The Peninsula Naturalist

Volume 212 | Newsletter of the Peninsula Field Naturalists Club | February 2007

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE – FEBRUARY, 2007

Beginning a new year with a good-news story is always a nice bonus for aspiring scribblers; it's fun to be positive! Which is why I tossed out my original message and decided to focus on one of the best items from 2006...

Most of you should now know that the Nature Clubs in Niagara have teamed up with the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority (NPCA) to carry out a Natural Areas Inventory, primarily in the Welland River watershed, but covering most of the area of Niagara Region. Such an inventory has not been done for over 30 years and, well, biological species can get lost or misplaced in that amount of time. (Unlike a certain furniture store, biologists have to inventory - they can't just cut the prices and sell the stock!). As well, it's always handy to be prepared with data when someone wants to start pushing earth around...

The NPCA began by contacting about 2200 landowners in the Welland-Port Colborne area for permission to allow staff and volunteers to inventory on their land. It was made clear that the inventory is not searching specifically for rare species, but just taking a 'snapshot' of what exists. Usually a positive response by 10% of those contacted is considered a good rate of reply. Imagine how the NPCA team felt when about 500 approvals came in! Suddenly the mission seemed more daunting than had been expected.

At this point, members of all three nature clubs stepped up to help, some full-time and part-time experts were also hired, and by the end of the 'normal' frost-free season a good number of those 500 sites had been visited. Cooperation also came from Brock University (Marcie Jacklin doing a literature search), OMNR (recent air-photos and delineation of wetlends), and a number of funding agencies who provided the cash to get on with the job. (Had we known what this so-called 'winter' would bring, we might have gone on inventorying until spring!!)

Now, based on the 2006 experience, teams of volunteers will spread out in 2007 through the Niagara-Chippawa area, and through Wainfleet/West Lincoln, along with occasional 'bio-blitzes' of areas where special expertise is required. By the end of 2008, we will have gained a much more complete snapshot of our biological capital, and will be ready to present some facts whenever the earthmovers appear...

IN MEMORIAM

MARGARET MILLMAN

St. Catharines Christmas Bird Count

The 2006 St. Catharines Christmas Bird Count was held on Sunday December 17, 2006. This was certainly our warmest count ever – balmy even. My records show the temperature climbed to +4° in 1993, but this year we recorded temperatures up to +10°. We had 37 people participating. In total the 12 groups spent 97 hours in the field, walking 66 km and driving another 620 km, and counted 81 species. Some groups started at 5 in the morning and most of us finished around 5 in the evening so we could enjoy the hospitality once again of the hosts with the mostest, Don and Sue Minchin. Many thanks to them and also the great cooks who once again provided a pot-luck extraordinaire!

The warming trends provided a few surprises - Little Gull and Yellow-bellied Sapsucker were new for the count. We found record highs for Mute Swans (25); Northern Pintail (53); Pied-billed Grebe (2); Double-crested Cormorant (45); Tufted Titmouse (24); Carolina Wren (18); American Robin (597); and American Goldfinch (462).

Unusual birds for the count included American Wigeon (1); Northern Shoveler (3); Canvasback (4); Surf Scoter (1); Red-necked Grebe (2); Red-shouldered Hawk (1); Short-eared Owl (1); Yellow-rumped Warblers (3); and Pine Warbler (1).

We also had our second highest count of European Starlings (9867) ☹. Other numerous birds were Canada Goose (1605); House Sparrow (1288); Mourning Dove (845); and Ring-billed Gull (742).

Species with the highest counts over the past 10 years included Lesser Scaup (8); Red-breasted Merganser (265); American Coot (4); Brown Creeper (8); and Swamp Sparrow (4).

Lowest count over the past 10 years included Herring Gull (119); Great Black-backed Gull (15); and Horned Lark (0).

