



The Rambler!

A Newsletter of the Bert Miller Nature Club
Fall 2010

Coming Up

BMNC

All indoor programs held at Stevensville Conservation Area Clubhouse, Main & Ott Rd.

Vernal Pools

Scott Sampson, President of the Ontario Vernal Pool Association gives us an update on the status of these important ephemeral bodies of water.
Mon., Oct. 18, 7:00 pm

Shagbark Nature Park

Learn about bluebirds, chimney swifts and an unusual tower. Bring a plastic bag and gloves to help with park cleanup.
Sat., Oct. 23, 10 am
Contact: Dawn Pierrynowski
905-382-2476

The Bird Detective

Popular author and researcher, Bridget Stutchbury, gives us the facts and important findings regarding our feathered friends.
Mon. Nov. 15, 7:00 pm

Reflections on the Past, Present & Future

September for the Bert Miller Nature Club is like New Years. We set forth our programming and goals, and hope to achieve everything that we set out to do. It is also a time for reflection. I vividly remember the first meeting, the naming of the club, and the various draft copies of our objectives which focus on preservation, restoration, environmental awareness, collaboration, and honouring local environmentalists. I still have the logos that were presented for our logo contest. We joined Ontario Nature and, directly and indirectly, have joined forces with many other organizations throughout the region. It seems like only yesterday.

Through our members, and the executive itself, there is a lot happening. We are involved with the Environmental Advisory Committee of Fort Erie, The Niagara Land Trust, The Niagara Heritage Alliance, The Citizens Coalition of Greater Fort Erie, NEST Niagara, The Niagara Envirothon, and Ontario Nature. We have received two grants for scientific studies which we are proud to say have been awarded to Albert Garofalo. He is conducting a salamander survey, and "The Lake Erie Shoreline Survey". The latter is a very significant project in which Albert is collecting biological data in order to compare it to historical records.



Lake Erie Shoreline

Members of the New York State Botanical Society and volunteers from the three sister clubs (Bert Miller Club, Niagara Falls Nature Club, and Peninsula Field Naturalists) are all assisting with this wonderful endeavor. Data collection is often the forerunner of positive environmental change. The stewardship of Shagbark Nature Park is also ongoing and we are presently working with Niagara College to update our plan for the area. This is only a highlight of a few of our activities and initiatives. We will keep

Holiday Pot Luck

Bring your favourite dish to share and a place setting. Beef on Wick tickets \$5.00. Albert Garofalo discusses Biodiversity and the Lake Erie Shoreline.
Mon. Dec. 20, 6:00 pm

Coastal Zone Program

Learn about Carolinian Canada's plan to create a Lake Erie Coastal Stewardship Trail.
Mon. Jan. 17, 7:00 pm

Great Winter Bird Hunt

Backroads birding in search of Bluebirds, Snow Buntings, Hawks & Owls. Meet at Stevensville Conservation Area.
Sat., Feb. 19, 1:00
Contact: Paul Philp
905-894-2723

Annual General Meeting

Living Waters: Reading the Rivers of the Lower Great Lakes. Margaret Wooster takes a look at the health of our waterways.
Mon. Feb. 21, 7:00 pm

Bird Banding at Dry Lake: A Family Affair

Find out about this unique operation involving an entire family.
Mon. March 21, 7:00 pm

everyone updated through "The Rambler", our new and wonderful website, and general meetings.

One initiative I am separating from the others. The proposed speedway in Fort Erie is a major concern from an environmental point of view. Every citizen in Fort Erie should be concerned about some of the impacts and, like our club, have their concerns answered. Our club is not against development or initiatives that might stimulate our local economy which are greatly needed. We are, however, bound by our constitution and moral ethics to raise environmental concerns. When those concerns aren't being properly addressed, what do we do? With today's environmental information, data, and excellent information transmission methods, answers should be relatively easy to come by? I may stand corrected, but as far as I know, no concern that we have raised has been thoroughly addressed by anyone. Noise, idling of cars on entrance and leaving of the site, wetland concerns, air born pollutants, etc. etc. etc. All we want is to have these concerns addressed and to have proper measures taken to protect what little is left of our natural environment. We shouldn't need another warrior canoe to get answers. Open dialogue and information sharing is a much better method and one that we keep pursuing.

Paul Philp

Editor's Note:

Last spring, Paul was the recipient of the R.W. Sheppard Award, presented by the Niagara Falls Nature Club to an individual who demonstrates a keen interest in the environment and who strives to inspire others to do likewise. With Paul's many involvements in various environmental pursuits, he is definitely a worthwhile recipient and we are proud to count him as a member of our club. Congratulations, Paul.



