
Nature Niagara News



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Niagara Falls
Nature Club

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LONG POINT

In mid-September a few members of the Nature Club took a trip to the Long Point area.

The first stop was at the Big Creek viewing stand where we had the good fortune to see a Moorhen and Wood Duck, plus a Marsh Wren and a Northern Harrier.

Next stop was at the Old Cut, both the banding station and adjacent bush. A good variety of birds were noted here. A number of Magnolia Warblers were seen along with a Connecticut Warbler and a Black- Throated Blue Warbler. A Green Heron, Cedar Waxwings and a Belted Kingfisher were also present.

As we strolled toward the Provincial Park an Osprey flew overhead, also a number of Turkey Vultures circled above. Other birds seen in the park were White- Breasted Nuthatch, Black and White Warbler and a Black- throated Green Warbler.

Next we moved along to the B.S.C. property and saw another Wood Duck and a Ruby- throated Hummingbird. Eventually we moved toward the Port Rowan lagoons, while on the way we came across a flock of 50 to 60 American Goldfinches. At the lagoons there were Northern Shovelers, Tree Swallows and a Pied- billed Grebe. Our final stop in the area was at Lee Brown's Wildfowl Reserve with only

ubiquitous Canada Geese and D.C. Cormorants, however in the vicinity were an American Kestrel and an Eastern Phoebe. On our return journey we stopped at the Townsend sewage lagoons seeing a Dunlin and a Pectoral Sandpiper. A pleasant day despite the odd rain shower.

Rick Young



Long Point 13th Sept. 2014

Birds of Kauai & Northern Ireland

Kauai The Chicken Island of Hawaii

The Niagara Falls Nature Club was lucky enough to have a tour of two different islands this month at our first indoor meeting. Jim Smith shared with us his recent experience at these two amazing places that are almost a third of the way around the world apart. The first island that he mentioned was Kauai, the most northern

island in the Hawaiian chain, known as the Garden Island. It is more widely recognized as the Chicken Island. Only half of the island is even accessible by road due to the rocky mountainous terrain, and the extremely wet weather.

There is an abundance of birds on Kauai. On the rocky shores albatrosses, boobies, and a wide variety of ducks and gulls can be found. On the open areas there are more invasive birds. Chickens run rampant on the island, hence the nickname. Scarlet-Headed Cardinals, Cattle Egrets and Pigeons are very common here, which are native to parts of Asia, Africa or Europe. The jewel of the island may be in the woods, many of the remaining native species make their homes here, such as the I'iwi, Apapane, and the Oma'o. We learned that the invasive species are having such a negative impact on the native species, that it is getting harder and harder to find the indigenous birds.

Next Jim took us to Northern Ireland, 12,000 kilometers away from Kauai. Not to worry, he did not do this all in one trip! In addition to seeing lots of fog, Jim was able to see how bird banding was run in Northern Ireland. Most of the banding here was done in their own back garden, which makes it easier for the bander. Some of the highlights of his trip included the Great Tit, Bullfinch (which had eluded him in the previous visits), and the Magpie, that left Jim with a memory of its beak. The Northern Ireland bander also monitored the population of the local Sandwich Terns. What a great presentation to remind us of the beauty and diversity that exists all over the planet.

Fraser Darling



Scarlet-headed

Cardinals



Black-headed

Gulls

BERT MILLER NATURE CLUB BUTTERFLY FESTIVAL

On a fine day in September a wonderful event was carried out by the nature club.

There were indoor programs about butterflies and damselflies plus insects. Another event was a butterfly release program.

There were also outdoor nature hikes and bird hikes.

A most enjoyable day.

The Bert Miller Nature Club

Is to be congratulated for an excellent event.

PELHAM PROPERTY

A few NFNC members were invited to view a privately owned woodlot in Pelham. There was a wide variety of trees, shrubs and wildflowers to be seen.

Some flower highlights were Hairy Bush Clover, Jerusalem Artichoke and Hairy Aster. While in the tree and shrub group we had three types of Dogwood including Eastern Flowering Dogwood.