A final thank you to John and Mary Potter and the Executive of the PFN for all their help and also the St. Catharines Standard who for the past three years have met me in the field for an interview and published a great article each time. And next year – remember to bring suntan lotion ☺

Participants in the Field:
Barbara Austin, Margaret Berridge, Wayne Berridge, John E. Black, Eileen Borteesa, Paul Chapman, Sue Chapman, Trevor Cornfield, Carl Damude, Janet Damude, Don Dimond, Elaine Dimond, Rob Dobos, Ben Escott, Christofer J. Escott, Denys Gardiner, Simon Gawn, Steve Gillis, Peter Graham, Marcie Jacklin-*compiler*, Brian Joule, Myra Kennedy, Nabil H. Khairallah, Kara Kristianson, Eric Maki, Kiirstin Maki, Kevin McLaughlin, Donald N. Mills, Gisele Mills, George Naylor, Roman Olszewski, Karin Schneider, Tim Seburn, Roy Sorgenfrei, John R. Stevens, Katherine Stoltz, Rob Waldhuber, Bud Walsh, Dora Young, Rick Young .

NECROLOGY

Regrettably, once again a long-time member of the Peninsula Field Naturalists is gone from among us.

Margaret Millman, beloved wife of the late Robert Millman, passed away at the Henderson Hospital, Hamilton, on Tuesday, December 12, 2006. Marg and her husband Bob were long-time members of the PFN, and had been faithful birders with the Christmas Bird Count until Marg slipped on some ice and injured her ankle. Personally, I recall having noticed a bench at the Wye Marsh Nature Centre inscribed with Marg and Bob's names, and later finding out that it had been donated by the Millman children in honour of their parents; it seemed a fitting location for such a tribute to two devoted birders. Marg was in her 87th year, as was Bob at the time of his death in 2004.

Marg is survived by her son Douglas and wife Gloria of Burks Falls, and Donna and husband Dr. David Cadman of Ancaster, as well as six grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. I'm sure we will miss her friendly smile and her quiet but keen sense of humour.

ST. CATHARINES Christmas Bird Count

SPECIES	Number
Canada Goose	1842
Mute Swan	25
Gadwall	3
American Wigeon	1
American Black Duck	21
Mallard	385
Northern Shoveler	3
Northern Pintail	53
Canvasback	4
Greater Scaup	61
Lesser Scaup	8
Surf Scoter	1
White-winged Scoter	188
Long-tailed Duck	210
Bufflehead	100
Common Goldeneye	173
Hooded Merganser	44
Common Merganser	77
Red-breasted Merganser	265
Ring-necked Pheasant	5
Wild Turkey	15
Red-throated Loon	5
Pied-billed Grebe	2
Red-necked Grebe	2
Double-crested Cormorant	45
Great Blue Heron (Blue form)	7
Northern Harrier	6
Sharp-shinned Hawk	5
Cooper's Hawk	10
Red-shouldered Hawk	1
Red-tailed Hawk	101
Rough-legged Hawk	3
American Kestrel	44
American Coot	4
Little Gull	1
Bonaparte's Gull	299
Ring-billed Gull	1004
Herring Gull	129
Great Black-backed Gull	15
Rock Pigeon	690
Mourning Dove	896
Eastern Screech-Owl	3
Great Horned Owl	2
Short-eared Owl	1
Belted Kingfisher	5
Red-bellied Woodpecker	25
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	1
Downy Woodpecker	92
Hairy Woodpecker	13
Northern (Yellow-shafted) Flicker	14
Northern Shrike	2
Blue Jay	436
American Crow	249
Black-capped Chickadee	416
Tufted Titmouse	24
Red-breasted Nuthatch	6
White-breasted Nuthatch	38
Brown Creeper	8
Carolina Wren	18
Winter Wren	2
Golden-crowned Kinglet	24
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	4
Eastern Bluebird	66
American Robin	597
Northern Mockingbird	70
European Starling	9867
Cedar Waxwing	102
Yellow-rumped (Myrtle) Warbler	3
Pine Warbler	1
American Tree Sparrow	454
Song Sparrow	11
Swamp Sparrow	6
White-throated Sparrow	35
White-crowned Sparrow	12
Dark-eyed (Slate-colored) Junco	542
Snow Bunting	6
Northern Cardinal	205
Brown-headed Cowbird	11
House Finch	262
American Goldfinch	462
House Sparrow	1351
TOTAL INDIVIDUALS Counted	**22199**
TOTAL SPECIES Reported	**81**

