



## A Message from the Board

Welcome to the spring edition of The Rambler.

Some highlights of 2025 include the Annual General Meeting in March, during which a new board member was elected, the establishment of the Greater Fort Erie Secondary School (GFESS) BMNC Bursary, the City Nature Challenge in April at Shagbark, ongoing work for the Breeding Bird Atlas, and the upcoming outing in June.

The Annual General Meeting was held on Monday, March 10, at the FECC hall, where the membership approved the revised Amendments to the Articles of Incorporation for the BMNC, as required by the Ontario Not-For-Profit Corporations Act (ONCA) (2010), which became effective in October 2021. The province did not accept the previous Amendments as submitted, prompting the Bylaws committee to reconvene and implement the required changes. It is anticipated that these revisions will gain acceptance when submitted later this year. Additionally, during the AGM, Sharaya McCollum-Brown was elected to the Board of Directors following the resignation of long-time board member Eliza Durant. The current board encourages any BMNC member in good standing to consider joining them to support the essential work of a successful and efficient club.

At the May board meeting, the BMNC Board of Directors approved a \$500.00 bursary for a GFESS student participating in the Environmental Specialist High Skills Major (SHSM) program who has demonstrated environmental stewardship or is pursuing post-secondary studies in a related field. Board member Anne Mills led the effort to establish the BMNC Bursary. Those interested in contributing to the GFESS Bursary fund can support its future by visiting [CanadaHelps.org](https://CanadaHelps.org). To donate, enter 'Bert Miller Nature Club of Fort Erie' in the charities section and specify that you wish for the funds to go toward

the bursary.

On April 26, a small group took part in the City Nature Challenge at Shagbark Nature Park, where they learned about the iNaturalist app. This app allows citizen scientists to submit their observations of nature for identification, aiding in the documentation of global biodiversity. The iNaturalist app, available for free on smartphones, features an automated tool for species identification that helps recognize species from photos and sound recordings.



American Robin nestlings. © Marcie Jacklin

2025, celebration, which showcased the spring migration in Canada and the United States. The theme for World Migratory Bird Day 2025 is 'Shared Spaces: Creating Bird-Friendly Cities and Communities,' emphasizing the importance of healthy coexistence between humans and birds.

The year 2025 will mark the conclusion of the current five-year cycle of the Breeding Bird Atlas program, which was initiated in 2021. Volunteer birders are invited to share any unusual nesting observations with Marcie Jacklin at [mjacklin@brocku.ca](mailto:mjacklin@brocku.ca) so these can be included in this edition of the atlas. The Breeding Bird Atlas aims to map the distribution and relative abundance of approximately 300 breeding bird species in Ontario, helping to guide future environmental policies and conservation strategies.

Finally, there is a change to our June meeting: it will now be a hike along the Friendship Trail, followed by a luncheon. The hike will start at the Farmers Market on Ridge Road, Ridgeway, on Saturday, June 7, at 10:30 am. Following the hike,

## Welcome New Members

- Dawn Davidson/Eli Robillard & family
- Joseph Fell
- Carrie Rongits/Chris Ruber & family

## Upcoming Meetings

- June 7 @ 10:30 am - Friendship Trail Walk and luncheon. RSVP required for luncheon, see "A Message from the Board" for update
- September 8 @ 7:00 pm (in person) - Don Scallen—Snakes
- October 14 (Tuesday) @ 7:00 pm (in person) - Owen Bjorgan—Lake Erie Shoreline and Islands
- November 10 @ 7:00 pm (virtual) - Brock Fenton—A Miscellany of Bats
- December 8 @ 7:00 pm (virtual) - Jennifer Baici—Wild Turkeys in Ontario—A Life History
- 2026 Spring Meetings will be updated in our Fall 2025 Rambler

## Upcoming Outings

- Keep an eye out for email updates or check the Club's website or Facebook page for information on future outings.

