



# The Rambler!

A Newsletter of the Bert Miller Nature Club  
Spring 2010

## Coming Up

### BMNC

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

### **Restoring our Natural Environment**

A member of the Niagara  
Restoration Council  
shows us what is being  
done in the peninsula to  
repair and restore some of  
our natural areas.  
Mon. Apr. 19, 7:00 pm

### **Nature in Niagara Series: Part 2**

### **The Flora & Fauna of Marcy Woods**

A public seminar co-  
sponsored by the Fort Erie  
Public Library and  
BMNC. Club members  
highlight the wildflowers,  
amphibians & birds that  
inhabit Marcy Woods.  
Wed., Apr. 21, 7:00 pm  
Centennial Library

### **Marcy Woods Walk**

Explore the flora and  
fauna of this beautiful  
piece of Carolinian  
woods. Meet at the end  
of Holloway Bay Rd.  
Sat., Apr. 24, 9:30 am  
Contact: Tim Seburn  
905-871-2577

## And the winner is.....



Photo courtesy of Paul Philp

The Bert Miller Nature Club Board is pleased to announce the 2010 recipient of the Bert Miller Award, Rick Young. Rick has been a mentor to many budding naturalists by sharing his knowledge and enthusiasm for Niagara's flora and fauna.

He is a member of all three nature clubs in the region and has been instrumental in bringing these organizations closer together. For many years, Rick has served on the Niagara Falls Club executive in several capacities, including that of president. He is a regular leader on club outings and always makes a point of helping others learn how to identify the various species that are found along the way. He continually upgrades his own skills by doing identification research to ensure his accuracy and generously shares this information with others.

Along with other dedicated individuals, Rick has put in countless hours conducting a natural areas inventory in conjunction with the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority. He has also been a regular volunteer at the Haldimand Bird Observatory banding station in Rock Point Provincial Park for a number of years.

In recent years, Rick has used his interest in technology to keep us all informed of upcoming events and recent publications through his email network – a fantastic volunteer service that is much appreciated.

It is an honour to recognize this gentle naturalist for whom volunteering seems to come so naturally! Congratulations, Rick, and thank you for all your contributions.

**NOTE TO MEMBERS:** If you would like to nominate someone for next year's Bert Miller Award, please submit the individual's name, along with a brief description of his or her accomplishments to a member of the Board of Directors. For a copy of the award criteria, contact Lynda Goodridge.

What a team!

It has been an enjoyable experience as your president these past 4 years. When I began in 2006, I would have never believed the opportunities that being president would offer. I have learned to develop programs, meet with the membership and speakers each month and work with some of the best people around. For now Shagbark Nature Park will continue to be a top priority and I will continue on the board as vice president. I am proud of the Bert Miller Nature Club and what it stands for and for what it has accomplished. I am honoured to have board members I consider friends. They work very hard and do an outstanding job of placing the Club's image and environmental objectives to the forefront both within the Club and the community

Thank you, Paul Philp, for stepping up to take on the role of president for a second time. Your long history of leadership includes: being a board director and mentor, developing the Club's programs and booking speakers. You have been editor of the Rambler, Junior Naturalists leader, guest speaker, outings leader, Ontario Nature rep. and keeper of the membership log. It is wonderful that you will be our leader again

Thank you, Lynda Goodridge, for your exceptional work as secretary. It is no easy task to keep the minutes accurate. As editor of The Rambler, you keep it current, interesting and professional looking. You have taken on the booking of guest speakers, organizing our participation at the Ridgeway Festival each summer and developing outreach programs through the library. The wonderful initiatives you are fostering promote the Club and the environment. Your passionate, dedication and attention to details are invaluable.

Thank you, Tim Seburn, for your work not only keeping the general finances of the club straight but making sure that Bingo is also organized. You have taken the initiative to stay on top of environmental issues, organize the web site with your son, Matt, chair the Fort Erie Environmental Action Committee (EAC) and become involved with the Niagara Land Trust. Your love of the community and the environment is evident in who you are and what you do.

