



# The Peninsula Naturalist

Newsletter of The Peninsula Field Naturalists' Club

Volume 260  
FALL 2025

## New Members

- Denise McCarthy
- Pam Martin

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

## Upcoming Meetings

- All monthly meetings are in-person at Bethany Community Church, 1388 Third Street Louth, St Catharines at 7:00 pm.
- January 26, 2026 - Philip Downey - THE WORLD'S BIGGEST TELESCOPES
- Stay tuned for more incredible speakers coming in 2026! We'll share the exciting news as soon as their participation is confirmed.

## Upcoming Outings

- Watch for more announcements soon on our website, on Facebook and in your E-mail.



## A Message From the President

I am always pleased that the Peninsula Field Naturalists are represented at public events, including a youth symposium and annual bioblitz in the spring, and a new event in the fall. Connections are a good thing, no matter what time of year. A nod to Mary-Lou Davidson for attending the symposium at Heartland Forest in April, and you can read more about the event in this newsletter.

On Saturday, April 12, Niagara College held its 10<sup>th</sup> annual Bioblitz at the Niagara-on-the-Lake campus on Taylor Road. Katie Bristow, Sustainability Program and Outreach Coordinator, does a great job of putting



Mary-Lou and Jean at the Niagara College Bioblitz. © Bob Highcock



Bob with a spotting scope and curious onlooker. © Mary-Lou Davidson

together several events for the day. As members of the PFN, Jean and I led a bird hike around the lagoons. Introducing attendees to waterfowl, migrating passerines and other nature sightings is always fun. It even drew interest to our club and the scheduled outings

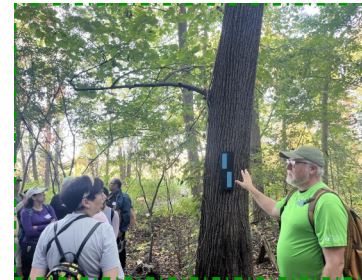
we had in the spring.

Sunday, October 5, was Bruce Trail Day, and I attended the Niagara Bruce Trail Club organized event, *Connections on the Trail*. It was a beautiful day to talk about



Bruce Trail Day booths. © Bob Highcock

nature as people viewed the PFN board between the scheduled hikes. I even stepped away for a bit to join the Biodiversity Hike led by a representative from the Bruce Trail



Biodiversity Walk. © Bob Highcock

Conservancy. I had a great day and was thankful for the invitation from the Niagara Bruce Trail Club President,

Ellen Savoia.

Continuing connections are essential, and I look forward to the Peninsula Field Naturalists being represented at many events in the years ahead.

Bob Highcock, President

## Upcoming Christmas Bird Counts

**St. Catharines CBC**  
Sunday, December 14, 2025  
Contact: Bob Highcock/Jean Hampson  
[bob.jean@sympatico.ca](mailto:bob.jean@sympatico.ca) 905-327-5457

**Niagara Falls CBC**  
Saturday, December 27, 2025  
Contact: Marcie Jacklin  
[mjacklin@brocku.ca](mailto:mjacklin@brocku.ca) 905-871-2577

**Port Colborne CBC**  
Saturday, January 3, 2026  
Contact: Drew Campbell  
[drewcampbell@roadrunner.com](mailto:drewcampbell@roadrunner.com)  
716-668-0759

**Grimsby Peach Tree CBC**  
Sunday, January 4, 2026  
Contact: Chris Motherwell  
[cmtrain@cmotherwell.com](mailto:cmtrain@cmotherwell.com)

**Waterfowl (Duck) Count**  
Sunday January 4, 2026  
Contact: Phil Downey  
[philip.downey@gmail.com](mailto:philip.downey@gmail.com)



American Kestrel © Jean Hampson

# Discover Jamaica's Wild Species

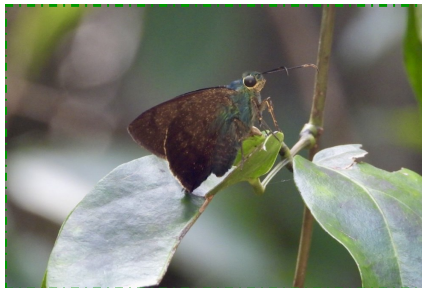
by Rafael Fernandes

The Peninsula Field Naturalists hosted a fascinating in-person talk on February 24, where Jean Hampson and Bob Highcook explained Jamaica's wild species. In that presentation, they showed us their trip from March 14-23, 2024, during which the main goal was to observe Jamaica's biodiversity, with a focus on endemic species and new bird species for Jean and Bob's life lists. It is imperative to remember that island ecosystems are excellent places to observe biodiversity due to high endemism, offering a good opportunity to examine species variation compared to continental regions. Jean and Bob showed a wide variety of photos featuring plants, insects, birds, and reptiles, while also highlighting cultural aspects and the lifestyles of local people.