SQUIRREL CHATTER

Our area is blessed (or cursed) with a generous helping of squirrels - some red, some grey, and even the occasional black. The reds tend to avoid our woods - maybe because of cats and hawks, or maybe because of being outnumbered by the greys. Suffice to say, we have no lack of squirrels.

Thus far, I've tolerated the greys, even though they are serious competition to the songbirds when it comes to any accessible birdseed. I've even taken some perverse enjoyment in attempting to outsmart them - and discovered in the process that a determined grey can jump straight up about four feet, and will actually chew through a hard plastic bucket to get to food.

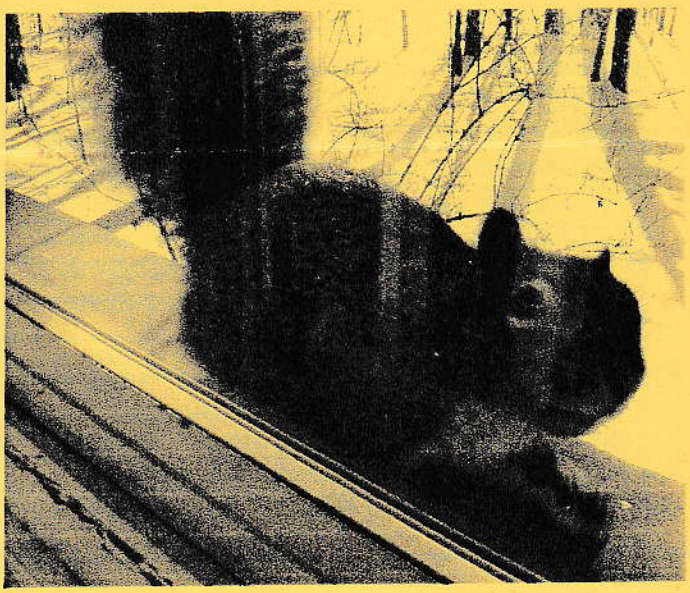
Now, however, a report from the British Trust for Ornithology has me wondering about being so tolerant. It seems that grey squirrels are not just up for meals of nuts and berries. In a three-year study the BTO have discovered that grey squirrels apparently are the cause of huge losses of eggs and fledglings of the Spotted Flycatcher, an endangered woodland species. The birds nest high in trees, protected from foxes and rats, but the fledglings are an easy target for grey squirrels. When pest-control measures controlled the numbers of predators, the Flycatcher achieved a 75 percent survival rate for nests. That survival rate dropped to 25 percent when the control measures were stopped. Incidentally grey squirrels were introduced to the UK in the late 19th century, and have largely driven out the native red squirrels by out-competing the reds for food and habitat.

Recently, Canadian biologists have discovered that red squirrels can anticipate when evergreens will produce bumper crops of cones, and the squirrels react by producing larger litters than usual. Somehow, responding to a cue that has not been identified yet, the squirrels go into a frenzy of reproduction, months before a big cone season starts. As a result, squirrel populations peak at a time when evergreen cones are plentiful.

It takes about 18 months to produce an evergreen cone, starting from when the cones are just buds. When these buds are sitting dormant over winter, squirrels can feed on them until spring comes. The biologists suspect that the reproductive buds may somehow give the squirrels a signal that a big cone crop is on its way. The current suspicion is that plant hormones in the dormant buds may affect some kind of reproductive trigger in the squirrels' physiology, inducing them to begin a greater rate of breeding and reproduction.