Thank you, to directors Pat Burke, Janet Kellam, Dave Mitchell, and Rick Stockton for your knowledge, as well as your careful thought and guidance on a whole range of topics that come before the board. Your hard work is appreciated for everything you do, from keeping the club's monthly social organized to baking goodies, from researching environmental issues to writing letters, for standing up for the environment to making a difference. Your volunteer work for the Club makes our Club work and has made it a success.

Dawn Pierrynowski

“Never underestimate that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world, indeed it's the only thing that ever has.”

Margaret Mead

And one more thank-you

## NFNC

Monthly indoor meetings held at the Niagara Falls Library, Vitoria St., 3<sup>rd</sup> Wed., 7:30 pm. Speakers on a variety of topics. Complete listing online [niagaranatureclub.tripod.com](http://niagaranatureclub.tripod.com)

### **Beamer Point Hawk Watch**

Good Friday, Apr. 2  
All day. Watch & count migrating hawks, falcons & eagles. Club displays on view.

Contact: Don Mills  
905-892-3973

### **St. John's Conservation Area**

Sat., May 1, 10:00 am  
Explore spring wild flowers & migrating birds. Bring a lunch & meet in parking lot.  
Contact: Janet Damude  
905-892-2158

### **Fairview Cemetery**

Sat., June 5, 2:00 pm  
See the large number of interesting trees to be seen here. Park by Admin. Bldg off Morrison or Stanley  
Contact: Joyce Sankey  
905-329-9672

### **Queenston Heights Pot Luck Supper**

Wed., June 16, 6:00 pm  
Bring plate, cup, utensils and a dish to share. Followed by a walk in the woods.  
Contact: Gisele Mills  
905-892-3973

At our Annual General Meeting on February 15<sup>th</sup>, outgoing president, Dawn Pierrynowski, received a well-deserved Certificate of Appreciation, which was acknowledged by those in attendance with a standing ovation.



Photo courtesy of Ron Goodridge

The Bert Miller Nature Club Board is grateful to Dawn for the outstanding leadership she has shown over the past four years. Her organizational skills have put us on track and have helped us to better focus on our goals and objectives. Her work with the Shagbark project has resulted in the construction of educational signage and a Chimney Swift tower, an innovative addition to this natural area. She has enhanced our monthly meetings with interesting and informative displays, as well as keeping us apprised of upcoming events and issues concerning the natural environment. Dawn has also raised funds to support the Shagbark project and has secured discounts on equipment and materials for the club. Thank you, Dawn, for all your contributions to both the board and the general membership. We're glad that you are still remaining on the board as vice president.

Lynda Goodridge

## Part I of Nature in Niagara Series a Success

On the evening of Wednesday, February 3<sup>rd</sup>, an audience of close to 50 was treated to a presentation and photo slideshow on the "Wonderful Waterfowl on the Niagara River". Held at the Centennial Branch of the Fort Erie Public Library on Gilmore Road, the event was the first of a two-part "Nature in Niagara" seminar series presented by the Bert Miller Nature Club in partnership with the Library. Club member Marcie Jacklin talked about the Niagara River as an internationally-recognized "Important Birding Area" (IBA) and highlighted many of the individual bird species which migrate from more northern breeding grounds to spend the winter on the River. Marcie's passion for birding and her gentle humor captivated the audience as she offered identification tips and historical anecdotes about over 25 species of ducks, geese and gulls commonly found along the River during the months of November through March. Ron Goodridge helped Marcie illustrate her talk by providing bird photos which he has taken along the River and elsewhere throughout the Niagara/Hamilton area.

## **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

### **Short Hills**

#### **Sanctuary Cleanup**

Sun., May 2, 10 a.m. Please help the Hamilton Naturalists Club with the annual maintenance of their sanctuary at the corner of Metler Road and Centre Street, east of North Pelham. Plenty of wildflowers! Bring lunch and tools. Brian Calvert 905-892-6267

#### **Port Weller Wildflowers & Birds**

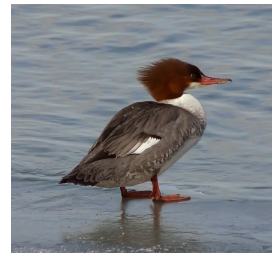
Sat., May 8, 9 a.m. Meet at Malcolmson Eco-Park, north of Niagara Street in St. Catharines, for a walk through the forest to the west pier of Port Weller. Brian Calvert 905-892-6267.

