



# The Peninsula Naturalist

Newsletter of The Peninsula Field Naturalists' Club

Volume 259  
SPRING 2025

## New Members

- Alain Diallo
- Craig Ozog & Maxine Semple

Please tell your family and friends about PFN. We love new friends and new members!

## Upcoming Meetings

- All monthly meetings are in person at Bethany Community Church, 1388 Third Street Louth, St Catharines at 7:00 pm.
- September 22 - Don Scallen - TURTLES
- October 27 - Rafael Fernandes - COSTA RICA
- November 24 - AGM and Dessert Night - John Black - GALAPAGOS

## Upcoming Outings

- Watch your email, the PFN website or our Facebook page for our upcoming outings.

## A Message From the President

Once again, the environment and green spaces are threatened. This time, it is concerning. On June 4, 2025, the Government of Ontario passed Bill 5, the Protect Ontario by Unleashing our Economy Act. Unleashing is an understatement.

The Endangered Species Act has been eliminated and replaced with the Species Conservation Act. The Special Economic Zones Act is one part of Bill 5 that allows the Cabinet to exempt projects from all provincial laws, regulations, and municipal bylaws, with no checks or balances. There are no limits on where a special economic zone could be

located.

Yes, the province needs homes built, and economic progress is significant, given the current political pressures in place. However, this should not come at the expense of

endangered species and crucial habitats. Ontario should not just be open for business; it should be a place that values the importance of natural resources and green spaces. Repealing Bill 5 will ensure our province remains a healthy environment for all Ontarians to discover.



Sunset at Happy Rolph's Animal Farm.

© Bob Highcock

Bob Highcock, President

## SC CBC 2024

by Jean Hampson & Bob Highcock

The Peninsula Field Naturalists held their annual Christmas Bird Count on Sunday, December 15, 2024. Throughout the day, the skies were cloudy. The temperature during the day reached a high of 2° Celsius, and the ponds and creeks were frozen.

Thanks to all the participants who assisted with the count, as well as to Sharon Wilson and Carla Carlson for allowing access to their properties.

High counts were recorded for Trumpeter Swan (25), Trumpeter/Tundra Swan (11), Gadwall (162), American Wigeon (3), Redhead (190), Ring-necked Duck (47), Bald Eagle (31), Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (1) and Fox Sparrow (1). Yellow-bellied Sapsucker has been recorded on seven counts previously, and Fox Sparrow on five counts previously.

Count week birds included Northern Saw-whet Owl and Winter Wren. The Northern Saw-whet Owl was heard in the early morning of the 16th by one of the feeder watchers in Area 1. Though it is a count week bird, this is the first time a Northern Saw-whet Owl has been noted for the SC CBC!

For this year's count, we had 36 participants as follows: Amanda Anstic, Lisa Bacon, Zhianna Bacon, John Black, Carla Carlson, Shirley Chambers, Paul Chapman, John Ciemitis, Paula Clark, Mary-Lou Davidson, Philip Downey, Christopher Escott, Jean Hampson, Bob Highcock, Shannon Hingston, Christa Jackson, Myra Kennedy, Mike Kershaw, Terri Kershaw, Nabil Khairallah, Ramsey Khairallah, Laurie King, Olivia King, Sandy McCutcheon, Joan Preston, Karin Schneider, Tim Seburn, Bill Smith, Ken Smith, Nancy Smith, Roy Sorgenfrei, John



Jordan Harbour Conservation Area.

© Bob Highcock

hello  
spring!



Stevens, Carol Teed, Tom Thomas, Diana Werezak, Rick Werezak, Elizabeth Yates.

We'd like to thank everyone who volunteers to help make this annual event a success.



Beaver damage at Twenty Valley Trail in Jordan.  
© Bob Highcock



At Twenty Valley Train in Jordan.

