



The Rambler

Fall 2021

From the President's Pen

Autumn is my favourite time of year. It is a highly symbolic season for many people, as it heralds the start of the end. Being a season that contains both abundance and solemnity, Autumn has recorded some myths, legends and festivities over the years. Across the years and across many cultures, these festivals have many similarities. So what do you think of these Autumn celebrations?

According to **Greek** mythology, Persephone, the daughter of Demeter, the goddess of the harvest, returns to the underworld during September equinox each year. During the time that Persephone is in the underworld, Demeter is so sad that she deprives the earth of crops until spring, when her daughter returns to her.

The **Romans** honoured the harvest festival in a celebration known as Ceresia. This festival, dedicated to Ceres, the goddess of corn, was marked with offerings of pigs, first fruits of harvest, music, parades, games, sports and a thanksgiving feast.

The **Chinese and Vietnamese** associate the full moon of the equinox with a good harvest. This association began during the Shang Dynasty, a time when they harvested rice and wheat in plenty to the extent that they started making offerings to the moon in a festival they term as the Harvest Moon festival.

The **Buddhists** of Japan return to their ancestral homes every spring and fall to celebrate their ancestors in a festival called Higan. Higan means "From the other Shore of the Sanzu River." Crossing this mystical Buddhist river is believed to represent crossing into the afterlife.

The **British** held and still hold harvest festivals on the Sunday nearest to the harvest moon in fall. This festival was

later taken to America by the earliest English settlers and was adopted as the Thanksgiving holiday, which is celebrated in November, often with turkey and pumpkin pie.

The **Welsh** celebrated the autumnal equinox in a feast called Mabon. Mabon, according to Welsh mythology, was the son of the goddess earth mother. This festival was characterized by the offering of apples and grapes and the performance of rituals meant to bring balance to life.

The **Jews** celebrate Sukkoth, the harvest festival, in two celebrations - Hag ha Succoth (Feast of the Tabernacle) and Hag ha Asif (Feast of Gathering). These celebrations are characterized by the hanging of grapes, apples, corn and pomegranates and feasting under the evening sky.

In **Canada**, traditions of giving thanks long predate the arrival of European settlers in North America. First Nations across Turtle Island had traditions of thanksgiving for surviving winter and for receiving crops and game as a reward for their hard work. These traditions included feasting, prayer, dance, potlatch and other ceremonies, depending on the peoples giving thanks. On November 14, 1606, inhabitants of New France under Samuel de Champlain held vast feasts of thanksgiving between local Mi'kmaq and the French. Though not known at the time by the settlers, cranberries, rich in Vitamin C, are credited with helping them avoid scurvy.

However you celebrate Autumn, I wish you a season of time spent sharing harvest food with family and friends, time spent enjoying nature and time spent being thankful for all the bounty of this colourful season.

Deb

Welcome New Members

- Lisa, Dakota & Zhianna Bacon
- Leslie & Graham Clark
- Anne & Chris Mills
- Beryl Smith

Upcoming Meetings

- All monthly meetings for the foreseeable future will be held virtually via Zoom.
- December 13 - Peter Ferguson – Postcards from the Park
- January 10 - Fred Jazvac – Waterfowl Identification: Tips and Tricks
- February 14 - Gregory Ford – Niagara Coastal - Using Community/Citizen Science to Address Data Gaps on the Great Lakes
- March 14 - Katherine Balpataky – Harnessing the Power of Communities, Farmers and Technology for Lake Erie

Upcoming Outings

- Sunday January 23, 2022 @ 10:00am – Waterfowl Outing Along the River (pre-registration required)
- Watch for email updates or refer to the Club's website or Facebook page for information on future outings.

Memberships for 2021-2022

- Memberships are **past due**. If you haven't renewed yet, please consider renewing today. Thank you to all who have renewed.



Autumn at Waverly.

© Ron Goodridge



A Well-earned Honour

by Lynda Goodridge

We are pleased to share some good news about one of our long-time members, Marcie Jacklin. In June of this year, Marcie received the Stan Hodgkiss Outdoorsperson of the Year award. This prestigious national award is presented annually by the Canadian Wildlife Federation to "a Canadian who has demonstrated an active and enduring commitment to conservation."

