



From the President's Pen

Happy Spring, everyone! The warmer weather, longer days, spring flowers, returning birds and budding trees seem like the balm to the heart, mind and body we all needed after a challenging winter. I hope you've had the time and health to be outside enjoying nature.

As you all know, there is a provincial election coming on Thursday, June 2. The provincial umbrella group that Bert Miller Nature Club belongs to is Ontario Nature. So the conservation staff, biologists and media folks at ON have devised some questions for us to ask when politicians come to our door, when we attend all candidates' meetings, when we write letters to the editor of our local papers, or when we post on Facebook or other social media. These questions fall into three broad categories:

1. Protected areas: These areas are the cornerstone of biodiversity conservation and a nature-based solution to climate change.

Question: Will your party commit to protecting 25% of our lands and waters by 2025 and 30% by 2030?

2. Species at Risk: Faced with an accelerating worldwide extinction crisis, successive Ontario governments have failed miserably to respond as needed.

Question: Will your party commit to reversing the damaging 2019 amendments to the Endangered Species Act and restoring a science-based approach to species recovery, including mandatory habitat protection?

3. Government Accountability: The public has been demanding action on both the climate and biodiversity crises, yet the provincial government has weakened environmental laws and policies, leaving us and future generations at risk of the adverse aspects of environmental degradation.

Question: If elected, will you do your utmost to ensure that the government refrains from using Minister's Zoning Orders to fast-track development while dodging environmental protections and community consultation?

A vote for nature is a vote for a livable planet for our children and grandchildren.

Deb

2022 BMNC Award

Our Club bears Bert Miller's name, a well-known naturalist in the Niagara area and a role model for many. The award is presented to any person or group from the Niagara area who has made a contribution(s) consistent with the goals of the Bert Miller Nature Club to preserve, protect, restore and improve the natural resources and environment of the Niagara Peninsula; to protect and preserve the wildlife of the Niagara Peninsula and to protect the natural habitat therein; to encourage, promote and foster an understanding and awareness



Lynda accepting the plaque from Dawn.
© Ron Goodridge

by Dawn Pierrynowski

of the natural resources and environment and their value in enhancing the quality of life.

Lynda Goodridge was presented this prestigious award Monday, April 11, 2022, at the Zoom General Meeting. Her professional leadership stood out as she contributed her time and expertise in many areas of nature and her community.

• Bert Miller Nature Club President and Director

• Member of the Biodiversity and Climate Action Committee

Welcome New Members

- Feroza Aladin
- Deb & Steve Brown
- Ann McLaughlin
- Loretta Shields

Upcoming Meetings

- May 25 @ 6:00 pm - Nature in Niagara at the Centennial Branch of the Fort Erie Public Library. Tim Seburn presents The History of Marcy / DiCenzo Woods. Registration required through Eventbrite or the Library.
- June 13 - Crystal Thejin - **Hobbitstee Wildlife Refuge** - learn about the work that this Haldimand County organization does to save wildlife and promote conservation.
- Starting in September 2022, we will be going to a split meeting format. We will be meeting in person for September, October, November, Zoom meetings for December, January, February and March 2023 and then back to in-person meetings for April, May and June 2023. Watch your email for further updates.

Upcoming Outings

- Watch for email updates or refer to the Club's website or Facebook page for information on future outings.

Memberships

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



BMNC Award *continued*

- Bird Friendly City Coordinator in Fort Erie
- Board of Directors for Community Voices of Fort Erie (to Save Waverly Woods).
- Participant in the Buffalo Ornithological Society's April, May and October counts.
- Participant in the Buffalo, Niagara Falls, and Port Colborne Christmas Bird Counts.
- Backyard Bird Count organizer for the BMNC
- Birds on the Niagara (BON) volunteer
- Marsh Monitoring program volunteer with Birds Canada
- Swift Watch coordinator with Birds Canada
- Nature Niagara program coordinator between the FEPL and the BMNC
- BMNC Ridgeway Summer Festival Coordinator for many years

- Fort Erie Arts Council volunteer
- Trainer and Volunteer for the Adult Literacy Council of Fort Erie, where she became a friend and mentor to a young stroke victim that continues to this day.
- A Senior Trainer in Ontario for the Laubach Literacy method of teaching reading to adult learners, doing workshops to train volunteer tutors and train other trainers.
- Fort Erie Public Library "Community Services Coordinator" for 28 years involved outreach programs and events with local organizations, schools, and other libraries and a weekly information column for the local media.