© Bob Highcock

Snow Goose	1	Sharp-shinned Hawk	5	White-breasted Nuthatch	19
Canada Goose	3,519	Cooper's Hawk	11	Brown Creeper	16
Mute Swan	2	Accipiter Sp.	1	Carolina Wren	38
Trumpeter Swan	25	Bald Eagle	31	Golden-crowned Kinglet	13
Tundra Swan	7	Red-tailed Hawk	100	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	1
Trumpeter/Tundra Swan	11	Rough-legged Hawk	2	Eastern Bluebird	17
Gadwall	162	Ring-billed Gull	114	Hermit Thrush	1
American Wigeon	3	Herring Gull	83	American Robin	259
American Black Duck	12	Great Black-backed Gull	4	Northern Mockingbird	10
Mallard	502	gull species	11	European Starling	9,462
Canvasback	8	Rock Pigeon	650	Cedar Waxwing	13
Redhead	190	Mourning Dove	885	Snow Bunting	50
Ring-necked Duck	47	Eastern Screech Owl	6	American Tree Sparrow	185
Greater Scaup	75	Great Horned Owl	4	Fox Sparrow	1
Surf Scoter	1	Belted Kingfisher	4	Dark-eyed Junco	823
White-winged Scoter	35	Red-bellied Woodpecker	60	White-crowned Sparrow	48
Long-tailed Duck	42	Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	1	White-throated Sparrow	34
Bufflehead	39	Downy Woodpecker	49	Song Sparrow	11
Common Goldeneye	257	Hairy Woodpecker	6	Northern Cardinal	203
Hooded Merganser	69	Northern Flicker	33	Red-winged Blackbird	14
Common Merganser	49	Pileated Woodpecker	1	Common Grackle	1
Red-breasted Merganser	328	American Kestrel	29	Brown-headed Cowbird	47
duck species	97	Blue Jay	478	House Finch	64
Wild Turkey	22	American Crow	164	Purple Finch	6
Common Loon	1	Common Raven	7	American Goldfinch	145
Double-crested Cormorant	8	Black-capped Chickadee	159	House Sparrow	888
Great Blue Heron	6	Tufted Titmouse	6	Total number of species	73
Northern Harrier	7	Red-breasted Nuthatch	12	Total number of individuals	18,330

# Some Herps I Have Known: Evolution and Life Strategies Encountered During My Travels

by Jean Hampson

At our Club's November 25, 2024, meeting, Josh Vandermeulen presented a fascinating topic exploring some adaptations reptiles and amphibians have employed to aid their survival. Some excellent photography accompanied Josh's informative talk.

Josh grew up in Cambridge, Ontario and spent much of his young days searching for snakes, frogs and any other reptile or amphibian he could find at the edge of town. He also developed an interest in birding, and in 2012, Josh held the record for the most species of birds seen in Ontario at 343 species. He and his wife Laura have travelled extensively, particularly in Central and South



Bartlett's Flying Dragon.  
© Josh Vandermeulen

postulated that because these forests consist of tall, straight trees that are far apart, the animals had to find a way to extend their jumps to travel through the area.

Josh and Laura travelled in Northern Argentina, where they were lucky to encounter Chacoan Horned Frogs. This area is typically hot and dry, and the frogs will remain underground for most of the year, only emerging when the rains come and they can reproduce. Josh and Laura happened to visit during a heavy rainstorm. Josh described other reproductive strategies employed by frogs and also discussed the Galapagos Islands and the various specialized reptiles found there. The Galapagos Land Iguana and the Marine Iguana



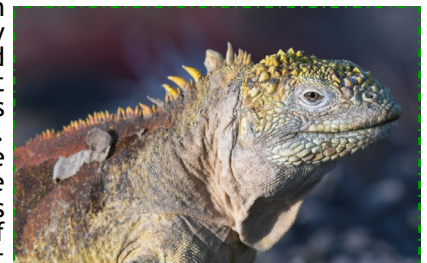
Amazon Horned Frog.

© Josh Vandermeulen

America. Josh has also led tours for Worldwide Quest to some fantastic places, such as Cuba and Jamaica (both of which I have had the opportunity to experience).

Gliders of all types can be found in the ancient forests of Borneo. In the Klias Peat Swamp Forest Reserve, Josh encountered a Five-Lined Flying Dragon, a long, thin lizard that can spread its ribcage and glide for up to 30 minutes at a time, as well as a beautiful, jewel-coloured Paradise Flying Snake with similar ribcage adaptations. Wallace's Flying Frog and a mammal called Sunda Colugo, which resembles our North American Flying Squirrels, can also be found here. Josh

may share a common ancestor, but they have developed completely different diets and morphologies over millions of years. Many people are familiar with the different shell shapes of the two species of Galapagos Giant Tortoises.



Galapagos Land Iguana.

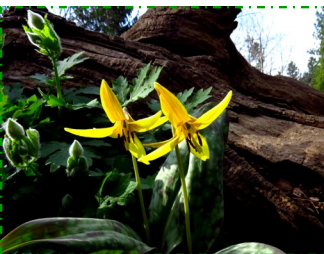
© Josh Vandermeulen

Josh has undoubtedly enjoyed some wonderful travels and experiences, and we appreciate him sharing his gorgeous photos and first-hand observations of these fantastic locations. For more information on his adventures, visit his blog, "Explorations of an Ecologist," at [joshvandermeulen.blogspot.com](http://joshvandermeulen.blogspot.com).