## Memberships

- September marks the beginning of a new season for the club, and we will start accepting 2026 memberships at our meeting. We look forward to reconnecting with old friends and meeting new ones. Everyone is always welcome. Until then, have a fantastic summer! Wishing safe travels to those who will be going away, and for those enjoying a staycation, please stay safe.



## A Message from the Board

a luncheon gathering will be held at South Coast Cookhouse in Crystal Beach, replacing the previously announced event at Trailside Bar and Grill. Registration for the luncheon is required. Please send your RSVP to Lynda Goodridge at [lgoodridge219@gmail.com](mailto:lgoodridge219@gmail.com). More details will be included in the June BMNC e-News email.

*continued*

On behalf of the BMNC Board of Directors, I wish everyone a delightful summer and hope you take pleasure in the natural beauty of the Niagara Region. I am looking forward to seeing you all in September, and happy birding!

Victoria Busche

## Welcome Our Newest Board Member

*by Tim Seburn*



Sharaya at Shagbark.  
© Tim Seburn

**M**et Sharaya McCollum-Brown, the newest Board Member of the Bert Miller Nature Club. Sharaya joined the Board at the Annual General Meeting in March. She is a local resident and a graduate of Ridgeway-Crystal Beach High School. At 27 years old, Sharaya significantly lowers the average age of the Bert Miller Nature Club Board!

Sharaya currently works at Niagara College in the Youth and Worker Program, and this May, she will begin her studies for a Bachelor of Indigenous Social

Work at Laurentian University. She is deeply committed to equal rights, and in 2022, she helped plan the Toronto Pride Festival.

Sharaya has always been interested in the environment, but she has recently been inspired by her boyfriend, Damien Robinson, a dedicated naturalist. In the past, she worked with Anne Yagi's environmental consulting company, 8Trees Inc., where she assisted with office tasks, social media management, and data analysis related to the Wainfleet Bog.

As a new Board Member of the BMNC, Sharaya has already injected some much-needed energy and enthusiasm. She is making it her mission to recruit many new and younger members and directors for the Club. We all wish her luck, and with her skills in social media, we have no doubt she will succeed.

## The Bert Miller Nature Club Award 2025

*by Lynda Goodridge*

**T**he Bert Miller Nature Club Award was established in 2009 to recognize significant contributions to nature made by individuals in the Niagara area. It was named in honour of our club's namesake, a renowned naturalist and environmental advocate.

We are pleased to announce that this year's recipient is Dawn Pierrynowski, a wonderful advocate for nature. She received her award at our general meeting on April 14th. Here is a list of her accomplishments:

- Served on the BMNC board for 26 years, including terms as President, Secretary, and Membership Secretary.
- Organizes and maintains BMNC memberships. As Membership Secretary, she sends monthly email updates to members with information on programs, events, and more.
- She is the primary liaison with the Town of Fort Erie regarding matters at Shagbark Nature Park. Along with Peter Bonenfant, she sent a letter to the Town urging them to purchase additional property for Shagbark, which recently became a reality. She has also been a grant writer for Shagbark and has conducted outings in Shagbark for both the Bert Miller Nature Club and the Niagara Falls Nature Club. Additionally, she participated in a community planting event with John Potter and the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority during the early development of the Park.
- Served as a grant writer and committee leader, coordinating with the Niagara Peninsula Authority, Niagara College, Land Care Niagara, and Blythwood Homes (Ridgeway-By-The-Lake).



Dawn with Lynda Goodridge  
© Ron Goodridge

- Involved in the development of the Field Guide to Fort Erie's Turtles, Snakes, Frogs, and Toads; also created other informational pamphlets, including collaboration with Cathy Herbert to produce a wildflower handout on Marcy's Woods.
- Designed and created all display materials and games used by BMNC for public information, including various fairs and exhibitions. Coordinated the activities of the button-making machine and developed button designs. Provides storage for these items on her property.
- Various engagements with Heartland Forest, including displays at Winterfest and other events.
- Sharing engaging and informative content about nature on social media.
- Actively participated in representing BMNC at various fairs and events, including the Ridgeway Summer Festival, Stevensville Fall Festival, Birds on the Niagara Festival, and the Butterfly Festival (Coordinator for 2 years).
- Collaborated with the local high school to organize various projects, such as building and placing Bluebird boxes.
- Participated in the beachgrass and dune initiative led by Albert Garofalo.