Photo Courtesy of Janice Haines

NFNC

Monthly indoor programs held at Niagara Falls Public Library, Victoria Av., 3rd Wed., 7:30 p.m.

Speakers on a variety of topics. Complete schedule online:

niagaranatureclub.tripod.com

Ducks Along Lake Ontario

Sun., Nov. 21, 9 am
Bring a lunch & meet at Tim Horton's, Prudhomme's Landing.

Contact: Gisele Mills, 905-892-3973

Gulls Galore

Sun., Dec. 5, 9:00 am
Dress warmly & bring a lunch. Meet at the control structure above the falls. Contact:

Kayo Roy, 905-892-4433

Christmas Bird Count

Mon. Dec. 27
Plan to participate in this important census.

Contact: Kayo Roy 905-892-4433

Waterfowl Along the Niagara River

Sun., Jan. 23, 9 am
Bring a lunch & meet at the parking lot at Dufferin Island.

Contact: Gisele Mills, 905-892-3973

Mink or Otter?

This article of mine is one from a few years ago that embarrassed me at that time. A good lesson in nature is "Don't assume you know it all."

There are two people in nature I hold in the highest regard. One is the late Bert Miller and the other is Ernie Giles, formerly of Fort Erie but now from the Lake of Bays. Ernie called us. "Could they stop in for a while?" "Come for lunch," we replied. They did. I thought that I could show them photos of the Niagara river otter. "Otter?" They both said, "That's not an otter, Earl." They proceeded to show me why. "It's a wild MINK!" "I said, but the photographer who lives on the Niagara Boulevard, said that it was so playful like an otter. She was able to approach it. "Can you get that close to a wild mink?" "Yes, was the answer. I remembered that I had an Audubon Mammal book. We looked up river otter and mink. There was the proof. The mink is much smaller. The shape of the head was conclusive as we looked at the photos. My two friends just looked at me as if to say, "Earl, give it up."



After lunch and fellowship they left. Just then two electricians arrived. As the two men were to leave I said to the one, "What do you think this is?" "Looks like a mink. I'm originally from Port Severn my and my mother lives in Honey Harbour. She has wild mink there. They play around just like otters. The otters are much larger than this guy."

Anyone see a river otter on the Niagara, give me a call, eh.
Lesson learned - Don't jump to conclusions in nature!

Earl Plato

NOTE: Earl has a book coming out soon containing 100 of his more than 1,000 published articles. Way to go, Earl!

Dufferin Island

Sun., Feb. 20, 2 pm

A leisurely walk along the trails. Meet in the parking lot. Bring a lunch & some seeds for the chickadees.

Contact: Joyce Sankey
905-329-9672

PFN

Monthly indoor programs held 4th Monday, 7:30 p.m., at Mountainview United Church, 150 Glendale Ave., St. Catharines. For details on speakers, contact John Potter: 905-892-2566

Rocky Horror Hike

Sun. Oct.31, Time

TBA

Wear a trail-safe costume for hiking the escarpment near Burlington & visit the haunted Ireland House Museum (\$4.50)

Contact: Brian Calvert
905-892-6267

Woodend Cons. Area

Sat. Nov. 6, 10 am

Meet at entrance gate.

Learn where to look for and how to identify mosses & lichens.

Contact: Roman Olszewski,
905-732-9955

A Secret Preserve

Many of our members are likely unaware there is an unnamed, unsigned, seldom-visited, preserve located on the Point Abino Peninsula. In fact, two of our former Presidents, Earl Plato and in particular Rob Eberly, were instrumental in encouraging Rick Phillips, the original owner, to take action to conserve his property. Someday soon it would be interesting for our club to arrange outings to help the present owner, the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority (NPCA), with verifying this site's biological inventory.

Based on the few visits by club members to date, the species at risk expected to be documented here include red headed woodpecker, Blandings turtle, snapping turtle, milk snake, eastern hog nose snake, and fox snake. This 95 acre reserve has a wetland along its Southern border, a sugar bush with some old growth walnut trees along its Western edge, with the remainder of the site being dominated by meadows.



Fox Snake

Walking through the meadows one is struck by the absence of European buckthorn. This invasive shrub, first recorded in Niagara by Bert Miller in the 1940's, has now almost entirely replaced hawthorn and our other native shrubs throughout Fort Erie. Non-native botanical species typically do not support insects, contributing to the dramatic decline happening to our bug-eating birds. The positioning of this preserve makes it a protective buffer for the Point Abino peninsula, designated as an Important Bird Area and one of the most critically important Carolinian sites remaining in Canada.