## Seasons of Diversity in a Native Garden

by Jean Hampson

Win Laar spoke to the PFN in person on January 27, 2025, about her contribution to the greening of the Niagara Region. Win and her husband, Kal, spent a



Trout Lillies.

© Win Laar

considerable amount of time over many years transforming their typical rural plot into a naturalized haven for native species. Their property is located on the slopes of the Niagara Escarpment, and the Bruce Trail runs behind their yard. You would never know that the International Border traffic is close by when you enter their garden.

help spread seeds to introduce new plants to the garden. Win planted Spicebush for the namesake butterfly. Blue False Indigo attracts bees and hummingbirds. In the winter, she is sometimes treated to the sight of a bright Red Fox in the white snow. The garden can also help feed Win and Kal as they enjoy Wild Ginger and Black Raspberries.



Green Heron.

©Win Laar

Some lessons in the garden are hard-earned, such as Win finding out just how aggressive Wild Turkey Toms can become when they begin to see you as a food provider and not someone to fear.

The couple undertook the backbreaking task of removing unwanted plants and invasive species to replace them with native plants, as well as digging a wetland. Win worked hard to ensure there is colour in every season. Spring ephemerals give way to summer wildflowers. Fall colours burst into winter with its beautiful architectural trees and bark.



Wild Turkeys in winter.

© Win Laar

Native trees help bring Orioles and other birds to the yard. The birds, in turn,

As those of us in the naturalist community are aware, the populations of insects, birds, and other native species are in severe decline, and we can all play a part in helping them. We are grateful to Win and Kal for going above and beyond in creating a haven for these imperilled species.

## Birding in Madagascar

by Mary-Lou Davidson

The speakers for our March 24, 2025, meeting were Marcie Jacklin and John Black. They gave a fantastic presentation of their birding trip to the mysterious island of Madagascar - a country that isn't frequently visited.

Their trip to Madagascar took place from October 16 to November 9, 2024. They flew Ethiopian Airlines from Toronto, stopping in Ethiopia and then to Antananarivo (Tana for short!), Madagascar.

On October 18, they arrived at Parc de Tsarasotra, a sanctuary for many birds, including fourteen endangered species endemic to Madagascar. They observed five species of ducks and eleven species of herons. The next day included a visit to the Tana Botanical Gardens and Zoo.

On October 20, they visited Lemurs' Park - a home for 600 abandoned or injured lemurs. From there, they flew to Mahajanga. The next day, they took a boat trip out to some mangrove islands and Ankarafantsika National Park. They saw the White-breasted Mesite, which was high on John's wanted bird family list. Other birds spotted were the Coquerel Sifaka, Magpie Robin, Drongo, Madagascar Buttonquail, Coquerel's Coua, Lesser Vasa Parrot and Rufous Vanga. Continuing at the park the next day, they took a boat trip and saw a Madagascar Fish-Eagle. Later, in a rice paddy area, the Madagascar Jacana was spotted.



Red-fronted Brown Lemur. © Marcie Jacklin



Long-tailed Ground-roller. © Marcie Jacklin

On October 24, they had a morning visit to Ankarafantsika National Park before flying back to Tana. The next day, they took a long drive south to Andasibe, visiting a reserve en route and some afternoon birding in a community park. This was followed by a long, bumpy ride to the Takoka Trail, where a Pitta-like Ground-Roller was calling.

More birding at the Voimma Community Park. Brown lemurs and two Indri lemurs were observed at the lodge. Indri are incredibly loud. On October 28, they visited Andasibe Mantadia National Park and a community reserve, where a sacred tree is located that villagers come to for help.



School visit.

© Marcie Jacklin

Some highlights of the travels on November 1 in the Ranomafana and Isalo areas were viewing a couple of poison frogs, which were held by the guides, and observing Ward's Flycatcher, Cryptic Warbler, and Forest Rock Thrush. They visited the Anja Community Reserve, which was started in 2001. Villagers were persuaded that it was in their interest to protect lemurs because they bring tourism and commerce to the area. The park has won several international awards.

In Toliara, the terrain is more desert-like, and a pair of White-browed Owls were seen, as well as a Giant Coua, Rufous Vanga, and Hook-billed Vanga. From Anako, they took a boat out to Nosy Be Island, where a few adult and young Tropicbirds were observed. At the lodge, a Grey Mouse Lemur helped itself to some bananas. Back on the mainland, they saw Verraux's Coua and the very rare, Red-shouldered Vanga. A Madagascar Plover was found by the Indian Ocean. Next, they headed to the Spiny Forest, which is listed as one of the world's 200 most important ecological regions. While there, they saw a Running Coua and a male Subdesert Mesite.