For over 30 years, Marcie has been an advocate for nature and has worked hard to raise awareness of the importance of protecting our natural environment. In 2018, she spearheaded the movement to save Erie Beach/Waverly Woods and was instrumental in forming Community Voices of Fort Erie. Since then, she has worked tirelessly to highlight this special place's uniqueness: its historical significance and importance as a wildlife habitat. In addition, Marcie has had many other accomplishments and involvements over the years. Unfortunately, there is not enough room to include them all, so here are some of the highlights:

- * Community Voices of Fort Erie (president since 2018)
- * Buffalo Ornithological Society (Council member 2000-2010)



Marcie holding her Outdoorsperson of the Year award. © Maria Featherston

- * Ontario Field Ornithologists (Director 2010 - 2013)
- * Biodiversity and Climate Action Committee
- * Niagara Birding Conservation and Tourism Collaborative
- * Bert Miller Nature Club (Director 2000-2005), Niagara Falls Nature Club, Peninsula Field Naturalists (President & Past President 1993-1997)
- * Birds on the Niagara International Festival
- * Twelve Mile Creek headwaters Important Bird Area Steering Committee
- * Bert Miller Award winner, 2016
- * R.W. Sheppard Award, 2020 winner (Niagara Falls Nature Club)

Marcie is featured in the July/August issue of the Canadian Wildlife Federation's magazine, which is circulated across Canada. This award is quite a distinguished honour for her, and we are thrilled that she is finally receiving the recognition she deserves.

A Bank Swallow Colony Sign for Sherkston Shores

by Tim Seburn

This past summer, Club member Jenny Marlatt spotted a Bank Swallow colony near Pleasant Beach on Sherkston Shores property. Feeling the nesting site was at risk of being disturbed by children and uninformed adults who might be visiting the beach, our Club approached Sherkston Shores to see if signs could be erected in front of the colony to inform visitors.

In Canada, Bank Swallows occur from the Atlantic to the Pacific coasts and as far north as the Hudson Bay coast. In Ontario, the species has been designated as "threatened," meaning it is likely to become endangered if steps are not taken to address the factors threatening its numbers. Between the first 1980-1985 and the second, 2000-2005, Ontario Breeding Bird Atlases their numbers declined 30.5%!

What makes this swallow species unique is that it needs a vertical face on a bank of earth or sand to excavate a group of nesting holes. According to the recovery strategy developed by Environment and Climate Change Canada, this vertical face only needs to be at least 0.5 meters in height.

With permission from Sherkston Shores, Jenny Marlatt erected temporary signs. At the same time, Dawn Pierrynowski worked with the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority to develop a permanent sign which would be sufficiently durable to last for several years. Banks Swallows nest frequently on Sherkston Shores property but will relocate their colonies each year depending on which dunes have the vertical face they require.

In Niagara, many of our Bank Swallow colonies occur in the coastal dunes of Lake Erie. Removal of some of these dunes and the hardening of the shoreline have had a significant impact on their numbers. The Bert Miller Nature Club hopes to continue working with partners along our coast to ensure this species continues to entertain us at the beach and help control the mosquitos that might make us a meal.



Derek Stevenson of Sherkston Shores with the new sign. © Tim Seburn

Bird Friendly City

by Lynda Goodridge

On October 25, 2021, Deb Sherk and I made a presentation to our local Town Council, asking them to consider working towards becoming a Bird Friendly City. This initiative is a process that leads to certification under guidelines developed by Nature Canada. It recognizes the efforts made by cities to save birds and acknowledges the vital role that they play in maintaining our ecosystems.

Cornell University did a major study, specifically, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, which shows a cumulative loss of nearly 3 billion birds since 1970 across most North American biomes (aquatic, grassland, forest, desert, tundra). This new study finds steep, long-term losses in virtually all groups of birds in Canada and the U.S.

Another way to phrase this is from the Audubon Society, which states that North America has lost more than 1 in 4 birds in the last 50 years. About 90% of the missing birds came from 12 distinct and widespread bird families - including warblers, sparrows, blackbirds and finches. Grasslands, in particular, posted the most significant losses, with more than 700 million breeding individuals lost across 31 species since 1970. However, not all species declined, and some have shown steady gains over time. Two examples are waterfowl - this group has seen an increase of 34 million since 1970, primarily due to wetland conservation efforts and raptors (such as Bald Eagles) - this group has gained approximately 15 million individuals since the banning of DDT in 1972. These numbers show that taking steps like wildlife management, habitat restoration, and political action can significantly save species in steep decline.

There is no doubt that humans significantly impact birds and their habitat. So how can we mitigate or, better yet, reverse this impact? Three main areas are the focus of becoming a Bird Friendly City.

First - we have to reduce the threats to birds through regulatory and educational measures, such as threats from cats, collisions and loss of habitat. A bill was recently introduced in the Ontario Legislature urging the Province to adopt a policy on using bird-friendly materials to construct all new residential and commercial buildings. Locally, we can promote the use of bird-friendly window treatments and perhaps incorporate these strategies into new buildings.