This is an impressive resume, and we were delighted to present the Bert Miller Award to her in recognition of all her contributions. Dawn's work has not only enriched our club but has also had a profound impact on the local community, inspiring many to join the cause of nature conservation.



## Birds and Brews

by Marcie Jacklin

Late last year, Lynda Goodridge suggested visiting Little Red Coffee for lunch. Upon entering, the owner, Les, immediately recognized me and said, "You are Marcie, aren't you? I follow you on eBird." After placing our orders, we discussed organizing a bird and beer event, as he sells bird-friendly beers. Following several emails, we launched an event called "Birds and Brews."



Marcie and Les.  
© Marcie Jacklin

We planned to birdwatch along the river for an hour before heading to Little Red Coffee for drinks, where I would present on winter ducks found in the Niagara River! Les requested that the event be within walking distance of the café, prompting us to meet on January 11 at the Catherine Street

parking lot by the river.

To our delight, approximately 22 people attended, many of whom were new to birding. Fortunately, we had ample



The group taking turns looking thorough the scope.  
© participant's photo

Duck and Lesser Scaup, as well as three gull species.

After feeling chilly, we made our way to Little Red Coffee, where Les had prepared a room for my presentation. This was a fantastic opportunity for the Bert Miller Nature Club to partner with a local business and connect with individuals unfamiliar with either the club or Little Red Coffee. A huge thanks to Les for being an outstanding host!

support—Lynda provided handouts on winter ducks, and Ron Goodridge set up his telescope for observation. We enjoyed great success, with most participants spotting nearly all seven duck species, including the Ring-necked

## Winter Waterfowl Along the River

by Tim Seburn

On Saturday, January 25, the Bert Miller Nature Club held its annual Winter Waterfowl Outing by the Niagara River. Nine intrepid participants faced the blustery conditions. The week prior witnessed a sharp drop in temperatures compared to recent years, leading to a quick freeze of Lake Erie.

We began our trip along the river beneath Old Fort Erie, where we witnessed efforts to free the "Manitoulin," a Canadian lake freighter trapped in ice for several days after unloading wheat in Buffalo. A larger Canadian Coast Guard icebreaker was assisting several smaller icebreakers in this operation. By 3 PM, the ship had finally progressed as far as Ridgeway.

We didn't stay long at the Fort, as the southwest wind was too chilly. Next, we stopped at the foot of Beatrice Street and then descended to the launch where Nicholl's Marina used to be. Here, we were mostly sheltered from the wind. After that, we stopped at the foot of Catherine Street, where Marcie spotted a Bald Eagle overhead, causing the waterfowl we were watching to flush suddenly. We continued driving slowly along the river, making quick stops at Frenchmen's Creek and then at the Niagara Parks Marina, which was completely iced in.

Finally, we visited Gonder's Flats and hiked alongside the river until we found a suitable spot to observe the new

Bald Eagle's nest. One of the adult eagles, though we couldn't tell whether it was the mother or father, perched in a nearby tree, watching over the nest. In the week prior, a Bald Eagle was discovered along the Parkway and taken to the Owl Foundation. Unfortunately, the bird passed away, with Avian Flu confirmed as the cause of death.



The group ready to brave the weather.  
© Ron Goodridge

Ron Goodridge has been monitoring the nest and has observed a pair of eagles together, indicating that the surviving eagle has found a new mate. Hopefully, the avian flu will not further affect the nesting, and fingers are crossed that there will be eaglets here this spring.