Lesser Hedgehog.

© Marcie Jacklin

On November 8, Marcie and John had to bid farewell to their accomplished guides and flew home.

Everyone in attendance thoroughly enjoyed their presentation and the photos of this fascinating country.

## Ontario Nature Network Meeting

by Ken Smith

The charity 'Ontario Nature' has 30,000 members and works to protect the environment across the province. Their 'Nature Network' program enables them to team up with local nature groups such as ours to support us and gain information about what is happening in Ontario. In April, members from the Peninsula Field Naturalists attended the Ontario Nature Network Group meeting for the Carolinian East section. Other groups who attended came from Woodstock, Long Point, Ruthven, Hamilton, Norfolk County, Brant, Halton Peel, and Fort Erie.

Each group gave a presentation about their club's activities. We discussed our participation in the Birds on the Niagara Festival, the Niagara College Bio-Blitz, the Heartland Forest Eco Leaders Youth Symposium, our Christmas Bird Counts, and

the recently updated website.

We were very impressed by the Norfolk Field Naturalists program called 'Nature's Calling.' Bernie Solymar is the founder and executive director. It is an environmental education program for kids and families, held in an outdoor classroom where children learn about shelter building, native plants, and land stewardship, among other topics. Bernie said they don't just tell the kids the names of every plant, insect, and bird. They encourage the kids to look things up and discover new facts independently.

Ontario Nature offers numerous programs to support groups like PFN. They have a 'volunteer posting' newsletter for which people and groups can sign up. They also provide GIS project support and assess

# Ontario Nature Network Meeting

*continued*

protected places. They have almost completed the Third Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas. Please visit their website, where you can access back issues of their magazine for free and attend webinars.

A hike was planned at Backus Woods near Long Point following the meeting. Sadly, our confused PFN members got lost on the way and hiked in a different section of the park than the rest of the group. We saw a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker and heard a Ruffed Grouse, so it was not a total loss.

## Outlet Collection and Niagara College Ponds *by Jean Hampson*



At Outlet Collection Ponds.  
© Jean Hampson

On March 22, the PFN held its first outing for the Spring 2025 session. We first visited the ponds located behind the Outlet Collection on Glendale in Niagara-on-the-Lake. This was the first time several of our participants had visited this area. We were rewarded with fantastic waterfowl views, including Bufflehead, Gadwall and a most impressive male Blue-winged Teal. The early Spring migrant Red-winged Blackbirds serenaded us as we

lovely Fox Sparrow in the shrubs along the path. Luckily, the predicted rainstorms held off, with only a brief, light shower breaking up the morning. We tallied fourteen bird species at the Outlet collection and sixteen species at Niagara College, with some overlaps. It was a great start to our 2025 outings!



At Niagara College Pond  
© Jean Hampson

circled the ponds.

Next, we crossed the road to walk the Wetland Ridge Trail at Niagara College. We discovered more beautiful waterfowl here, such as Hooded Mergansers, Ring-necked Ducks and a pair of Trumpeter Swans. Toward the end of our outing, we caught a glimpse of a



Male Ring-necked duck.  
© Jean Hampson



Trumpeter Swan.  
© Jean Hampson

## Swayze Falls Hike

*by Barb West*



Swayze Falls.  
© Bob Highcock

Although the weatherman called for rain, Saturday, April 19, was a lovely, warm, early spring day.

We saw several birds. These included the Common Raven, Turkey Vulture, Brown-headed Cowbird, Song Sparrow, Brown Creeper, Northern Flicker, Black-capped Chickadee,

Golden-crowned Kinglet, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Northern Cardinal, Eastern Phoebe, Red-tailed Hawk and Cooper's Hawk. We heard a Field Sparrow, but I don't think it was spotted. Besides birds, we saw some insects, including a millipede, a Greater Bee Fly, a Six-spotted Tiger Beetle, and an Oil Beetle. Some of the spring wildflowers were starting to appear. Our sightings included Hepatica, Purple Violet, Forsythia, Spring Beauty,



Oil Beetle  
© Jean Hampson

Blood Root and Trout Lily.

The highlight of the walk was finding a Red-bellied Snake. It was very thin and relatively small. Jean picked it up and turned it over to show us its red belly. Not being a snake lover, I kept my distance, but I admired Jean's courage.