Second - we have to protect the habitats where birds live by factoring in the well-being of birds (and people, of course) when planning any urban development. The planning of any new urban development must prioritize habitat protection and restoration. We also need an effective tree management policy to protect, enhance, improve and restore our natural habitat.

Third - we have to create impactful community outreach and education, such as participating in and celebrating World Migratory Bird Day, encouraging residents to plant bird-friendly gardens, making people aware of the

dangers of letting their cats roam freely, and suggesting appropriate window treatments that can help avoid bird collisions.

As a bird-friendly city, there are many benefits. In addition to attaining international recognition and a sense of community pride, we can use this to our economic advantage. Bird-watching is one of the fastest-growing hobbies globally, and ecotourism can be an economic driver. Birders love to travel to see birds, and they spend their money in local restaurants, hotels and stores. Local businesses might be able to use this as a marketing tool, and it might encourage them to embrace some of the suggested changes as well.



© Nature Canada

A detailed application from Nature Canada lists the items that count towards certification and assesses the performance on key issues. There are three levels of certification, so this will be an extended process.

We have a Bird Team ready to move ahead with the project once the Town is on board. At the October 25 Council meeting, Councillor Butler made a notice of motion for Town staff to investigate the certification process and report back to Council before the November 22 meeting. The Councillors will then take a vote on whether to proceed.

Some quick facts:

- * Nearly 3 billion birds have disappeared since 1970
- * Birding is a very popular hobby. The number of people enjoying this hobby has increased 30% in the Niagara area since COVID-19 began.
- * According to Quartz.com, businesses that sell birdfeed and backyard bird feeders reported sales increases of approximately 45% since COVID-19.
- * Novice birders contributed to a new record for spotting bird species on Global Big Day - an annual bird-watching event run by the eBird program at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.
- * People are moving to the Niagara area to enjoy our natural areas, parks, woods and trails. Bird watching is part of this desire to be in nature.
- * Birding is a pastime that requires little in the way of equipment, expertise or knowledge. People of all ages and stages can enjoy it.

If you require any additional information, please feel free to contact me at lgoodridge219@gmail.com

EDITOR'S NOTE: On November 22, 2021, the Town of Fort Erie Council voted unanimously to proceed with the Bird Friendly City initiative.

Notable Birds in Niagara Sept. 1/20 to Aug. 31/21

by Marcie Jacklin

I'll start this report off on a high note for many Niagara birders. A lone Black Tern was seen by a few observers on September 2, 2020, on the Niagara River near the Peace Bridge, but then on September 7, nine Black Terns and four Red-necked Phalaropes were sighted at the exact location. Black Terns were more common but have disappeared from this area due to the destruction of



Red-necked Phalaropes. © Marcie Jacklin

wetlands. At one point, my American friends texted me from the other side of the river to let me know that the Laughing Gull, which showed up in late August, had just flown over my head. The Red-necked Phalarope sighting was my 251st species for Fort Erie since 1993.

Just a few days later, another exceptional bird showed up! Philip Downey found a Red Knot at Jones Beach, Port Weller. Fortunately, this bird stayed for several days, and many birders were able to get great looks.



Laughing Gull. © Marcie Jacklin



Red Knot © Marcie Jacklin

On October 30, 2020, John Black, myself and two other birders found a Purple Sandpiper while doing a census on private property at Port Weller. Luckily it flew to the East pier, and birders were able to view it until November 3.



Purple Sandpiper. © Marcie Jacklin

November 2020 was good for birds in Fort Erie. First, I was fortunate to find a Black-legged Kittiwake at Nichols Marine in Fort Erie on November 2. On November 6, a young female Rose-breasted Grosbeak showed up at our feeder and stayed until the 22nd and then on November 8, a King Eider, which had been reported on the US side of the river, was located.



Black-legged Kittiwakes. © Marcie Jacklin

While birding with my friend Jamie Spence at Niagara Falls, he found a rare Common Gull (recently split from Mew Gull) on November 24. We had spectacular views! Although most birders, except Jamie and I, slept in and missed seeing the gull the following morning, it apparently flew to Brantford and stayed there for several days.

On December 11, I was

fortunate to find two Black-legged Kittiwakes above the Falls. The gull master, Ryan Griffiths, found a Slaty-backed Gull in Thorold on December 19. Many birders were able to see this bird before it flew away.



Townsend's Solitaire. © Marcie Jacklin

The first eight months were remarkable for Niagara firsts. So many other birders, and I added four new species to our all-time lists.

It all started on January 16 when Nancy Smith found a Townsend's Solitaire, a bird typically found out west. It stayed until about the 22nd.