Congratulations, Lynda, for all you have accomplished and continue to work towards in making the Fort Erie Community a better place to live, work and play.

R.W. Sheppard Award Presentation

Marcie Jacklin received the R.W. Sheppard Award on Monday, April 11, at Waverly Beach Park. The Niagara Falls Nature Club presented the award, originally choosing her as the recipient in 2020. Traditionally the award is presented at the group's annual dinner in April, but COVID-19 resulted in the cancellation of this and other live events.

Making the presentation on behalf of NFNC was former President Win Laar. In addition, Mayor Wayne Redekop gave his congratulations, as did our Regional Representative, Tom Insinna. Marcie also received a commendation from April Jeffs on behalf of MP Tony Baldinelli.

Roy W. Sheppard, for whom the award is named, was the first honorary president of the Niagara Falls Nature Club. He joined the club in 1966 and was an active member until his death in 1985. He was internationally known as a naturalist and published scientific and nature articles.

The award named in his honour was begun in 1986 and is intended to recognize and honour an individual or group for a contribution to the Niagara Community through conservation, education or research in the field of nature.

by Lynda Goodridge

Marcie Jacklin is undoubtedly a worthy recipient of this honour. We congratulate her on her many accomplishments over the years, including her tireless efforts to save Waverly Woods.



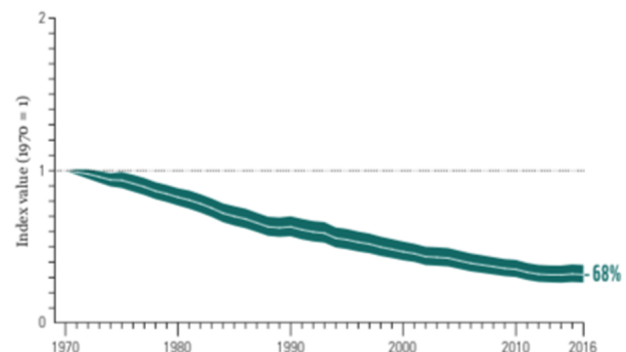
Marcie showing off her plaque after two years of waiting while Win looks on.
© Ron Goodridge

Biodiversity

Most readers of The Rambler already have a notion of the meaning of biodiversity, but I will provide one myself. Biodiversity includes the variety of species, the genetic diversity within those species, and the unique ecosystems in a given area. That area might be focused on a single field or pond, an eco-region such as Carolinian Canada or a whole system such as the Boreal forest or the Arctic - It has been termed "the fabric of life." But the focus of this article is on why protecting biodiversity is important and what would be the significance if it were lost.

Here is the problem: globally, we have lost 68% of the population of 4,392 animal species between 1970 and 2016. This loss is unequal globally, ranging from 94% in Latin America to 33% in North America. The causes are

multiple, including habitat loss, commercial over-exploitation, pollution, climate change, etc.



by Rick Stockton

Biodiversity *by continued*

However, the graph on the previous page only concerns species numbers, and other elements of biodiversity should also be considered. Biodiversity comprises "the totality of actions and connections between organisms," and we should consider what this loss means for North America. I will focus on two forms of loss: the loss of genetic diversity and the loss of keystone predators.

Genetic diversity is decreased through the isolation of species, reduction of species richness (loss of competition, decreased predation, etc.), decreased populations, greater inbreeding, etc. There are many ecological consequences, but one of the most important might be the loss of resiliency. In a world that is changing relatively rapidly, a wider range of genetic variability would be advantageous; for example - in a warming world, any organism carrying a latent gene for "heat tolerance" might provide a survival value and allow that species to flourish.

The loss of keystone predators is best exemplified by the near extirpation of wolf species in North America. One of the most studied examples of the wolf's ecological influence is in Yellowstone National Park. When wolves were reintroduced, they rapidly changed the behaviour and decreased the numbers of Elk, which in turn led to revegetation of the watercourses, increased number of trees, increased bird and beaver populations, etc. Thus change in one species, the wolf, led to a cascade of changes in the ecology of Yellowstone.