From start to finish, it took almost four years of work before the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) acquired the property in 2008. When asked, Rick Phillips said, "Yes, I'm satisfied, I'd do it again." But he goes on to note the reserve could not have been created without the support of several people, including Mayors Wayne Redekop and Doug Martin, Kim Craiton, John Maloney, Tim Hudak, Darcy Baker (NPCA), and James Duncan (NCC). Both

Vineland Research Station

Sat., Nov.13, 12:30pm
Meet in the parking lot of the Agriculture Canada Research Station for a stroll in the arboretum, followed by a fascinating talk “Sex in the Forest”
Contact: Brian Calvert
905-892-6267

Christmas Greenhouse Tour

Sat., Dec.11, Time TBA
Enjoy the warmth of the Royal Botanic Gardens in the morning and visit the Victorian Christmas exhibit at Dundurn Castle in the afternoon
Contact: Brian Calvert
905-892-6267

Christmas Bird Count
Sun., Dec.19, Time TBA
Census of birds in the St. Catharines area.
Contact: Marcie Jacklin
905-871-2577

Polar Bear Hike

Sat., Jan. 1, Time TBA
Take a hike on the Lynn Valley Rail Trail in Port Dover, watch the Polar Bear Plunge& enjoy a free fiddle concert.Bring a lunch & food bank donation. Contact:
Brian Calvert
905-892-6267.

Rick Phillips and James Duncan singled out Dave Heyworth, Senior Policy Planner with the Town of Fort Erie, as being particularly helpful. Rick also notes it was important his daughter Amy and son William were involved and fully supported his decision.

Rick says, “I hope our example will encourage some of our neighbours to take a look at this and consider doing something similar.” To that, we at the Bert Miller Nature Club say, “Hear, hear”. We congratulate Rick and all those who helped make this happen. And we encourage our members to continue their support of NCC, NPCA, as well as the Niagara Land Trust, so conservation work can continue in Fort Erie.

Tim Seburn

Canadian Motor Speedway Update

A year has passed since the Canadian Motor Speedway proposal was first announced at Fort Erie Town Hall. Every opportunity has been exercised by Concerned Citizens of Greater Fort Erie (CCGFE) to express our concerns and objections to this regressive development over mainly good agricultural lands, environmentally sensitive corridors and a Provincially Significant Wetland. We waited patiently for a promised report from the Mayor who, on the taxpayers’ dollar, attended the Richmond speedway in the spring in order to experience the event and explore how Richmond mitigates the negative side effects of noise, traffic, pollution, infrastructure issues, etc. CCGFE has inquired about the report and the answer from Town staff to date has been that a report has never been completed. Mayor Martin’s comment after his trip, noted in an interview in the Niagara Falls Review May 14, 2010, was, “you could hear (noise), but it wasn’t problematic”. What does this mean exactly and is this the extent of feedback we can expect from our ‘investigative team’?

On September 13th, Fort Erie Town Council passed the zoning and bylaws which will allow the construction of a motor speedway in conjunction with other ancillary uses. Rather than wait for all the required studies to be completed, including the peer review of the noise study, the Town instituted holding provisions on the new zoning that will not be removed until the necessary studies are complete to the satisfaction of the Town and other governing bodies.

The new zoning, MS-434 (H) (the area occupied by the actual motor speedway) allows the use of motor vehicles, motorcycles, go-carts and motorized snow vehicles. Operating hours are 9am-6pm, seven days a week, year round, exempting eight “Automotive Race Events” per year (each lasting up to three days in duration) from the 6pm curfew.

EDITOR'S NOTE:

Sandy and some members of CCGFE attended the Michigan International Speedway. The grandstand holds 119,000 spectators, only 19,000 more than the Canadian Motor Speedway's ultimate build-out goal. She took these pictures of the grandstand area and the campground.



Sandy was amazed at how much land the grandstand used



A campground that looks like a parking lot

A warm welcome is extended to the following new members of the Bert Miller Nature Club:

Sean Ong
Alec Wick
Amy Brunning
Lori Knight
Joan Dunn .
Scott Sherk

We are pleased to have you join us in discovering the wonders of our natural environment.

This bylaw and how it relates to noise is, in our opinion, far from comprehensive. There is no curfew for the exempt race events; no provisions have been made limiting or monitoring noise levels; nor are there any mitigating strategies to deal with noise complaints from the community. We are unaware of any completed studies relating to noise and vibration effects on wildlife.