The ice conditions along the shore provided better viewing of waterfowl than we have had in many years, and the total number of ducks was absolutely incredible. Waterfowl species observed included Common, Red-breasted, and Hooded Mergansers,

Bufflehead, Long-tailed Duck, Goldeneye, Redhead, Greater and Lesser Scaup, Ring-necked Duck, Canvasback, and Ruddy Duck. We also saw several American Coots, Canada Geese, and Tundra Swans.

After taking the requisite group photo at Gonder's Flats, we went to the Little Red Coffee House to warm up and have a bite to eat. I'm already looking forward to next year!

## Birds on the Niagara Festival

by Dawn Pierrynowski

The Birds on the Niagara International Birding Festival kicked off with Birds and Beers at Counterpart Brewing on February 7, and other events took place from February 14 to February 17, 2025. Unfortunately, the weather did not cooperate, leading to the cancellation or postponement of several events, including



the Niagara Shores Walk at Niagara Shores, the Adam Beck Overlook event, the Nelson Park Marina Flyby at Nelson Park Marina, the Dufferin Islands Walk at Dufferin Islands, the PAG Paint Battle at Canadian Corps, and the Birding with Pride Walk in

Dawn and Lynda with the Niagara Gorge in the background.  
© Debbie Wright

## Birds on the Niagara Festival

*continued*

Fort Erie.

The weather finally cleared for Family Day at the Niagara Glen Nature Centre, which overlooks the Niagara River. Lynda Goodridge and I spent a lovely day gazing out the windows at the picturesque scenery below this beautiful Nature Centre. We chatted and engaged with the public and other participants. We were joined by volunteers from the Niagara Falls Nature Club, the



Red-tailed Hawk  
© Debbie Wright

Peninsula Field Naturalists, the Niagara River Remedial Action Plan (RAP) representative, and a representative from the Canadian Raptor Conservancy, who presented a live bird demonstration while a slideshow of wonderful photos by Ron Goodridge played on a nearby screen.

## Heartland Forest's Winterfest

*by Dawn Pierrynowski*

Sharaya McCollum-Brown, Lynda Goodridge, Christine Knighton, and I were delighted to represent the Bert Miller Nature Club at Heartland Forest's Winterfest, where we showcased a variety of kid-friendly activities on Saturday, February 22. The cost for this family-friendly event was reasonable and included a cozy fire pit with S'mores, delicious hot chocolate, their signature Tundra Trek on the trails, Reptile Kingdom, craft and construction



Lynda and Christine showing activities to children visiting the BMNC table. © Dawn Pierrynowski

stations, the Niagara Royal Astronomical Society of Canada, and the Niagara Falls Nature Club. Many attendees enjoyed the interactive exhibits inside the Nature Centre.

## Heartland Forest's Youth Symposium

*by Anne Mills*

On April 4, Heartland Forest hosted a Youth Symposium from 3:00 to 5:00 p.m. at their lovely Nature Centre. The purpose of the event was to connect high school students with local organizations and initiatives that offer volunteer hours. The Bert Miller Nature Club had a table at the symposium, supported by members Sharaya McCollum-Brown and Anne Mills.



Sharaya with the BMNC display board.  
© Anne Mills

The table featured information about the Club and included "sign-up" sheets for four volunteer projects: monitoring Monarch Butterflies (in collaboration with Land Care Niagara), overseeing Bluebird boxes at Shagbark Trail, tracking Chimney Swifts, and providing general assistance at meetings and events. Approximately eight students

enrolled in our projects, with Monarch Butterfly monitoring proving to be the most favoured choice. The names of these interested students were forwarded to Land Care Niagara.

Other organizations at the Symposium included the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority, Sustainability - Niagara College, Niagara Falls Nature Club, Peninsula Field Naturalists, and Heartland Forest. Free pizza and pop were served, and marshmallows could be roasted outside over a fire - yum! The Symposium was a highly successful event, with approximately 50 students in attendance. It also provided an excellent networking opportunity for various local environmental groups. Heartland Forest plans to hold it again next year.