The biologists have assumed, until now, that squirrels and other animals just begin increased rates of reproduction after a large food source becomes apparent, so that the animal population is always a bit behind the volume of food. This finding, that red squirrels actually anticipate the larger food supply and breed more vigourously in advance, is a totally new discovery. The same pattern of behaviour has been observed in Europe, where Eurasian red squirrels ramp up their reproduction in advance of larger seed crops from oak and beech trees. Exactly how the squirrels became 'psychic' about tree seed boom years is still to be determined - just like how their distant relatives, the woodchucks, became prescient about the onset of spring.

- based on material from The Independent News & Media Ltd, and The Canadian Press, courtesy of Bob Layton.



NO FUEL LIKE AN OLD FUEL?

Our 'modern' society has a love affair going with oil - a love affair that survived even the rise of oil prices to levels that were unimaginable a decade ago. The old popular song *"Just One of Those Things"* includes the lines: *'If we'd thought a bit about the end of it... we'd have been aware that our love affair was too hot not to cool down...'*

So far, the love affair shows minimal signs of cooling down - even though the car makers acknowledge that they need to, and are trying to, develop vehicles with less or no reliance on petroleum-based fuels. And of course, not just automobiles and trucks require fuels and lubricants - industry and farming also have an appetite.

What to do? In a burst of new green enthusiasm, the US President indicated in his 2007 State of the Union speech that he wants the US to use five times as much alternative fuel as it does now, within ten years. That would amount to 35 billion gallons of alternative fuel, which would reduce gasoline usage by 20 percent. That doesn't include the amount of petroleum diesel fuel needed, which is currently 60 billion gallons annually.

At present, the US produces 5 billion gallons of ethanol for fuel use from corn, consuming about 12 - 15 percent of the nation's corn crop. For reference, a good corn crop can yield about 7100 lb. per acre, which can be processed into 328 gallons of ethanol - so each gallon of ethanol consumes about 26 lb. of corn. To produce 35 billion gallons of ethanol would require the production from 100 million acres of corn - which would only satisfy 20% of the US need for fuel to replace gasoline.

Even replacing the current usage of diesel with biodiesel ethanol would require consuming 12 times more corn acreage for feedstock - in other words, more corn than the whole current US national production of that grain.

Such demand has already inflated corn prices to the point that livestock farmers question their ability to continue raising beef, hogs and fowl, unless the price of those meats also rises.

The consumer public will probably resist meat prices rising by 2 to 3 times, but that is one possible result of the fuel-driven uses of corn. Factor in the need for corn as animal feed, and the US corn production requirement becomes simply unobtainable, if just US production is involved. So, that implies the US having to buy corn from elsewhere.

Guess who has traditionally grown corn? You're right - Mexico! However, most Mexican corn is white corn for human consumption; they have traditionally imported yellow corn for livestock feed, principally from the US. With yellow corn prices at all-time high levels, Mexico is actively encouraging more yellow corn production, calculating that US needs will soon make Mexico an exporter rather than an importer of yellow corn.

Meanwhile Mexican livestock producers face the same difficulty as their US counterparts - with the same consumer resistance to high meat prices. An added concern is the danger of becoming locked-in to requirements for shipping corn to the US, under trade agreements.

The consensus seems to be that corn-derived ethanol will not, by itself, resolve the US need for gasoline replacement - and petroleum-derived gasoline will eventually dry up. Other research now is concentrating on ethanol production from cellulose instead of corn - with the probable sources of cellulose being grasses and/or wood. That's a story for another time...

Information for this item extracted from The St. Catharines Standard, Jan.20/07, and from www.breitbart.com

LAKE ONTARIO MID-WINTER WATERFOWL INVENTORY

The weather on Jan.7/07 during the Waterfowl Count was excellent, providing near-perfect viewing conditions with exceptional visibility and little wind. The lake was calm, with all shoreline areas open, as were all bays and inner harbours. Temperatures ranged from +3° C to +7° C. This was the 17th year that the entire Canadian shoreline of Lake Ontario has been covered. Ninety-eight participants spent 192 party-hours searching for waterfowl.