We had to wait until April 15 for the next exciting bird, a Little Blue Heron. This bird was found in Miller's Creek off the Niagara Parkway. Again many birders were able to see it, including some of our American friends, who, with a bit of patience, could see it (barely) when it fished along the edge of the river.



Yellow-headed Blackbird. © Marcie Jacklin

Another great bird, a Yellow-headed Blackbird, had been coming to a feeder in Niagara Falls and was reported by the homeowner so that many people could see it on May 7, 2021.

The next mega-rarity to show up was a Yellow-crowned Night-Heron at Happy Rolph's Animal Farm in St. Catharines. Lisa Bacon found this bird on July 25, and many birders were able to see it over several days. Usually, this bird is located much further south, but as our climate warms, we will see more and more of these vagrants.



Yellow-crowned Night-Heron. © Marcie Jacklin

Lastly, on August 20, Sid Wood found a Black-bellied Whistling-Duck at Dufferin Islands in Niagara Falls. After missing it by 10 minutes that evening, I was able to see it the following morning. I didn't have to worry; it is still being reported as of November 3, 2021.

Good birding!

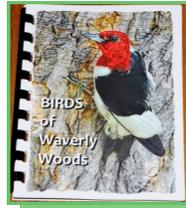


Black-bellied Whistling-Duck. © Ron Goodridge

Birds of Waverly Woods Book Now Available for Purchase

Need a memorable Christmas gift? How about a gift for a friend or neighbour or your favourite birder? Check out this unique guide to the Birds of Waverly Woods; it contains 60 colour photos. It's only \$13.

To order, send an email to waverly2021@gmail.com or call Maria 905-871-4681.



The Misadventure of the Navy Island Nuts

by Tim Seburn

“Oh no - not again!” I cursed at myself. While cleaning out the fridge after the holidays, a jar of kingnut hickory nuts (*Carya laciniosa*) had just come into view. “These are rare. Don’t collect seeds if you are not going to plant them!” I privately scolded myself. I held up the jar and studied the nuts. A couple of them looked like Christmas ornaments sprayed with snow. Did someone use them as decorations? Without glasses, I cocked an eye for a better look and cursed yet again. A fascinating white mould was growing on a couple of the nuts. “How long have these things been in here?” I asked myself. It suddenly came back to me, and I chuckled as I recalled the trouble these nuts had caused. Rick Stockton had decided to get a new Subaru because of what had happened back then, and his new Subaru was now giving him trouble. So it had been several years at least.



Kingnut hickory nuts - not decorated for Christmas
© Tim Seburn

Rick, Rob Eberly, and I wanted to return to Navy Island in the fall to collect nuts. Many years before, we had been on the perfect trip. Earl Plato had arranged with Gene Muma to shuttle a bunch of us across on a pontoon boat. Kingnut hickory nuts were almost knee-deep - well, maybe only ankle deep. Each of us brought back one or two grocery bags full of nuts, except for Gene. He carried his tiny dog, Buddy, in his arms the whole time, feeding him a steady stream of treats. Peter Foebel even found an exceedingly rare quadruple-sized nut, which he firmly refused to give up. After that trip, we thought of Navy Island, once proposed as a home for the United Nations, as headquarters for kingnut hickory nuts in Niagara. We were eager to go again.

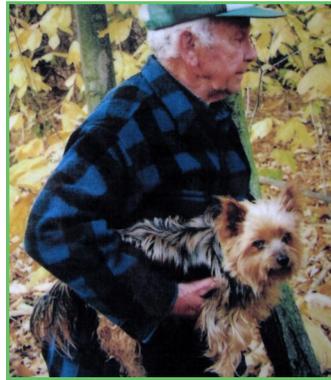
Finally, Rick, Rob and I got our act together and agreed on a morning. We put my 17-foot canoe on Rick’s old Subaru and headed out to Ussher’s Creek. Either we were too eager, or someone didn’t get enough sleep because we dropped the canoe while lowering it from the roof rack and knocked one of the Subaru’s mirrors loose. “That’s ok. It’s the passenger side”, Rick said forgivingly as we carried the canoe to the water, leaving the mirror dangling down the side of the car.

Paddles, backpacks, lifejackets - check. Rick crawled into the front of the canoe with Rob in the middle. I pushed off and hopped in the rear. Pushing the canoe away from shore was unexpectedly difficult. Finally, I was able to turn around to start to paddle when I noticed Rob was facing the rear of the canoe and paddling in the wrong direction. We laughed at ourselves. Already in a current-carrying us swiftly towards the Falls, and realizing he might upset the canoe if he tried to turn around, Rob put his paddle down, lit up a cigarette and enjoyed the short ride to the island.