Among the plants that prefer wet feet there were examples of Yellow Nut Sedge and Arrow-leaved Tearthumb.

There was also an abundance of Lady Fern on the property.

A very interesting woodlot.

Rick Young

ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM SKINS ROOM TOUR

It was an unforgettable tour of an irreplaceable collection of bird skins at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto.

Our host, Mark Peck, led nineteen NFNC members first into the botany/ornithology prep lab, where information is recorded on incoming birds, most of whom are brought in by volunteers from the Fatal Light Awareness Program after window collisions. Two large garbage bags in the walk-in freezer held one day's dead birds. Over a million birds hit windows in the city each year, second only to those killed by cats.

After being skinned, bodies are put into the bug room with beetles which clean the bones of meat. "Abandon hope all ye who enter here," reads the sign on the door.

Inside we saw lots of activity on the bones of a recently deceased tiger from the Metro Zoo. Before being taken upstairs to the collections room, all specimens are frozen for a week to kill any bugs and larvae.

A quick tour of the vertebrate room found shelves and tables full of bones in casts, some being carefully cleaned of their protective plaster.

And then to the skins room, final resting place for 140,000 birds of international origin, the oldest from 1812, the most recent from just a month and a half ago. Rows and rows of metal cabinets held flat trays of birds, organized according to species, subspecies, sex, age, and time of year. Here one can see changes in plumage with age and variations in different parts of the country, as there is no single typical bird.

Bird banders are welcome to come to learn wing feather patterns, and anyone can make an appointment to come and examine

the specimens, as the collection belongs to the people of Ontario.

To prepare the skin, an incision is made in the breast, the skin turned inside out, innards removed, then the skin is turned, stuffed with cotton and sewn up.

In response to a request for a favourite bird, Mark held up a Red-tailed Hawk, showing the distinguishing red tail, then pheasants of many colours, explaining how male birds often evolve elaborate plumage to attract a female. We saw feathers of remarkable length, pattern and colour, and even some feeling more like scales, from which feathers evolved.

We saw hummingbirds as fat as chickadees, as small as a bee, some with long ribboned tails, or with a beak like a swordfish. And we saw Hannah, the Rufous Hummingbird that came ten years ago to live with Janice and Art Haines of Niagara Falls. Mark told us how Janice did all she could to prolong the life of this little bird from BC well into the snowy winter, eventually sending its body to Mark for Christmas. Today the story of Hannah and her travelling box live on in a cabinet at the ROM.

Win Laar

KENYA

At our May 2014 club meeting Rick Ludkin gave a presentation on Kenya. One of his reasons for travelling there was to give people there an appreciation of nature both flora and avi-fauna.

He also intimated that many folks, especially youngsters there lacked equipment such as binoculars and or funds to purchase same. Some members at that time volunteered to give used and unwanted equipment. If you wish to give a donation please bring any to the next club meeting and I will collect any items to take to Rick.

Rick Young

KAY MCKEEVER'S 90TH BIRTHDAY

A huge cake in the dining room at The Owl Foundation marked the 90th birthday celebrations for our Honourary President, Kay McKeever, on October 16, 2014.

After extending best wishes on behalf of our club, I reminded Kay of the many times she and husband Larry had spoken to our dinner meetings, so often eliciting great hoots of laughter. She told the story again of Tiglet, the Eastern Screech Owl which had been human imprinted, and thus could not be released into the wild.

Tiglet lived in their home, preferring the freedom of the house to the solitude of his cage, which was accessible through a small hole in the bathroom ceiling. A male, Tiglet regarded Kay as his mate, and Larry as his rival. He flew at poor Larry so often that Larry took to wearing a hard hat in his own home.

At night, as Kay and Larry slept, Tiglet would perch on the headboard of their bed, keeping an eye on them. Larry had a bushy moustache, rather furry, one might say, and it waved slightly in the breeze of Larry's deep sleep. One night the temptation became too great, and Tiglet pounced on the "mouse" that was on Larry's face, talons outstretched. One can only imagine the scene, Larry roaring his displeasure, Tiglet fleeing through the hole in the bathroom ceiling, into the safety of his cage.