This year we recorded 258,603 waterfowl from 38 species. This is lower than the average total for the previous 10 counts (273,822). First ever for the count was a single Eurasian Wigeon found in Kingston. Record high numbers were also reported for an additional 12 (!!) species: Red-throated Loon, Common Loon, Horned Grebe, Red-necked Grebe, Double-crested Cormorant, Greater White-fronted Goose, Northern Shoveler, American Wigeon, Ring-necked Duck, Hooded Merganser, Red-breasted Merganser and American Coot. Higher than usual numbers were reported for Tundra Swan and Ruddy Duck. Lower than usual numbers were reported for Canada Goose, Mallard, Redhead, White-winged Scoter and Common Goldeneye. Missed Species were Cackling Goose, Wood Duck, Barrow's Goldeneye and eiders.

Eleven Bald Eagles were also reported including 1 from Niagara. Other interesting sightings from Niagara were: 1 Common Loon, 4 Horned Grebe, 48 Double-crested Cormorant and 6 Black Scoter..

Observers for the Niagara route (50 Point to Niagara-on-the-Lake) were: John Black, Brian Ahara, Drew Campbell, Brad Clements, Trevor Cornfield, Blayne Farnan, Jean Farnan, Marcie Jacklin, Brian Joule, Carol O'Shea, Kayo Roy, Tim Seburn, Maggie Smiley, John Stevens, Katharine Stoltz.

Thanks to John Black and compiler Glenn Coady for making this information available to the Peninsula Field Naturalists Club. (Ed.) While the chart on the following page may appear rather extensive (and may also appear in the Toronto Ornithological Club's newsletter), we hope the information will be of interest and use to the local birders of Niagara who were not part of the count team.

ATTENTION, ALL GLOBETROTTERS

A tour to the Union of South Africa is being organized from July 24 to August 9, 2007, with travel details being arranged by a local travel service. Points of interest will include wildlife in Kruger National Park, an optional trip to Victoria Falls, historical sites and battlefields, and spectacular scenery. This is an open invitation; space is limited. For further details, contact Bob Layton, 905-682-2435.

(Note: Because this newsletter does not publish commercial advertising, we cannot provide the name of the tour organizer or travel service).

Quotable Quotes

"We must make the rescue of the environment the central organizing principle for civilization." –
Al Gore, author of 'Earth in the Balance'.

"One thing I think we need to know is that sustainability isn't a destination, it's how you make the trip." -
Dennis Meadows, co-author of 'Limits to Growth'.

"He that uses many words for explaining any subject, doth, like the cuttlefish, hide himself for the most part in his own ink". -
John Ray, naturalist (1627-1705)