CCGFE struggles to understand why what is probably the single largest development in Fort Erie's history has been rushed forward without proper, independent investigation by the Town. Most Fort Erie residents still do not understand this is NOT just one or two races a year; but a track that will be used year round for car clubs, driver experience, and other private functions (all of which operate on a skeleton staff and do not involve any spectators, aka 'tourists'). This is strong evidence that the Town has not taken enough time to inform the residents and consider the impact this development will have on the character of Fort Erie. Development is necessary, but must it be at the expense of our quality of life?

The final chapter is far from written. CCGFE has hired a planner and lawyer to represent our concerns at the OMB hearing, a date for which has not yet been set. For more information, to volunteer or make a donation please check us out on the web: www.ccgfe.org or contact us at 905.994.7422

Sandy Vant, President
Citizens Coalition of Greater Fort Erie

Shagbark Nature Park Update

The Bert Miller Nature Club has been the steward of Shagbark Nature Park since 1999. The park has undergone many changes, some of which include: a parking lot and trail; the blazing of trails; the installation of blue bird nesting boxes and the construction of a Chimney Swift tower. In 2005 and 2006 community planting events were held to increase the biodiversity of native species

On Saturday, October 23 at 10:00 the Club will meet at the Shagbark parking lot on Burleigh Rd. This is

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welcome and can be

forwarded by email to

lynda.goodridge@

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your chance to participate in the stewardship of the park by helping with any clean-up of trash as well as the maintenance of the Blue Bird nesting boxes. We will also enjoy a walk on the trails to look for the local flora and fauna. If you are unable to go but would like a virtual walk through the park, visit the Club's website, www.bermillernatureclub.org and look under projects.

The educational signage has been completed for the Chimney Swift tower and is being manufactured at this time.

Unfortunately, some vandalism of the tower has taken place in the past year and so a few repairs are needed. Let me know if you are handy with a hammer and we will look it over.

Chimney Swifts have been recently listed by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) as a federally threatened species. Their population has declined in Canada by 96% over the last 40 years.



I would like to begin a new project in the spring of 2011 and need your help. This past June, Bird Studies Canada invited Ontario residents to help look for Chimney Swifts by holding an Ontario-wide Chimney Swift "Blitz" They are conducting an extensive study and are relying on volunteers to gather information about Ontario's Chimney Swift population and identification of their habitats. I would like to form a group to do the monitoring of our local birds. If I can get a group of 10 volunteers, Bird Studies Canada will provide a workshop on Chimney Swift monitoring protocol. Please contact me at 905-384-2476 or talk to me at a meeting. If you have observed Chimney Swifts going in and out of a structure, please let me know the location. The following link has a more complete explanation:

<http://www.birdscanada.org/research/speciesatrisk/chsw/>

Another interesting web page lists results of studies done all over North America after having a Swift Night Out, which is similar to the recent Ontario Chimney Swift "Blitz".

<http://www.concentric.net/~dwa/page56.html>

Dawn Pierrynowski

Ridgeway Summer Festival Recap

The change of venue didn't put a damper on this year's festival with hundreds of people attending over the two days. The Bert Miller Club booth was located in the gymnasium of the Crystal Ridge Community Centre, along with a number of other organizations. Joining us again this year was Stan Miksovsky and his menagerie of snakes, frogs and other amphibians. Stan was assisted by a young man named Griffin, and Scott Sherk added to the fun by bringing a selection of native species. Sky Hunters International entertained outside the building with their fabulous raptors.

Dawn Pierrynowski came through with a great nature display and our button-making table was busy both days. Hassleman Nurseries donated a selection of native plants, giving us an opportunity to talk to people about the benefits of choosing this option for their gardens.

Many thanks to the volunteers who helped make this event successful once again.



Our button-making table was a big hit !



Our reptile crew was kept busy as well!



Our information display was awesome!

You Can Help

Every five years, the North American Trumpeter swan survey is carried out by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, in conjunction with the Canadian Wildlife Service, to assess the health of these birds. The 2010 survey will be conducted this fall.

If you have spotted a Trumpeter Swan, you can help by sending a report of the sighting to stewardship@wymarsh.com. The report should include your name, phone number, email address, home address, date, time, location, tag number, colour, number of adults and cygnets and any other comments you think are important. An official report will be available in 2011.

Adults swans are white with a solid black beak, legs and feet, weighing up to 30 lbs. with a 7 ½ - 8 ft wing span and can live up to 35 years in captivity. They are the largest waterfowl in North America and the largest swans in the world. Young swans less than a year-old are called cygnets and are brownish/grey with a pinkish beak and legs. For more information visit

www.trumpeterswansociety.org