linkages is that they contain native plant species and are at least 30 meters wide. Another valuable corridor connects a woodland to a wetland complex, especially a provincially significant wetland (PSW). These need to have the same design features as those above - an acceptable width to length ratio and the preservation of as much native habitat as possible. Indeed, these same principles apply to all bio-corridors.

Even small and relatively isolated corridors are of value because they might contain native herbs and bushes, attract seasonal insects and butterflies and be sources of seeds. But there are negative consequences of edges, both physical and biological, that need to be minimized. In this area, there are more significant numbers of invasive species (buckthorn, garlic mustard, etc.), some predators are more common (brown-headed cowbird, crows, skunks, cats, etc.), and the land can heat more readily or be exposed to more wind. This includes corridors that lead to a dead-end (such as urban development, a road or a cliff).

Thoughtful engineering can sometimes mitigate these adverse effects. For example, a square culvert under a

roadway can allow amphibians or small mammals to avoid road mortality. In contrast, round culverts have ridges that inhibit some animals from crossing through them.

The goal of bio-corridors is to preserve and enhance habitat and biodiversity. The greater the size of the habitat preserved, the greater the species richness, the more enhanced ecological services will be for humans. Preserving wetlands provides essential water filtration services and better stormwater management. Promoting greater biodiversity increases the number of raccoons, skunks, and turkeys, reducing the number of ticks carrying Lyme Disease. Trees and shrubs provide shade and help reduce CO₂. Then there are enhanced esthetic benefits, such as the enjoyment of nature and reduction in stress.

Designing and maintaining bio-corridors requires multiple skills, including planners, landscape architects, engineers, mappers, ecologists, and naturalists. But the effort is well worth it, and we should insist that corridors be included in Town Plans to preserve biodiversity and ecological integrity.

References:

1. Natural Heritage Reference Manual, 2ed. for the Provincial Policy Statement, 2010. pp.24-33,148-152. <http://www.mnr.gov.on.ca/289522.pdf>
2. Hilty, J.A., Lidicker, W.Z. and Merenlender, A.M., 2006. Washington, D.C.: Island Press.

This 2015 air photo shows Bertie Township's two most important corridors. The red line is the old portage trail that passed along the Onondaga Escarpment, connecting Miller's Creek to Abino Bay. The blue line is Black Creek. Around 1793, Quakers organized the Black Creek Meeting in what is today the village of Ridgeway, naming it, perhaps, in recognition of their community's connection to the Niagara River. © Brock Map Library



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The Rambler Newsletter

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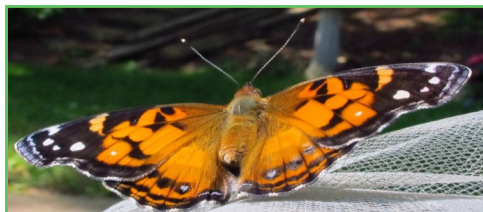
The Bert Miller Nature Club is a charitable organization formed in January of 1995 by a group of people interested in sharing their enthusiasm for nature. Earl Plato, a local naturalist and history buff, was the founding president. The club is named after a well-known naturalist and resident of Fort 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 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 not being held at this time, but virtual meetings will be via Zoom on the second Monday of the month, September through June, at 7 p.m. 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.

“You’re Not the Boss of Me!” *continued*



American Lady (*Vanessa virginiensis*). © Win Laar

share our home with a diverse community of life.

There is something very calming in knowing a young fawn is hidden in the cattails, in brushing against the mountain

Our native trees and fruit-bearing shrubs have grown tall and stately, providing welcome shade, shelter and food through the seasons. We

mint and bergamot and releasing their familiar perfume, in watching the turkeys snoozing upon the warm pine needles. One sleeps well as the owl calls.

All through the year, there is a quiet joy in the garden.



Swamp Milkweed (*Asclepias incarnata*)
© Win Laar

In Closing... two timely articles to read.

We're in a climate emergency and a biodiversity crisis. What we plant and how we alter landscapes matters. | The Star

[Click here to link to the article.](#)

One of our most elegant native shrubs, Eastern Redbud (*Cercis canadensis*) after a recent snowfall.
© Janet Seburn



Lake Erie Lowland, where we live, is considered the most threatened Ecoregion in Canada. | Springer Link

[Click here to link to the article.](#)