Lake Ontario Mid-Winter Waterfowl Inventory

January 7, 2007

Compiled by: Glenn Coady

						TORONTO AREA											
Species	Kingston	Quinte	Presqu'ile	Port Hope	Durham	Route1	Route2	Route3	Route4	Route5	Route6	Route7	Subtotal	Hamilton	Niagara	TOTAL	COMMENTS
Red-throated Loon			2	1							1		1	1		5	Record high count!
Common Loon	27		2					2	1			1	4	3	1	37	Record high count!
Pied-billed Grebe														2		2	
Horned Grebe	22			3	2		1					5	6	1	4	38	Record high count!
Red-necked Grebe	2				1			6		1	9	10	26		1	30	Record high count!
Double-crested Cormorant	3	1					1		2				3	29	48	84	Record high count!
Tundra Swan	661		3			3							3			667	Higher than usual
Trumpeter Swan	3				8	12	10				3	2	27	79		117	
Mute Swan	23	55	110	4	31	24	6	46	16	35	53	92	272	104		599	
Greater White-fronted Goose						2							2			2	Record high count!
Snow Goose	4															4	
Brant	1															1	
Canada Goose	14816	534	569	1003	1736	2286	169	210	202	921	286	706	4780	1622	677	25737	Lower than usual
Cackling Goose																	
Wood Duck																	Missed
Green-winged Teal	3													3		6	
American Black Duck	1460		8	27	60	58	16	15	21	16	42	16	184	73	34	1846	
Mallard	2745	129	62	402	160	458	289	236	528	581	339	180	2611	837	125	7071	Lower than usual
Northern Pintail	15													4		19	
Northern Shoveler								3		87			90	43		133	Record high count!
Gadwall	488				63	36	12	158	45	69	207	111	638	190		1379	
Eurasian Wigeon	1															1	First ever for count!!
American Wigeon	145							19			8	8	35			180	Record high count!
Canvasback	1	11	13					1					1	84		110	
Redhead	2252	480	60			47		53		6	15		121	5	1	2919	Lower than usual
Ring-necked Duck	215	6				1		7					8	36		265	Record high count!
Greater Scaup	2464	800	1985	1413	2466	1551	4	595	973	17	8056	734	11930	13525	902	35485	
Lesser Scaup	27	2	7		4	8	10	2	9	2	21		52	2745	18	2855	
Scaup sp.	3646		1100												1642	6388	
King Eider																	Missed
Harlequin Duck	2		2													4	
Long-tailed Duck	10927	2434	4092	296	1988	2210	1209	2200	1698	3779	941	1027	13064	68920	4434	106155	
Black Scoter	3					5							5	3	6	17	
Surf Scoter	5											19	19	79	6	109	
White-winged Scoter	126	17	94	13	4						2	43	45	1717	107	2123	Lower than usual
Common Goldeneye	3598	613	1177	955	1784	739	48	522	89	20	668	727	2813	4504	3559	19003	Lower than usual
Barrow's Goldeneye																	Missed
Bufflehead	523	42	292	124	426	549	92	162	123	82	285	443	1736	940	964	5047	
Hooded Merganser	163	17			9	2		55		17	7		81	22		292	Record high count!
Common Merganser	5194	185	65	14	116	31	9	40	5	19	6	4	114	533	374	6595	
Red-breasted Merganser	3423	59	62	995	1104	616	271	84	101	41	489	1246	2848	564	3895	12950	Record high count!
Ruddy Duck											2		2	453		455	Higher than usual
American Coot	205	101		1				1			4	1	6	97	3	413	Record high count!
Swan sp.	85						1						1			86	
Merganser sp.	150															150	
Duck sp.	13666	3680			370	1500							1500			19216	
Mallard X Black Duck								1		2			3	5		8	
Total Birds	67094	9166	9705	5251	10332	10138	2148	4418	3813	5695	11444	5375	43031	97223	16801	258603	
Total Species	33	17	18	14	17	19	15	21	14	16	21	19	31	30	19	38	
Participants	24	1	1	6	5	2	2	4	4	2	2	16	32	13	16	98	
Party-hours	49.5	9	6.5	15.5	12.5	15.5	7	7.75	7	7	7	14	65.25	20.75	13	192	
Bald Eagle	8												0	2	1	11	

WOODLAND AMPHIBIANS AND VERNAL POOLS

As is customary, the November meeting of the PFN was our pre-Christmas dessert night. For the main course of the evening, we were served a delicious helping of 'Woodland Amphibians and Vernal Pools', a video/audio presentation by Janine McLeod, ably assisted by husband Glen.

Janine came to us from the Havelock area, and commented that her interest in vernal pools was stimulated by the topography of their own property, and the sounds emanating therefrom. She noted that the vernal pool habitat is conditioned by the forest in which it exists; a woodland with an open canopy will allow a vernal pool to warm faster than one where the canopy heavily shades the pool.