These are just a couple of the myriad of examples of why we can't afford to lose the earth's great wealth of biodiversity. Humans are one of the main drivers of biodiversity loss, but they are also dependent beneficiaries. Our entire food system relies on biodiversity - from pollinators to soil microbes, to potential new crops in a warming world, to control of plant disease by birds, bats, mammals, etc., to the variety of wild fish that we extract from the sea. Trees capture CO₂, improve water and air quality and, along with many other plants, produce oxygen. All of these are just a tiny representation of the ecological services upon which humans are dependent. Biodiversity is the essential link between humans and the biological world around us.

References:

1. WWF (2020). Living Planet Report 2020-Bending the Curve of Biodiversity Loss. www.panda.org
2. Global Biodiversity Outlook (GBO-5) 2020. Convention on Biodiversity. www.cbd.int/CB05.
3. National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine 2022. Biodiversity at Risk: Today's Choices Matter. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/26384>.

Niagara River's Winter Ducks *by Tim Seburn*



The group all bundled up and ready to go.

© Ron Goodridge

After being delayed by several weeks due to pandemic restrictions, February 26, 2022, the date of the Bert Miller Nature Club's winter waterfowl outing, proved to be the long-awaited fun day we all needed. The weather was a bit windy and cool, but the sun came out, making the day cheery.

Our day started at the Niagara Parks Commission parking lot at the end of Beatrice St. We picked up Red-breasted Mergansers, Bufflehead, and Goldeneye. As we drove north, up the parkway, we added Common and Hooded Mergansers, Canvasback, Redhead, Lesser and

Greater Scaup, and even a Ring-necked duck. Peter BonEnfant thought he had a Ruddy duck, and when we managed to get a closer look, we found four of them. Michael Deeley was lucky enough to spot a Great

Cormorant, with its white throat patch, flying south low over the centre of the river, near the International Railway Bridge. We all managed to spot Bald Eagles.

Viki Busche was particularly pleased with the parking lot near the end of Old Townline Road when we found and had great looks at a large flock of Tundra Swans. We all agreed it was a great way to end a great day. Plus, it was time for lunch!



© Ron Goodridge



Tundra Swans.

© Ron Goodridge

Marcy / DiCienzo Woods Walk 2022

by Cathy Herbert

After three long years of not enjoying the beauty of Marcy / DiCienzo Woods, our club was finally able to get out and do just that on the last day of April. Of course, the weather was really in our favour, considering the recent rain in the forecast. But Mother Nature was looking out for us.



Over the dune to the beach below.
© Dawn Pierrynowski

brochure were in bloom. The most prolific one we saw was the Virginia Spring Beauty, in varying shades of pink. We also walked on the beach, seeing all of the erosion damage to the dunes from the storms and high water. The only fauna we saw was a



Red Trillium, White Trillium, Blue Cohosh and Marsh Marigold were all in bloom.
© Ron Goodridge

Garter Snake on the lower trail.

Walking in the woods is always a soothing experience, listening to the birds singing, trying to spot them, and taking in the beautiful landscape. But I think we all needed a woods fix! Hoping there is nothing in our way to repeating this experience next spring.



Dune erosion.

© Dawn Pierrynowski

Peter BonEnfant led the birding group, while Ken Fretz and I led the spring flower group. The trilliums weren't as showy as we hoped for but were still there, both the white and red varieties. Almost all of the flowers in the wildflower



Patty Moss shows the garter snake to Owen.
© Dawn Pierrynowski

Holes

Holes in nature are important. As woodlots, forests and chimneys disappear, they become critical to the survival of many birds and other species of animals that require a hole or cavity. Woodpeckers are primary excavators of holes. Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers, Downy, Red-headed, Pileated and Hairy Woodpeckers all drum out a hole for nesting and once a hole has become empty other birds and animals called secondary cavity nesters move in. The new tenants may include Eastern Bluebirds, flycatchers, sparrows, Prothonotary Warblers, owls, nuthatches, swallows, Carolina Wrens, Tufted Titmice, Chimney Swifts and Wood Ducks. Purple Martins are dependent on humans to supply cavities for their survival. Birds aren't the only animals that use holes to survive. Wasps, bumblebees, Deer Mice, Southern Flying Squirrels, opossums, and weasels are a few to watch for. What biodiversity! Who knew all these living things depend on holes and much more?



Eastern Bluebird male.



