
Nature Niagara News



Bulletin No. NNN 313
August 2015

ISSN: 0829-1241

Niagara Falls
Nature Club

Post Office Box 901, Niagara Falls, Ontario, L2E 6V8
<http://niagaranatureclub.tripod.com>

RUTHVEN PARK VISIT 9TH MAY 2015

On a fine sunny morning, eight energetic Niagara Falls Nature Club members met at the Shoppers Drug Mart in Pelham and carpooled to Ruthven Park in Cayuga off highway #3.

Previously a grand stately home of the Thompson family the property, including the mansion, cemetery, outbuildings & surrounding land were donated to the Land Trust by the last owner with three easement conditions to protect it in the future. Our visit coincided with a family-friendly grand opening celebrating the spring migration of songbirds and included a visit to the bird banding station & tour of the mansion for members who had not previously been inside the house. Clowns performed for the children present and a live raptor display was provided. It was estimated that 120 people attended this event. At the entrance a table was setup with a sign suggesting a fee of \$15.

Conveniently located next to the car park are a number of Purple Martin 'condos' of two different designs which were well populated by insect seeking Martins and their housebound broods providing good photo opportunities. Several trails led away from the car park and we selected the **Carolinian Trail** leading through the wood, and afterwards, explored the **Fox Trail**.

Some birds seen were as follows Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Downy Woodpecker, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Song Sparrow, Yellow Warbler, Pine Warbler, Scarlet Tanager, Cape May Warbler, Blackburnian Warbler, Black-and-White Warbler, Great Crested Flycatcher, Eastern Phoebe, Indigo Bunting and nesting Killdeer. Foliage this early in spring is not yet prolific and enabled acceptable

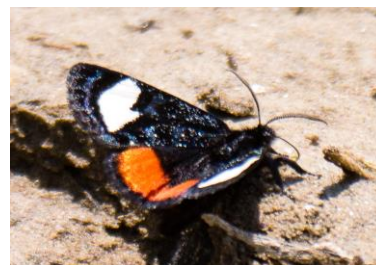
bird viewing in most cases. The property is adjacent to and slopes down to the Grand River once a couple of small inconveniently placed wooden walkways to cross the marsh have been negotiated.

Returning back across the marsh one member who will remain nameless but whose initials are JD spotted what she thought was a four-eyed frog or toad in a small mud pool. All binoculars were soon trained in the direction indicated without immediate success. Eventually **two** pairs of eyes could be seen at water level and the back of a frog or toad emerged above the water surface. JD, not to be outdone ventured closer and sank into the mud in her new sneakers. This event diverted our attention away from the frog/toad and it remained unidentified.

Michael Deely



Killdeer



Grapevine Epimemesis Moth

WEDNESDAY EVENING WALKS & SUMMER OUTINGS

Our evening walks to date have once again been successful. We revisited the Cave Springs area, a walk that was well attended. Many of our favourite locations were also visited. One new area visited was Decew House.

On these walks and a summer outing organized by a sister club we saw many birds, plants and insects.

At the Decew House walk we had the good fortune to find a Juvenal's Duskywing.



Canada Mayflower
Cave Springs



Virginia Ctenucha Moth
Sherkston



Prepops insitivus
Sherkston



Juvenal's Duskywing
Decew House

RED BAY WEEKEND

The sense of anticipation was the same, but the participants and some of the practices were different. Kal and I had accepted an invitation extended by the South Peel Naturalist Club to all members of Carolinian East division of Ontario Nature to join them on their 50th annual Red Bay weekend, held May 22 – 24, 2015

After checking in at Evergreen Lodge on Lake Huron we learned that our \$20.00 per person registration fee covered prizes for a bucket draw as well as meals and accommodation for two outings leaders for birding and botany. I thought of how we in NFNC do things a little differently, alternating spring and fall outings and going to a new location each year, with club members sharing organizational responsibilities and expertise with only our thanks in return. The welcome was warm and the people friendly, and we were eager to get started. After dinner our botany leader, Bill McIlveen, who will give a presentation to our club next May on Plants' Defenses, pointed out the vivid pink of Fringed Polygala, the yellow of Lady's Slipper, and the red splashes of Indian Paintbrush, all along the entrance drive off Red Bay Road.

Next morning we crossed the peninsula and accessed the Bruce Trail in Lion's Head. I quickly realized that Bill's wife Irene was equally knowledgeable about plants, as she pointed out one of the distinguishing features of Balsam Fir, that is, the blisters on the smooth gray bark that pop when pressed, releasing their clear resin. An evergreen which I incorrectly assumed to be Christmas Fern was in fact Holly Fern, unknown south of the Bruce Peninsula. The sharp bristly spines on the ends of its pinnae give it the name holly.

Striped Coralroot glowed a translucent purple-pink in the sun, red fruits of Partridgeberry nested in their dark green foliage, and the round white umbels of Bristly Sarsaparilla clustered in abundance.

After lunch at the lodge we drove north to Black Creek Provincial Park. Beach Plum, with its dainty white flowers, anchored the sand by Lake Huron, while nearby flourished the low periwinkle blue flowers of Dwarf Lake Iris, common here, but rare elsewhere in Canada.