Elisabeth and Steven from Heartland Forest draw names for giveaways.  
© Anne Mills

## Town of Fort Erie Bee City Designation

*by Anne Mills*

The Town of Fort Erie recently applied for and received the designation of "Bee City" <https://beecitycanada.org/>. Many cities and townships in Ontario and across Canada have also embraced this initiative, including the City of Toronto, St. Catharines, Brampton, Cambridge, and Hamilton. This designation encourages local residents to cultivate native plants, thereby increasing pollinator species and enhancing overall biodiversity. It must be renewed annually, and for Fort Erie, this involved passing a bylaw to permit native gardens, subject to specific guidelines and property size restrictions.



Anne Mills of the Bert Miller Nature Club, along with other stakeholders, attended a meeting in early April with the Junior and Senior Environmental Planners from the Town of Fort Erie. The meeting aimed to inform stakeholders about the Bee City designation, outline the Town's initial plans, and gather input from the attendees. A school program is proposed for the fall to educate children about the importance of pollinators and biodiversity. The Town indicated that there will be a Bee City Advisory Committee and that the Bert Miller Nature Club will be invited to join. More information will be provided as the program is implemented.



## Marcy's Woods Spring Walk

Marcy's Woods has long been described as a mythical, fairytale-like location. It stands as one of the last fully preserved Carolinian forests in Southern Ontario, providing a sanctuary for numerous Carolinian plant, animal, and fungi species, including some that are rare or endangered. For years, local environmental organizations and individuals have tirelessly championed its protection to maintain its natural heritage. This place has been on my bucket list for ages, ever since I first learned about it as a child. I never had a chance to visit until our group outing on May 3. I attempted to go last year but was called into work. So, when I found out about the Marcy's Woods trip, I eagerly requested that day off.

Our visit to Marcy's Woods, affectionately known as "Marcy's," far exceeded my expectations. I gained valuable insights into Carolinian forests, including their diverse plants, animals, and fungi, along with the area's fascinating history. Despite the rain, our enthusiasm remained strong. From the strikingly diverse forest and its vibrant plant life to the stunning beach and dunes, Marcy's offers a wide variety of species to discover and enjoy. Experiencing such a remarkable place as Marcy's Woods is both a privilege and a delight.



The group on the shore of Lake Erie.  
© Dawn Pierrynowski

by Sharaya McCollum-Brown

(From Tim) Birds observed include:

- Yellow Warbler
- Yellow-rumped Warbler
- Palm Warbler
- Blackburnian Warbler
- Black-throated Blue Warbler
- Black-throated Green Warbler
- Northern Parula
- Black-and-white Warbler
- Nashville Warbler
- Ovenbird
- Great Crested Flycatcher
- Veery
- Wood Thrush
- House Wren
- Carolina Wren
- Titmouse
- Northern Oriole
- Red-bellied Woodpecker

## Join the Swifties!

No, not the Taylor Swift fans—these are nature Swifties! We track the Chimney Swifts, birds that arrive in our area around mid-May to nest in our old brick chimneys. These remarkable birds spend the majority of their lives airborne, feeding on flying insects. They only land to sleep or to care for their young ones in the chimneys. As a Species of Concern, regular monitoring is crucial to track their population numbers. In Fort Erie, most swifts use the brick chimneys in Old Fort Erie, particularly in the Jarvis Street area and in a large building on the Niagara Christian Collegiate campus along the Niagara Parkway.

Monitoring commences in May when Birds Canada sets



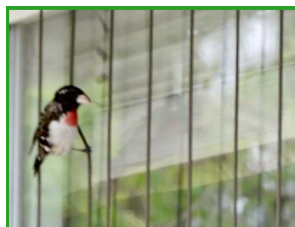
Chimney Swift.  
© Ron Goodridge

specific dates (usually four). Throughout the summer, we conduct checks approximately every two weeks until the end of August. Our responsibility as monitors is to count the number of birds entering each of the six chimneys downtown and the two at NCC. We initiate each monitoring session half an hour before sunset and continue for an additional half hour after sunset, totalling one hour.