Woodland amphibians are intimately involved with vernal pools. As Janine explained, the presence of salamanders and wood-frogs are definite indicators of a vernal pool, along with fairy shrimp, a delicate little critter with seemingly more legs, antennae and other appendages than any animal should require. We were treated to perhaps more information than some ever wanted to know about the mating habits and egg-laying by various salamanders, and the fact that salamanders can live for 20 years.

Along with salamanders and wood-frogs, Janine showed a number of other assorted species common to woodlands with vernal pools. These included spring peepers, grey tree-frogs, American toads, northern leopard frogs, pickerel frogs, green frogs, American bullfrogs, spotted turtles, Blandings turtles, wood turtles, aquatic ribbon snakes, and Wood Ducks and Great Blue Herons. The photos of many of the frogs and toads were accompanied by the characteristic sounds made by each, and visual identification markings were also discussed.

Janine cautioned us that fish (of any kind) are not to be found in a true vernal pool, and graphically demonstrated with a winter-to-fall series of pictures how a vernal pool can be waterfilled in winter, but dry by late summer.

Her degree in Conservation Biology was obviously a labour of love for this member of 'the other PFN', as Janine referred to her home nature club, the Peterborough Field Naturalists.

HERE THERE BE DRAGONFLIES

The January 2007 Meeting of the Peninsula Field Naturalists seemed just made for viewing photos of summer scenes. Fortunately, we could indulge, with the digital photography of Paul Philp helping us to capture a summer mood.

Paul advised us that he had only taken up digital photography in the past two or three years, and that dragonflies and damselflies were a fairly new study for him. However, as a former teacher, current education specialist with Heartland Forest, and author of the ON's *Junior Naturalist Manual*, he had no reason to be modest about his knowledge or ability to display his photographic talents. We were transported to summer meadows and streamsides, where delicate damselflies and more robust dragonflies were frozen in midflight by Paul's digital camera.

Paul pointed out some distinguishing features of the two main groups of 'Odonates', showing the large round eyes of the damselflies and the more angular dragonfly eyes, the more delicate wings of the damselflies held together over the back when at rest compared with dragonfly wings held outstretched, and of course the difference in body size and thickness. The iridescent body colours and the patterning of colour on the wings were breathtaking. As with many insect groups, the genitalia are used by professional entomologists to separate species; however, Paul finds that visual cues and up-close photos are quite satisfactory.

A few tips about watching these fascinating insects were provided; for instance, if disturbed they will fly off but always return to the spot where they were perched. So to photograph them, Paul sets up his camera at a target where an odonate has been and simply waits for it to return to be photographed. He explained the mating flights, in which a pair of odonates are locked together as they skim over water to deposit eggs (dragonflies) or perch on vegetation (damselflies), and he also showed a few shots of the juvenile (nymph), an aquatic stage with little resemblance to the adult.

While we may not remember which species are 'clubtails' and which are 'mosquitohawks', we will certainly know who to ask about Odonates, from now on.

Ramblings...

When does "enough" become "too many"? That question is at the heart of a local land-use issue, involving a pumpkin-grower, environmentalists, and the agency that oversees the Niagara Escarpment. The grower in question is seeking approval for an alternative use of his land, unfortunately, an alternative use which does not involve agriculture. However, in the opinion of his neighbours, the alternative use ('laser-tag' - similar to paintball games) could potentially result in both environmental damage and nuisance to those same neighbours. Some environmentalists agree with the neighbours. On the surface, the alternative use presumably would result in too many humans (children and probably adults) being present at the farm, over too much of the year, with a potential for too much noise and the trampling of an endangered wildflower species.

Below the surface, the real problem for this grower is *Odocoileus virginianus*, a.k.a. White-tailed Deer, in excessive numbers. Lacking sufficient predators to restrict their numbers, and afforded the protection of the adjacent Short Hills Provincial Park, the deer have multiplied to a population that local government biologists acknowledge as being "too many". The understory in the Provincial Park certainly shows the effect of excessive browsing and antler-rubbing. For the grower, deer damage to his preferred crop (pumpkins) threatens his ability to continue with this crop or even the farming occupation.