Clumps of Wormwood, Baltic Rush, Canada Wild Rye and Silverweed brought Lake Erie to mind.

A messy tangle, or witches broom, on spruce was evidence of the parasitic fungus Dwarf Mistletoe, a relative of our Christmas mistletoe. Bill pointed out the tiny spikes which can hurl their spores 65 feet into the air, infecting other trees. Not welcome on Christmas tree farms.

We examined the brown glands under the leaves of Buffalo Berry shrub, also called Soapberry, for the soap like froth produced when the fruits are agitated in water. As we moved into the woods we found the tiny white flowers of Goldthread, named for its golden rootstocks, and the soft pinky white flowers of Bird's-eye Primrose leaning over the water of Black Creek.

After dinner that evening we shared stories with each other and with the birding group, led by Mark Cranford. One is always comfortable in company with other nature lovers.

Next morning we set out for Petrel Point Nature Reserve. Here the carnivorous Pitcher Plant and Spatulate-leaved Sundew were just putting out new leaves, not the fully developed plants we see in the fall. The roadside, so colourful with Fringed Gentian in the fall, now waved softly golden with Sweetgrass, so revered by native peoples. With plans to hike elsewhere we too waved goodbye to our new friends in the South Peel Naturalist Club. Their hearty urgings to join them again next year were something we might all consider.

WIN LAAR



DWARF LAKE IRIS



FRINGED POLYGALA



STRIPED CORALROOT

PICTURES BY WIN LAAR

CAVE SPRINGS

Our Wednesday Evening Walks provide an excellent opportunity for members to become familiar with local natural areas, unless one is directionally challenged. Thus, in spite of my best efforts, I missed Rick's outing to Cave Springs Conservation Area on June 3rd. After going north on Camden Road from Fly Rd. the group had explored the area above the escarpment, but had missed the more significant features that make it imperative to preserve Cave Springs.

Fortunately for me, Jean Hampson responded to my disappointment a few days later by offering to take me there. We went south on Victoria Ave. through Vineland, then west on King St. and south on Cave Springs Rd., with careful attention for its barely visible street sign. We parked in a cul de sac by a locked gate to a drive leading to the iconic red barn, with only Jean's assurances that we were indeed at the right place.

After squeezing through the gate and crossing a grassy field we came upon a large boulder with a plaque identifying the Cave Springs Carolinian Forest. Through another gate and soon we were on a steep path leading to the sheer vertical rock face of the escarpment. A rich diversity of wildflowers, ferns and mosses flourished on the jumbled rocks of the talus slope midst a towering Sugar Maple forest.

As we climbed Jean told me how she and Bob come regularly to watch and listen for evidence of breeding birds, part of the many surveys being conducted here.

After many stops to soak in the surrounding beauty and spirituality of a place with thousands of years of habitation we reached the Bruce Trail running along the rim of the escarpment. Heading west we were suddenly blasted by a screeching cacophony of sound, as a very angry Hairy Woodpecker chased us out of his nesting territory. Add one to the Breeding Bird Inventory. Another pause later to peer through a spy hole in the rocks to look down upon the old Lake Iroquois shore that is now tender fruit land.

Heading back down we came upon Kim Froelich of the NPCA, and asked her for directions to the fabled ice caves. Now we followed a different trail, behind the boarded up red house and outbuildings almost to the fenced perimeter of the property, and, as Kim had said, knew we were there by the sudden drop in temperature.

The cave itself was a bit of a disappointment, more a grotto in a rock wall, but we gingerly lowered ourselves down a steep slope, and Jean reached down to an even lower level, soon rising triumphant with a chunk of ice on a hot June day. Intrigued by this magical place I started looking for more information. W. F. Rannie, in his publication, "Lincoln, the Story of an Ontario Farm," wrote that Cave Springs Farm was "the site of a Neutral Indian encampment with long house, and high above on the face of the Escarpment wall were until recently (written in the 1950's) a number of Indian faces carved in stone...." Before the last of these most unusual carvings fell prey to vandals who have erased all traces of them, an archaeologist at the ROM took plaster casts of the heads and preserved them for all time."

W.H. Smith, in his 1846 "Canadian Gazetteer" wrote that the ice cave "at the base of the rocky escarpment wall has excited all who have seen it, the ice even in midsummer being used as a natural refrigerator by successive owners of the farm." Rannie continues, "one such owner, unfortunately, in the 1930's attempted to 'improve' upon nature by enlarging the cave with a blast of dynamite. He brought down some of the roof and succeeded merely in substantially blocking the finest features of the cave. Connected with stories of the ice cave are tales of an underground lake, entry to which until about the 1920's could easily be gained from a field on Quarry Rd.

Another phenomenon is the 'magnesium spring,' well-regarded by Indians for its medicinal properties and for some years trucked to Hamilton and sold as efficacious for several stomach complaints. Chemical analysis in 1950 showed relatively high amounts of magnesium sulphate (Epsom Salt), proving that in this case what everybody knew was substantially correct. On June 16, 2015 the NPCA held workshops seeking public input on a Cave Springs Management Plan. Mark Brickell, project manager for Cave Springs, announced that archaeologists may have located one of the original Indian head carvings, so we may see them again.