#### **Rock Point Birding**

Sun., May 16, 10 a.m. Our annual birding outing meets at the Port Colborne Macdonalds Restaurant on Highway 3 for the carpool. Bring lunch. Barb West 905-935-5339.



On the following Saturday, 20 hardy souls, including several "new birders" from our Wednesday audience, endured a brutally cold and windy day on a field trip to look for some of these "wonderful waterfowl". We spotted plentiful Common and Red-breasted Mergansers, Redheads, Canvasbacks, Scaups, Buffleheads, Goldeneyes, and Long-tailed Ducks to name just some of the species found that day. A special treat was watching two adult Bald Eagles buzzing the rafts of ducks on the River just north of Frenchman's Creek, while another Eagle watched the proceedings from a perch on Strawberry Island. Later in the day, several of the group went on to Adam Beck in Niagara Falls and found an Iceland Gull. Thanks to Marcie, Lynda and Ron, Tim Seburn, Rick Stockton and Dawn Pierrynowski for their help on the outing.



The second seminar in the series--"Fabulous Flora & Fauna in Marcy Woods"--will be presented at the Centennial Branch on Wednesday, April 21 at 7pm. A follow-up guided walk through Marcy Woods is planned for Saturday, April 24 (meet at 9:30am at the end of Holloway Bay Road).

## **Close Encounters**

How time flies. Here in 2010 I realize that a decade has passed. Remember 2000? What were you doing back then a decade ago nature wise? I know what I was doing in early January, 2000. Daughter Diane O'Brien and I were walking the Lower Trail in Marcy Woods. I had in my pocket a small reference book on animal footprints. Yes, I, like many of you, have been fascinated with animal and bird tracks. On that mild winter day in January 2000 snow had melted on the sand based trail and track impressions were easily seen. Deer tracks were everywhere. Their hoof marks ranged from that of a fawn to much larger probably that of a buck. Squirrel and chipmunk tracks crossed back and forth. We saw no deer that morning but the chipmunks were quite active. We walked all the way to the Marcy cabin. Human tracks there, marks of male boots 12-14 sizes. Bird tracks - crows? We headed back the same way along the Lower Trail. If you know the trail, we had headed north and turned west along the rolling terrain. Then Diane spied it. How did we miss it before? The tracks were clearly marked in the moist sand.

Don't Miss  
Malcolmson Eco-Park  
**Earth Day Festival &  
Native Plant Sale**

Saturday,  
April 24<sup>th</sup>  
8 a.m. – 1 p.m.

Wildflowers; trees & shrubs;  
native grasses & grass seed. A  
wide selection available.  
Location: Lakeshore Road at the  
north end of Niagara St. in St.  
Catharines, just west of Lock One  
of the Welland Canal.

**NATIVE PLANT SALE**

Continues on  
Sat. May 8<sup>th</sup>  
8 am – 1 pm

**Fascinating Nature Facts**

**Hummingbirds** are the only birds  
that can fly backwards

A **porcupine** has 30,000 quills on  
average, and its heartbeat is  
around 190 beats per minute,  
which reduces to 20 during  
hibernation

**Butterflies** taste with their feet

**Black-capped Chickadees** are  
known to be able to cache food  
for later periods of scarcity and  
are able to remember with  
excellent accuracy for up to 28  
days both the locations and kinds  
of food at each.

We looked around but no sign of the animal and its unusual  
footprints. I had seen the unusual prints of this solitary nocturnal  
animal.



The opossum has five toes but one is thumb-like slanted  
backwards. Three middle toes close together pointing forward and  
the fifth on the left remains alone. Most unusual and unforgettable.  
Fore prints are similar to rear only smaller. We were happy this  
day. Once home, I recalled the day that Benji, my black lab and I  
met a full grown opossum on Long Meadow farm. Benji was very  
aggressive with the animal. It tried to bluff Benji as my dog circled  
it. It hissed, salivated and opened its mouth wide showing its 70  
teeth. Benji had fought and won in fights with racoons. It  
continued to worry the opossum. Then it rolled over, closed its  
eyes, and let its tongue hang out. It excreted a greenish substance.  
Benji backed off. It was playing 'possum' or faking death. We  
headed back to the farm house for lunch. You know the story. We  
returned in the afternoon and of course our wise acting opossum  
was gone.