In microcosm, this is one more iteration of an ever-increasing human population interacting with an ever-increasing non-human species in nature - a scenario that has been played out innumerable times.

Take your choice - recently, white-tailed deer, Canada geese, European starlings, purple loose-strife - or historically, the rabbits of Australia, the locusts of the American West, or the fungi that decimated the American Chestnut and the American Elm - wherever and whenever you gaze, some organism or other has always been perceived as being "too many" (rightly or wrongly). Of course, the perception of "too many" is a human perception of the world. And we humans all know that there aren't "too many" of us - right?

Reading Al Gore's *'Earth in the Balance'*, I discovered that humans who consider our species as a kind of pathogen on the planet are known as Deep Ecologists, a term coined in 1973 by a Norwegian philosopher. Deep Ecologists see *Homo sapiens* as a global cancer, and global warming metaphorically as the fever that accompanies the attempt of the host to ward off this disease. If *Homo sapiens* is a plague to the earth, logic says the plague organism should be eliminated. Al Gore has a moral problem with the concept that *Homo sapiens* should be eradicated; undoubtedly many of us would have the same moral problem. But we are left with the same philosophical question as the one that torments our pumpkin grower *vis-a-vis* White-tailed Deer - When does "enough" become "too many"?

Thanks to Marcie Jacklin, John Black and Glenn Coady, Bob Layton, the St. Catharines *Standard*, and several internet websites for material and ideas for this issue of *The Peninsula Naturalist*. Theft of exact words of one author is plagiarism; theft from many is 'research'.

EVENTS OF INTEREST

OUTINGS:

The annual **Maple Syrup Fest and Walk** will take place on Saturday, March 3/ 07 with the walk starting at 10:00 a.m. at the Roland Road entrance parking lot of Short Hills Provincial Park. We will be joined by members of the Bert Miller Nature Club. At 11:45 a.m. (or thereabouts), we proceed to White Meadows Farms for a maple-syrup pancake lunch (unsubsidized – you pay). Non-walkers may join us at White Meadows at 11:45. - John Potter 905-892-2566.

The Annual **Niagara Peninsula Hawk Watch Open House** will be on Friday, April 6 / 07 all day at Beamer Conservation Area south of Grimsby. An opportunity to see many species of raptors and learn from the experts. - Marcie Jacklin 905-341-6664.

INNINGS:

The **ANNUAL PFN POTLUCK DINNER** will be at Mountainview United Church, 150 Glendale Ave., St. Catharines, on Monday, April 23 / 07, starting at 6:00 p.m. As has been the custom, please bring your ex-treasures for the draw – draw tickets will be $0.50 or 12 / $5.00. Those with surnames beginning with A-L please bring first course, surnames M-Z bring salad or dessert. All bring cutlery, cups, plates. Anyone willing to help set up, please arrive about 5:30 p.m.

The Peninsula Field Naturalists Club

A non-profit organization started in 1954 with the objectives to preserve wildlife and protect its habitat, to promote public interest in and a knowledge of the natural history of the area, and to promote, encourage and cooperate with organizations and individuals having similar interests and objectives. Affiliated with Ontario Nature (ex-FON) and Nature Canada (ex-CNF).

P.O. Box 23031, 124 Welland Ave., St. Catharines, ON. L2R7P6

The Peninsula Naturalist Newsletter

Published: February, May, October
Circulation: 150 copies per issue
The Editor welcomes written articles or artwork on any natural history topic. Handwritten articles will be accepted, and if possible, please submit typewritten articles, or computer disks containing your file. All pieces of artwork will be accepted, although line drawings are preferable, as they are better suited to photo copying. New ideas and constructive criticism are always welcome.
Editorial Staff: John Potter
Labelling/Mailing: Kay Smith

– please send submissions to the above address –
Deadlines for submissions 2007:
Jan. 28; April 10; Sept. 30

2006/7 PFN EXECUTIVE

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