Eastern Bluebird female.

by Dawn Pierrynowski

which produced large, bright-red sumac fruit clusters. These bluebirds depended on the fruit from sumacs from the previous summer for their late winter and early spring survival. She watched as the sumac fruit clusters grew raggedy and small, and by April, caterpillars, spiders and other bugs supplied the bluebirds with most of the food they needed.

There is a large circle of organisms in a food web that bluebirds and other species depend on for survival. They need food, other plant species for cover from predators, materials for nesting and, yes, cavities (holes) to raise their young. Many plants are dependent on pollinators, microorganisms and fungi in the soil. Bluebirds need insects for food for themselves and their young. Insects need plants to host their eggs and feed their larvae and themselves. Living things depend on one another. This includes humans who are also dependent on this web of biodiversity to support their needs of good food, clean water, shelter and a place to raise children.

People can help wildlife by keeping some dead trees, creating wildlife corridors and by leaving remaining woodlots and forests intact. Citizens can build, monitor and maintain nest boxes for cavity dwellers. More biodiversity means a healthier environment for all.

The Bert Miller Nature Club and the Greater Fort Erie Secondary School (GFESS) are doing their part to help the Eastern Bluebird population. Collaboration was started with Principal Fred Louws, Technology Program Lead

Dr. Alexandra Moore, Senior Education Associate at the Paleontological Research Institution in Ithaca, N.Y., was observing bluebirds in her backyard in March and wondered what insects they were eating at that time of the year. She thought that bluebirds were solely insect eaters, but she discovered that, in fact, they were omnivores.

She had been thinking about clearing out her overgrown sumacs, and fortunately for the bluebirds never got around to it. Insects had pollinated the sumac flowers,

Holes *continued*

Gaston Letourneau, Construction Teacher Peter Clark and Cooperative Education Lead Bill Connor.

Students were to build Eastern Bluebird nesting boxes for Shagbark Nature Park in Ridgeway as an introduction to woodworking starting in September 2021. They were to demonstrate how both construction and environmental concerns can inspire a solution for Eastern Bluebird habitat. The build was a success! Now for the installation.

Bill Connor and co-worker Sandra Mackenzie arranged for students enrolled in the Special High Skills Major in Environment program to come to Shagbark Nature Park. They accompanied them to do the installation of the 15 nesting boxes and also earn Community Involvement Hours. After much post pounding and screwing on clamps to posts, the bluebirds now have 15 new holes to call home. The students were a pleasure to work with and are to be commended for a job well done. A big thank you to Joe Pierrynowski, David Shirley and Jim Albano for their time, expertise and contributions.

Moving forward, Lynda Goodridge chairs a local Bird Friendly City Committee that was formed to partner with the Town of Fort Erie to work toward meeting Nature Canada's criteria for becoming a Certified Bird Friendly City and expanding the biodiversity of birds. More about this program can be found on Nature Canada's website.



Students who installed the Bluebird nesting boxes in front from left to right: Nafasat Rehmani, Owen Gautreau, Lorelie Lavergne, Brayden Leaver, William Everett and Nolan McClellan.
Teachers: Bill Connor, Sandra Mackenzie. Bert Miller Nature Club: President Deb Sher; Board member Dawn Pierrynowski

Contact the Bert Miller Nature Club at <https://bertmillernatureclub.org> for more information, membership and volunteering to help maintain the Bluebird nesting boxes once a year.

World Migratory Bird Day in Fort Erie

by Lynda Goodridge

As part of our Bird Friendly City initiative, we are planning an event for **Saturday, May 14, from 9 am - 3 pm** to celebrate World Migratory Bird Day. This is a celebration held yearly throughout the globe. At its April 25 meeting, the Council officially proclaimed May 14, 2022, as World Migratory Day in Fort Erie. The event will occur at Waverly Beach Park, located on Lake Erie at the end of Helena St. and will include displays, games, and various Bird Friendly City handouts. We will also have Club members on hand to help people find any birds that can be seen in the park. Now, all we need is good weather! If you have some free time that day and can



help us out, please let us know. The Bird Friendly City Team is currently working on a baseline checklist with staff from the Town of Fort Erie to determine what we already have in place and what we still need to do to obtain the first level of certification. Thanks to all the team members who have worked hard to get the information required for this task. It is a lot of work but should be well worth the effort. Saving and improving habitat, removing threats to birds and informing our residents of the benefits these measures will bring will definitely make our community more vibrant.