Before leaving I stopped in to watch zoologists Annick and Stacey banding a rehabilitated Great Horned Owl that would be released later that evening near Woodstock.

Various wing measurements were taken, breast feathers were blown apart to check for fat distribution and the owl was wrapped in a padded sling to be weighed,

before the band was secured, all details carefully recorded. Once Annick's thick leather glove was out of its mouth, the owl clacked its displeasure, before being lowered into its carrying box. It was a very fortunate owl, and thanks to the skill and care of the folks at The Owl Foundation and a volunteer driver, that evening it would be back on home territory, and flying freely.

Win Laar



QUEST FOR ONTARIO'S ODONATA

On October 8, Lev Frid spoke to the Niagara Falls Nature Club about "The Quest for Ontario's Odonata". Odonata is an order of insects that includes both dragonflies and damselflies, two very similar families that most of us have seen flitting around, but many of us don't know too much about. The presentation was visually stunning and narrated with enthusiasm and entertaining asides that brought a personal element to the science behind Lev's work and study of these tiny but fascinating bugs. The slide show was dynamic, filled with picture after picture of brightly coloured dragonflies and damselflies, set against a backdrop of marshes, bogs and fields. With names like Broad-tailed Shadow Dragon and Ebony Bog Hunter, these jewels of nature are just as intriguing for their behaviours as for their ethereal physiques. Some protect their offspring from predators (a rarity in the insect world) and others perform

extravagant dances to attract a mate. One difference between dragonflies and damselflies is that dragonflies rest with their wings flat open against their backs, while damsels hold their wings together at rest. The exception to this rule is the aptly named Spreadwing Damselfly. In addition to their wings, damsels usually have thinner abdomens and legs and their eyes don't meet in the middle of their face, as do dragonflies. Of course, there's another exception: the Clubtail dragonfly group have eyes that don't meet.

All "Odes" are carnivores, and you may have noticed them swooping for mosquitos or flies over lakes and streams. The Flag-tailed Spiny Legs is specialized to feed on butterflies such as the Eastern Comma and others in the group of Cruisers have long legs perfect for catching large prey like butterflies and beetles. Although it's probably not a common occurrence, one was also seen with a hummingbird in its clutch. As its gruesome name suggests, the Dragon Hunter eats other dragonfly species.

Lev talked about his introduction to Odes through friends, and recommends it to birders because when birding slows down in late spring, Odes start to flourish. Like birds, many Odes migrate back into Ontario from warmer overwintering spots. One of the first arrivals in April is the Common Green Darner with a big thorax and massive eyes. Later in April and Early May, Odes such as the Basket-tails with dark, fuzzy bodies and long legs, that overwinters here, begin to emerge. The Swamp Darner is the largest dragonfly in Ontario with a wingspan like that of a house sparrow. The smallest dragonfly in all of North America, the Elfin Skimmer, could sit on a thumbnail (the female is a wasp mimic). Various species can be found through the summer months, sometimes corresponding with prey abundance. For

example, the Mosaic Darner peaks in August at the exact time of the carpenter ant swarms, and hundreds of these dragonflies can be seen when the ant eggs hatch and winged males fill the sky at dusk. Autumn Meadow Hawks are some of the last Odes of the season. At Point Pelee, thousands of Common Green Darners can be seen migrating south again for the winter.

The "Quest" part of Lev's talk referred not only to his own search for Odes rare and common, through the years of learning about the various species, working on other projects and starting a family, but also on the elusive behaviour of many Ode species. In particular, the Broad-tailed Shadow Dragon is a mystery species first discovered by its shed larval skin in the 1990's. Found only in Algonquin Park, in an area inaccessible for a few years due to a road wash-out, this rarity only flies for about 30 minutes at dusk. Lev detailed his search for, and success in finding, this Shadow Dragon, and the brief time they saw it in the dark before it disappeared again. It's still a mystery how it spends the other 23 hours of its day. All of us in attendance were captured by the descriptive storytelling and vivid pictures of Lev's Quest for Ontario's Odonata and will keep a sharper eye on these miniature dragons (and damsels) from now on.