This Marsupial is a good tree climber. I learned that it  
feeds on carrion. That explains why I have seen them as road kill  
in the Ridgeway area. Checking out animal tracks this winter –  
why not?

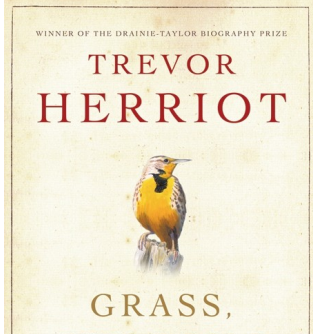
Earl Plato

**Recommended Reading**

**Grass, Sky, Song:**  
**Promise & Perial in the World of Grassland Birds**

By Trevor Herriot  
2009

Taken from The Chickadee,  
Vol 52, No. 3, January-  
February 2010 issue



If you haven't already been introduced to grassland birds, you certainly will be enchanted with these fascinating species after reading Trevor Herriot's new book, "Grass, Sky, Song". Perhaps overshadowed by their more colourful woodland cousins, these birds, and their disappearing prairie habitat, have a special endearing quality all of their own. A collection of bird "biographies" appear throughout the book, accompanied by the authors own sketches of the individual species.



Upland Sandpiper. Photo courtesy of Ron Goodridge

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

**Patty Moss**

**Rhonda Armstrong**

**Bodd & Waltraud**

**Hartmann**

**June Chipp**

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

And welcome back to former members

**John & Virginia Scarlett**

Just as Bridget Stutchbury sounded the alarm about the decline of the songbird population in her book, "Silence of the Songbirds", Herriot raises the alert about the many threatened species of grassland birds. Studies show that these species are declining faster than any other bird populations on the continent.

With eloquent prose that is at once profound, intimate and informative, Herriot paints a compelling portrait of grassland species and the perils that could lead to their extinction. He argues that their survival depends not only on informed agricultural and governmental policies, but also on our own individual choices as consumers. Do we continue to insist on low food prices without concern for the well-being of the land and waterways that are being compromised to produce it? What is our responsibility as stewards of the natural world? These are some of the thought-provoking issues discussed in "Grass, Sky, Song".

Anyone who has visited the Carden Plain or who simply enjoys trolling the back roads to hear the call of the Bobolink and Eastern Meadowlark is sure to enjoy this fascinating book. Those interested are welcome to borrow my copy.

Lynda Goodridge

## NATURE'S OLYMPIANS

### **Western Yellowbelly Racer**

Racing is this reptile's game. Built for speed, Western Yellowbelly Racers use their long, slender bodies to reach speeds of up to seven kilometres per hour, making them one of the fastest snakes in Canada.

### **Freestyle Diver: Golden Eagle**

Speed, agility and strength make the Golden Eagle a fierce competitor. With a wingspan of up to seven feet the Golden Eagle can dive-bomb its prey at more than 240 kilometres per hour.

### **Silver Medal Sprinter Pronghorn Antelope**

Did you know Canada's prairies are home to the second-fastest mammal in the world, after the cheetah? Coming in at three feet tall, the Pronghorn antelope can reach impressive speeds of up to 100 kilometres per hour.

### **Skeleton Rider: Fisher**

When on the hunt, the Fisher will descend trees head-first, aided by its retractable claws. This helps it to approach the Porcupine stealthily, attacking the only quill-free spot on its body - the face. This winning acrobatic feat can feed a Fisher for up to two days.

Taken from "The Leaflet",  
February 2010 edition



On February 11, 2010, in spite of the fact that the proponents of the planned speedway have failed to complete several studies, Amendment 3-2009 to the Regional Official Plan for the Niagara Planning Area has been approved by Regional Council.