We safely landed at the usual spot on the west side of Navy Island and climbed the ridge to inspect our two

favourite flowering dogwood trees (*Cornus florida*), old friends we had known for years. “Sure enough, they got the blight,” Rob said sadly. This came as no surprise. So much of the flowering dogwood in Niagara is being lost to this blight. Heading into the forest, Rick pointed out Emerald Ash Borer’s damage on an Ash tree. “What’s next?” I groaned to myself, “Will anything other than invasive species be left with the climate we are leaving to our grandkids?”

We started kicking in the duff on the forest floor for nuts. “Not a good year,” I called out. After 40 minutes, we found only a couple each, which we just shoved in our pockets rather than dig bags out of the packs. “What should we do now?” Rob wondered. Without hesitating, I said, “Why don’t we try and find the pawpaw.” Privately, I had second thoughts about my suggestion but kept these to myself. Somewhere I had Bert Miller’s map showing the spot on the island where he had located the pawpaw (*Asimina triloba*). Or had I loaned it to Earl? Several years ago, with the map in hand, Earl and I spent a whole day looking for the pawpaw without success. In any case, I hadn’t looked at that map in years. But I wasn’t worried about getting lost. We were on an island. And we had lots of time to kill. Rob quickly agreed with my idea and said, “I know where it is. Earl and I found it this spring.” I was pleased to learn Earl had found the Pawpaw patch after all the work he had put into finding it, and I was eager to see it for myself.



Gene Muma with Buddy. © BMNC Archives - photo by Earl Plato

Two hours later, Rob felt we were getting close to the patch. We began scanning the forest with our binoculars, looking for the tell-tale long drooping leaves of the pawpaw. Rob suddenly spotted something and called out, “I think I’ve found it!” As he pushed into an area of dense shrubbery, he completely disappeared from view. I scanned the shrubbery where I last saw him but saw no pawpaw. When Rob finally emerged, he was holding a single large leaf. It was coloured slightly yellow, as a pawpaw leaf might be this time of year. However, my skin crawled, a sudden shudder went down my spine, and I felt myself involuntarily backing away from him. I asked, “Where did you get that leaf from, Rob?” He reached back into the shrubbery and pointed. It was poison ivy!

Sometimes poison ivy leaves can be huge, as was the case here. As you know, poison ivy leaves grow in leaflets of three. Rob had selected a large center leaflet, which indeed looked very much like a pawpaw leaf. Unlike Rick, Rob and I have extreme allergic reactions to poison ivy. I’ve had so many bad reactions that I now sometimes

Bert Miller Nature Club

PO Box 1088
Ridgeway, ON
L0S 1N0



www.bertmillernatureclub.org
email: info@bertmillernatureclub.org

2021-2022 Executive

President •Deb Sherk
Past President •Lynda Goodridge
Vice President •vacant
Secretary •Peter BonEnfant
Treasurer •Rick Stockton
Memberships •Dawn Pierrynowski
Directors •Viki Busche
•Eliza Durant
•Janet Kellam
•Brandon Marlatt
•Dawn Pierrynowski
•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 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 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.

Navy Island Nuts *continued*

instinctively feel a revulsion running through my body from simply looking at poison ivy, which saved me here.

We had nothing in our backpacks to help Rob, and we hadn't noticed any jewelweed (*Impatiens carpensis*), a common natural remedy, during our hike. So our only choice was to get to the shoreline as quickly as possible so Rob could give himself a quick wash-off. Then we paddled back to the Subaru, so Rob could get home and

shower with hot water and a bar of laundry soap.

It was mostly quiet on our ride home until Rob, and I offered to pay to repair Rick's mirror. Rick kindly declined and said he would be buying a new Subaru anyway. Besides, we laughed; how could he possibly deal with all the poison ivy oil we had just deposited onto his car seats?

In Closing... Bird Notes

According to a column titled, "Bird Notes of the Week", by Dr. Harold Axtell, curator of vertebrate zoology at the Buffalo Museum of Science, which was published in a Buffalo area newspaper, around 1965, black terns at the Peace Bridge numbered about 5,000 birds seen in a year. Today the report of a single black tern at the Peace Bridge is a "big deal", which attracts birders to the Peace Bridge from all over Niagara.



Black Tern at Fort Erie. © Marcie Jacklin

A small flock of Snow Buntings came off Lake Erie. A few landed on the rocks and beach area for a short rest at the Palmwood boat launch area in Crystal Beach, November 4, 2021.



Snow Buntings.

© Wally Parker