Kerry Kennedy
Kiera Newman



COMMON WHITETAIL

A NEW ONTARIO BUTTERFLY GUIDE THE ROM FIELD GUIDE TO BUTTERFLIES OF ONTARIO, 2014

The ROM has just introduced a new addition to its excellent series of Field Guides to various flora and fauna of Ontario. This latest guide covers all 167 species of Butterflies that are found in Ontario. The combined experience and expertise of Peter W. Hall, Canadian National Collection of Insect research associate; Colin D. Jones, Natural Heritage Information Center zoologist; and ROM entomology technicians Antonia Guidotto and Brad Hubley, result in a remarkable and thorough treatment of the subject – Butterflies of Ontario.

The introduction pages which, of course, include the life history and morphology of butterflies, mostly focus on Ontario including the history of butterfly study, conservation, butterfly gardening, and places to observe butterflies. Particularly useful to new enthusiasts is the easy to use pictorial dichotomous key to the families of butterflies.

The 16 comparative plates are a welcome and useful feature. We will now be able to compare the pearl crescent to the northern crescent without flipping between pages. Is it a Spring Azure or a Summer Azure, or one of the other Blues? Confusing punctuation is also clarified on the Anglewings plate – *is it a comma or a question mark?* There are also comparative plates for the sulfurs, the hairstreaks, the browns, the duskywings and the skippers, and more.

The species accounts are ordered taxonomically with colour coded page edges for each family for easy referencing.

Each species is beautifully covered with several photographs including the caterpillar, on two facing pages. Excellent distribution maps, and flight season graphs that are divided into Boreal, Mixed Forest, and Carolinian Zone, will help narrow down which species can be found in our unique zone at a particular time of the season, as well as their relative abundance. And for the listers among us there is a checklist.

I believe this amazing new butterfly field guide will soon become the field guide of choice for butterfly watchers in Ontario. My copy will start to get some serious wear and tear this summer as my older North American Guides start to collect dust.

Margaret Pickles

CRANBERRY PICKING IN NORTH BAY

Fingers parted low green foliage and probed velvety mounds of moss in search of the elusive red fruits. We were quickly gaining an appreciation for the effort required in earlier times to gather food for the winter.

We were in a wild cranberry bog in North Bay, where water swallowed our every footstep across the spongy sphagnum moss. My thoughts turned to the native peoples, who incorporated the nutrient rich cranberries into their pemmican.

Our grandchildren were quiet and intent, unknowingly partaking in a ritual that has endured for thousands of years. Our daughter included a bouquet of Red Chokeberry branches which later formed a cheerful centrepiece on our Thanksgiving table. When next we would be together, there would be holly, spruce and pine, in the season of red and green.

There is something deeply satisfying in pairing red and green. In her book, *The*

Global Forest, Diana Beresford-Kreuger writes that red and green have been mystical colours since ancient times. We see them in the hollies of the old world and of North America, where they were known as medicinal trees, holy plants. Green is the colour of forests, and red is the colour of blood.

Diana explores our connection to the forests. Blood is primarily made up of red hemoglobin molecules carrying oxygen throughout our bodies. In plants green chloroplast sacs carry the mobile chlorophyll molecules. Oxygen is delivered from the chloroplast sacs in the leaves of all plants and trees into the atmosphere upon which we depend.

“These two sister molecules, hemoglobin and chlorophyll, the red and the green, conduct the pattern of our lives. Without them, we would not survive as a species or as a planet.”

Perhaps intuitively we recognize the intertwining of our complimentary systems, and that is why it is so satisfying to be picking bright red cranberries in the lush green bog with our grandchildren.

Win Laar



NOTICE

At our November meeting a book sale will be held.

Bring your unused nature books or magazines and or nature jig-saw puzzles.

All proceeds to go to our general funds

CONTRIBUTIONS

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

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