The outstanding issues include, and are not limited to: servicing requirements, road improvements, air quality, noise mitigation, boundaries for natural heritage, storm water management, agricultural activities, traffic and operations management, environmental site conditions, archaeological resources servicing and environmental impact. The Provincially Significant Wetland is still a major issue. According to public record, the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority recommended in a letter dated June 15, 2009 to the Town of Fort Erie (file MPR 4.6.19) and again in November to the Region, that the proponent "*amends the layout of the road circuit portion to avoid the wetland features.*" As of time of writing there are no additional updates on this matter available to the public.

The estimated \$53 million dollar price tag on the required infrastructure has been assigned to the developer but it is still unclear how or when this will be paid. If the proponent seeks financial assistance from the Town, Region or Province, the resulting financial burden will be borne by the taxpayer.

In order to effect positive change and have a more powerful voice in such local matters, **CARS (Citizens Against Racing Speedway)**, has partnered with a not-for-profit incorporation called Citizens Coalition of Greater Fort Erie. The Coalition now plans to take the background research and experience **CARS** has established to the next level.

Although the Town and Region will have "holding" provisions placed in the zoning by-laws and site plan, opportunity for objections to the speedway project must now be in the form of an Ontario Municipal Board Appeal and this must be made within a strict time frame after the passing of the Regional Official Plan Amendment; again, well before the studies mentioned above are complete. This is a time consuming and expensive avenue for all involved. **CARS** would have preferred to see that all the studies were completed, peer reviewed and satisfactory to all governing bodies prior to the opening of agricultural zoning to the intrusive land use of a motor speedway with all the negative impacts it will have on the environmentally sensitive areas on site and for the community as a whole

**2010  
Board of Directors**

President  
Paul Philp

Vice-President  
Dawn Pierrynowski

Treasurer  
Tim Seburn

Secretary  
Lynda Goodridge

Directors  
Denise Ball  
Peter Bonenfant  
Janet Kellam  
Dave Mitchell  
Rick Stockton  
Bruce White

We are pleased to welcome Denise, Peter and Bruce to the BMNC Board and thank them for making this commitment.

**The Rambler**

Newsletter Editor:  
Lynda Goodridge  
Published (hopefully)  
twice a year

Submissions are always  
welcome and can be  
forwarded by email to  
lynda.goodridge@  
distributel.net

On the horizon is a major fund raising campaign to help pay for independent studies for a wetland study, noise study, a planner and legal counsel. If you would like to volunteer time or make a donation, please contact **CARS** at 905.994.7422 or through our website: [www.forteriecars.org](http://www.forteriecars.org) or [www.ccgfe.org](http://www.ccgfe.org)

Sandy Vant

**BMNC's Role**

The Bert Miller Nature Club will be assisting the CARS group and the Coalition with funding for research on the environmental impacts of the Canadian Motorsports Speedway (CMS) project and for advice respecting applicable environmental law. It is also disturbing to us that updated environmental studies have not been released by CMS and that these studies may not be required by officials until it is too late to meet residents' environmental rights.

Of paramount concern is the unavailability of an updated noise study, as the stage is being set for unmitigated noise pollution that would devastate Fort Erie. CMS is already lobbying the Town to exempt their project from Ministry of the Environment (MOE) noise regulations for "a few events per year" but have raised the estimated number of event days from 150 to 180 days per year.

It is important to appreciate that the noise pollution produced by an event will not be related to the size of the crowd but rather to the race itself, the number and type of vehicles being raced, and whether the race is taking place on the road course or the oval. The difficulty associated with providing noise mitigation for the entire perimeter of the road course and the fact that road racing produces a more irritating type of noise, is expected to make the road course the main source of future complaints by residents. CMS, it is anticipated, will make the road course its primary racing surface.

Meanwhile many of the periphery buildings planned to help with noise mitigation may be delayed or never, in fact, be constructed. The Town has reduced the square footage of associated commercial space being authorized and the Region is requiring that the racing facilities must be constructed and operational before the associated commercial enterprises, such as hotel and retail space, can proceed.

If the Town exempts CMS from MOE noise regulations, after opening day on the road course we expect it will be hard to find anyone **who actually lives in Fort Erie** still in support of the CMS project.