Red-bellied Snake. © Bob Highcock

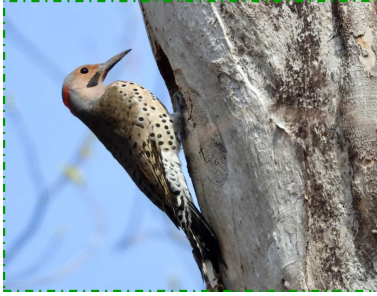


Group photo.  
© Bob Highcock

## Earth Day Celebration Walk

by Jean Hampson

On Sunday, April 20, PFN celebrated Earth Day with a walk in Malcolmson Eco Park. Barb West and I were co-leaders, with Barb leading the way while I tended to stay near the back of the group to help point out birds to new birders. Thanks to our participation in the Niagara College Bioblitz, six guests and some of our members attended the outing. It was a little early for migrating warblers, but we saw some interesting species. The variety of woodpeckers we encountered definitely stole the show. We saw the resident Hairy, Downy, and Red-bellied Woodpeckers, as well as pairs of Northern Flickers and Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers. I could point out the dimorphic features of the male and female birds to



Northern Flicker.

© Jean Hampson

the newer participants, making the event an educational experience. We even found a Northern Flicker feather that featured the yellow shaft. We totalled 27 species by the end of the hike and hopefully sparked some new birders.



The group on the path.

© Jean Hampson

## Wildflower Walk

by Jean Hampson

On Saturday, April 26, we had our annual outing to Louth Conservation Area. It's always interesting because, depending on the weather, we are never sure which Spring ephemerals will be blooming when we arrive. It has been cool this year, so the Trilliums were in peak form, but only one Jack-in-the-Pulpit could be found. The Mayapple plants had full, glossy leaves but tightly closed buds. We saw lovely, large patches of Canadian Wild Ginger, Dutchman's Breeches, and Wild Leek. Blue Cohosh and Early Meadow Rue bordered the trail. Sixteen Mile Creek was running well, so Louth Falls looked beautiful. Walking atop the limestone path, I was



Canadian Wild Ginger.

© Jean Hampson

pleased to see more Walking Fern than I have seen here in the past. We were also happy to have such an excellent turnout for this outing, including some additional guests and people we had met at the Niagara College Bioblitz. Everyone enjoyed their visit to this jewel of our Conservation Areas.



Dutchman's Breeches.

© Jean Hampson



Wild Leeks (ramps).

© Jean Hampson



Walking Fern.

© Jean Hampson



Louth Falls.

© Jean Hampson

The Peninsula Field  
Naturalists' Club



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**2024 Executive**

**President** ~ Bob Highcock

**Vice President** ~ Carol Horvat

**Secretary** ~ Jean Hampson

**Treasurer** ~ Doug Gillard

**Membership Secretary** ~ Barb West

**Directors** ~ Mary-Lou Davidson

~ Ken Smith

~ Don Stevenson

**Non-Executive Positions**

**Newsletter Editor** ~ Lorraine Brown-Joyce

**Webmaster** ~ Adrian Lawler

The Peninsula Field Naturalists' Club is 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. We are affiliated with Ontario Nature and Nature Canada.

Currently, our meetings are held at 7:00 pm on the fourth Monday of each month from September to April (except December) at Bethany Community Church, 1388 Third Street Louth, St Catharines. We may offer various popup outings around the Niagara area. Please check our Facebook page for more information.

The Peninsula Naturalist newsletter is published twice per year, in Spring and Fall. Submissions for the next newsletter should be received by the end of March or September for publication.

Club members are encouraged to send in articles, photos, stories, observations and outing reviews to [penfieldnatsnews@gmail.com](mailto:penfieldnatsnews@gmail.com). Material accepted may be edited and will be used subject to space allowances.

Views expressed are not necessarily those of the Peninsula Field Naturalists Club or the Editor.

Thank you to all the members who volunteer their time to our club and also to those who make submissions to make our newsletter fabulous!

**In Closing... Enjoy a Weather Word Search**

Try to find all of the hidden Weather words. (Words can be spelled forwards, backwards, diagonally, up, or down.)

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- BLIZZARD
- COLD
- DRIZZLE
- DRY
- FLOOD
- FROST
- HAIL
- HEATWAVE
- HUMID
- HURRICANE
- OVERCAST
- RAIN
- SLEET
- SNOW
- SUNSHINE
- THUNDER
- TORNADO
- TSUNAMI
- TYPHOON
- WINDY



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