Thirty NPCA staff members are currently involved in studies looking at all life forms, historical data, sustainability, etc., to establish base line information on what is at the site. Their reports are to be written and submitted by the end of September, and recommendations made. At

issue is whether the site will be classified as a Nature Reserve, where access will not be widely promoted due to the sensitivity of its features, or as a Nature Environment, which would allow more use.

The house, where previous owner Margaret Reed, the “Witch of Cave Springs,” lived, is in poor shape. The red barn, used for a while as a jail, and later as a stable for Reed’s horses, has a crumbling foundation, but is otherwise sound.

It will be a good while before authorities at various levels of government determine what to do with Cave Springs, but in the meantime, the public is welcome. It is definitely worth the visit.

Win Laar



CAVE SPRINGS



JEAN HAMPTON

LEGACY GARDENS

If you build it, they will come,” could be the motto for the two year old Legacy Gardens beside the NPC’s Butterfly Conservatory. For our August 5th Wednesday Evening Walk curator Sue Clarke treated us to a personalized tour of this installation that celebrates 75 years of School of Horticulture graduates.

Based on a circular design, the garden represents five prairies of Ontario: tallgrass prairie, oak savannah, sand barrens, alvar, and riparian. Both native plants and native cultivars were used, providing larval plants for native butterflies and food for pollinators. At the entrance we saw the vine Dutchman’s Pipe, native to the southern states, but a food plant for the Pipevine Swallowtail.

The main gardens were a sea of yellow, with Gray-headed Coneflower, Black-eyed Susan, Oxeye, goldenrods, Lance-leaved Coreopsis, and the towering Prairie Dock, with its huge sandpapery leaves. Over all waved the delicate fingers of tall prairie grasses, interspersed with deep purples of Missouri Ironweed and Blazing Star, vivid orange Butterfly Weed, crimson Cardinal Flower and soft pinks of Swamp Milkweed and Joe-Pye Weed. Holding the evening light were the whites in Culver’s Root, Virginia Mountain Mint, and a low plant with thin leaves and a tiny familiar flower: Whorled Milkweed. Quite unusual was Rattlesnake Master, with white button flowers over stiff yucca-like leaves.

With the unwelcome tangle of invasives at Malcolmson Eco-Park in mind, we asked about maintenance. Sue and her team discuss the pros and cons of keeping and removing. Native Lance-leaved and Canada Goldenrod, Heath Aster, and Prairie Cordgrass are very aggressive, and may be a problem. No question that non-native and nasty Phragmites must be removed. Big Bluestem grass growing majestically in an area designated as alvar is out of place and must go.

If you build it, they will come. The pond was dug on a Friday and the frogs moved in on Monday. Goldfinches and seed-eating birds are in heaven here. Monarchs, swallowtails, other butterfly species, dozens of dragonflies, busloads of bees and bugs, all are at home here. Skunks, possums, snakes, coyotes, and at least 40 deer create paths and sleeping areas and trim the tastiest plants.

This is a garden that is evolving, always moving, always changing, always beautiful, a good place to visit.

WIN LAAR



Rattlesnake Masters

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Old habits are hard to break, but we can do it. For all the 40 years I've been in Niagara, NFNC meetings were at the library third Wednesdays. Now the library has changed its schedule, and we're second Wednesdays, except for this November 11, when the library is closed, and we meet Nov. 18th.

We've had another full summer of Wednesday Evening Walks, the most popular being at Marcy's Woods, with about 60 attending, and the fewest coming to Bradshaw Park, cancelled due to an extravagance of mosquitoes.

Our season begins with a journey to Kenya and then from the Andes to Amazonia. Pack your bags! We have promised no blizzards when Miriam Richards again is scheduled to speak on Evolution in Action, in November.

If you haven't already signed up and booked your room for our club weekend Sept 11 – 13th at McGregor Point Provincial Park, there might still be time. Contact Kerry Kennedy at 905-892-4932 for details.

Don't forget our December meeting is all about ourselves and sharing our stories and photos. See you soon, on Wednesday, September 9th.

WIN LAAR

NOTICE

Our meetings this year will be held on the second Wednesday of each month with the exception of November when it will be on the third Wednesday.

The presentation at our first meeting on Wednesday 9th September will be made by Marcie Jacklin and Tim Seburn.

Titled a "Journey to Kenya"
An amazing wildlife adventure.

WEEKEND OUTING

This year's weekend outing will be to the McGregor Prov. Park area.

We will base ourselves in Port Elgin. Dates are from Friday 11th September until Sunday 13th September.

All are welcome to join us.

Colonial Motel

Phone 519-832-2021

e-mail colonial.amiller@gmail.com

235 Goderich St

CONTRIBUTIONS

Your editing team would like to thank you for your contributions that make this an interesting and valuable newsletter.

Please send contributions to:

Carol Horvat chorvat1@cogeco.ca or

Rick Young rick.y@sympatico.ca