Fishers in Fort Erie

by Tim Seburn

A Fisher (*Pekania pennanti*) is a feisty, tree-climbing mammal of the *Mustelidae* family with a particular fondness for porcupines. Their ankle joints are flexible, which allows them to descend trees head-first, a rarity for mammals. They once roamed the entire northern Boreal forest and, in the east, occurred as far south as Pennsylvania and Virginia. Their range certainly once included Niagara. Their dense and glossy fur, dark brown or black, was once highly sought after during the fur trade. However, like the beaver and many other fur-bearing mammals, their numbers plunged during the fur trade years, and Fishers were eliminated from much of their range, including Niagara.

Fishers are sometimes called fisher cats. Perhaps this is because their call sounds much like a house cat. Males fishers are larger than females and can weigh up to 18 lbs (8.1 kgs) and measure 41 inches (104.1 cm) from the tip of their nose to



Fisher on a trail cam. © Rick Doan

the end of their tail, with their tails being up to 16.5 inches (41.9 cm) long. Females require a hollow tree or a rock crevice to nest.

In Niagara, the only animal that might be confused with a Fisher is the Mink. Minks are much smaller and only reach up to 28 inches (71.1 cm) long. You can often see a white patch under the Mink's throat, which Fishers do not have.

iNaturalist has several records of Fisher sightings from just south of us in Erie County, New York, beginning in 2018. The same year a Fisher was reported on the ice on Lake Erie south of Long Point, and in following years there are several records of Fisher sightings near the shore of Lake Erie near Long Point. There is also a 2018 sighting from Flamborough, Ontario and more recent sightings near London and Guelph. So although there is still nothing in iNaturalist for Niagara, there have indeed been Fisher sightings here.

Bert Miller Nature Club

PO Box 1088
Ridgeway, ON
L0S 1N0



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

2022 - 2023 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.

Fishers Return to Fort Erie *continued*

I personally first saw a Fisher in Fort Erie while birding with Rick Stockton along the Niagara River. It was in the Niagara Parks parking lot next to Nichols Marina. Fishermen on the scene told us they were hand-feeding it fish. I saw a Fisher here two or three more times for a couple of years. It appeared to be living in the crevices between the large boulders along the river. I think this was about 7-10 years ago. Marcie Jacklin took a photo of it for me, which would help us identify the exact year, but we have been unable to find the photo.

Around the same time, a nature club member, I've forgotten who it was, told me a Fisher was also being seen at Dufferin Islands. Then, in early 2021, Rick Doan sent me a photo of a Fisher taken by a game camera in Marcy / DiCienzo Woods.



Road-killed fisher.

© Tim Seburn

Unfortunately, the next sighting was of a road-killed Fisher on Thunder Bay Road at Six Mile Creek. There had been prior unconfirmed reports of Fishers denning in the sandbanks of the creek. L. O'Brian, a surveyor, discovered the carcass. I

recovered it and unprofessionally measured it to be 41 inches (104.1 cm) from the tip of the nose to the tip of the tail, with the tail being 16 inches (40.6 cm) long.

I then made arrangements to have it properly measured. It was male, weighing in at 11 lbs (5 kgs), the spine - 16 inches (40.6 cm), the base of the neck to the top of the skull - 5 inches (12.7 cm), left ear - 1.75 inches (4.4 cm), tail - 13.5 inches (34.3 cm), left shoulder - 5.5 inches (13.9 cm), elbow to wrist - 4 inches (10.1 cm), paw - 2.5 inches (6.3 cm), hip to hawk - 7.5 inches (19 cm), foot - 5 inches (12.7 cm). (All conversions to cm are approximate).

Fishers are suddenly expanding their range all across eastern North America. One male was even spotted prowling the streets of the Bronx in New York City. So what is causing this sudden range expansion? One hypothesis is that the decrease in population of larger predators benefits smaller predators like the Fisher, as similar range expansion for them is not being seen in the west, where there are still healthy populations of large mammal predators. So squirrels, wild turkeys, and opossums had better watch out!

If you see a Fisher, please consider using iNaturalist to report it along with any photograph if you've taken one. The sightings in iNaturalist are an essential resource for scientists to help them track the changes that are occurring in the natural world.