It is truly captivating to watch these birds, specialists in flying and diving into chimneys—often in large groups! If you're interested in seeing the process firsthand, we'd love for you to join us. For more information, please contact Lynda Goodridge at [lgoodridge219@gmail.com](mailto:lgoodridge219@gmail.com).

## The Results of My Zen Curtain

I wrote a story for the Fall 2024 Rambler titled "A Do It Yourself Guide to Making an Acopian BirdSaver (Zen Curtain)." I'd like to share the outcomes from this past winter. Fortunately, there were no bird collisions with my windows, which I consider a successful outcome. Additionally, the Alien Tape has functioned well.



Rose-breasted Grosbeak  
grabbing a cord.  
© Dawn Pierrynowski

by Dawn Pierrynowski

With the arrival of spring, I was intrigued to observe a male Rose-breasted Grosbeak swoop in, grasp a cord, hang momentarily, and then take off again. He has repeated this several times. This shot is the best I managed to capture, as he was incredibly quick.

## A Whimsical Spring Diorama

My sister Catherine and I crafted charming centrepieces for the April meeting of the Niagara Falls Nature Club. We incorporated materials sourced from nature, a discount store, and our own collection. Leftover siding scraps were repurposed for the base. Note: You can replace this with any durable material of your choice.

by Margaret Pickles

The fungus log came from a fallen tree in the woods and was screwed to the base. A branch was attached using hot glue into a pre-drilled hole, with smaller twigs positioned accordingly. Cuttings from a curly willow were wrapped around the branches to provide some leaves.

The concept for the paper snowdrop flowers was inspired

## Bert Miller Nature Club

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### 2025 - 2026 Executive

**President** •vacant  
**Past President** •Deb Sherk  
**Vice President** •vacant  
**Secretary** •Viki Busche  
**Treasurer** •Rick Stockton  
**Memberships** •Dawn Pierrynowski  
**Directors** •Lynda Goodridge  
•Sharaya McCollum Brown  
•Anne Mills  
•Tim Seburn

### The Rambler Newsletter

•Newsletter contact: Tim Seburn  
•Editor: Lorraine Brown-Joyce

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.

Meetings are held the second Monday of the month at 7 p.m., in person for September, October and April to June, and virtual via Zoom for November through March. Field outings may be scheduled periodically. Please visit our website, [www.bertmillernatureclub.org](http://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](mailto: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.

## A Whimsical Spring Diorama

by online resources that offer additional ideas for creating paper snowdrop flowers or paper spring flowers. The flowers were crafted from printer paper, while the leaves were made from poster board (cardstock is also suitable). They were secured in place with hot glue.

In keeping with a whimsical theme, wooden bird shapes were purchased at Dollarama and painted with acrylic paint for this craft; however, substitutions can be made. The wing shapes were cut from fabric scraps and glued on with white glue. The button eyes were attached with hot glue.

The chicks are made of two wooden buttons that are glued together and then securely attached to the branch or nest using hot glue. The nest itself is crafted from willow.

Naturally, since I love insects, I had to include some bugs! The ladybugs are charming as they emerge from their winter hibernation. The bees, symbolizing the early spring pollinators, are decorative wooden stick-ons purchased from Dollarama.

You're welcome to let your imagination run wild and add your own wonderful ideas!

If you are working on this project or have created a nature-related painting, drawing, or craft, we invite you to send us a picture along with a brief description. Both adults and children are welcome to share their creations. We would love to see what you've made! Email us at [bertmillernatureclub@gmail.com](mailto:bertmillernatureclub@gmail.com)

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All photos  
© Dawn Pierrynowski