Graham's Anole. © Jean Hampson

Despite the rugged terrain and hot weather, they were determined to pursue their primary goal: spotting lifer species and appreciating the stunning landscapes. Additionally, they shared insights into Jamaicans' daily routines, including typical foods, local grocery stores, and buildings in villages or temporary lodging near biodiversity hotspots. Jean and Bob were guided by Ann Haynes-Sutton during the trip, which was invaluable for nature enthusiasts visiting a new place. Having



Jamaican Flasher. © Jean Hampson

a local guide also increases the chances of spotting rare and diverse species. As a club member, I felt so happy for them, and we all learned a little bit more about the biodiversity of the Neotropical region.

Some threats are common among Jamaica's wild species, especially in island populations where the number of individuals is low, leading to lower diversity than in continental areas. It is difficult to highlight just one species from the trip, but Jean and Bob had the chance to see Jamaica's National Bird, the endemic Red-billed Streamertail (*Trochilus polytmus*). Interestingly, male and female individuals exhibit different plumage, with the male's long, bifurcated tail playing a role in mating and territorial dominance, a typical trait of hummingbirds.



Red-billed Streamertail. © Jean Hampson

In summary, Jean and Bob managed to spot 112 bird species, including 45 lifers, which represented 40.18% of their total sightings. Additionally, they observed a wide variety of other organisms, including plants, insects, and reptiles. Now, we all want to go there! We genuinely appreciate that Jean and Bob shared such a valuable talk with us.

# Helping Turtles Win the Race

by Ken Smith

The PFN members came out of their shells for our September meeting to learn all about turtles. During the excellent presentation by naturalist and author Don Scallen, we learned about the fantastic diversity of the eight Ontario species and the obstacles that threaten their survival. We also learned about the organizations and volunteers working to ensure their future.



Midland Painted Turtle. © Jean Hampson

As someone who has only seen painted turtles and snapping turtles in Ontario, it was fascinating to learn about the other species living under our noses. Spiny-shelled turtles look like an exotic species from another continent, yet they can be seen in Southwestern

Ontario. Who knew that some Ontario turtles defend themselves with a smelly spray, some stomp the ground to attract worms, and some turtle species supercool their blood to survive freezing?

In addition to threats from humans, such as habitat loss, cars, and poaching, turtle eggs are very vulnerable. Just like birds, surviving the egg stage is difficult. Don told us about organizations



Northern Map Turtle. © Jean Hampson

such as the Ontario Turtle Conservation Centre in Peterborough, which has volunteers who collect eggs in vulnerable locations. The eggs hatch in the centre and are then released back where they were initially found in the spring.

Thanks to Don's presentation, I am officially a turtle watcher.



Blanding's Turtle. © Jean Hampson

## Beautiful Costa

by Rafael Fernandes

The Peninsula Field Naturalists hosted a presentation on October 27, during which Rafael Fernandes, a PFN member, spoke at our in-person meeting. This time, Rafael worked with Mary-Lou Davidson so that both could discuss the main topic of this presentation. Rafael and Mary-Lou's main goal was to explain their focus on Costa Rica's ecotourism, biodiversity, and environmental research. In this case, the presentation followed the same standard and structure as last year, with three parts: the audience could watch the beautiful, colourful world of Costa Rican wildlife, with a focus on terrestrial vertebrates and a brief touch on insects, especially butterflies.

Rafael argued for the importance of American naturalist Alexander Frank Stuck, who moved to Costa Rica, where its vast and fascinating tropical biodiversity attracted him. Stuck is considered one of the most important naturalists of the last century, and his legacy remains significant today. Some institutions also host dedicated exhibitions on Stuck's house, which is a great place to visit. Rafael wrote and shared an article about Stuck's impact on tropical ornithology, demonstrating how this research remains relevant today.



Black-throated Trogon.  
© Mary-Lou Davidson

In the second part of his presentation, Rafael demonstrated Costa Rica's rich biodiversity and avian diversity. He showcased a comprehensive scenario of endemic bird families and species, highlighting their vibrant colours, unique vocalizations, and striking behaviours through a collection of photos and videos. Rafael and Mary-Lou's presentation included images of typical Neotropical birds, with Rafael focusing on families and species not commonly seen in Canada or the United States to avoid

duplication in PFN members' life lists. Additionally, he highlighted his own research publications alongside other publications focused on notable regions in Costa Rica and/or typical ecosystem surveys in that country.



Northern Emerald Toucanet.  
© Mary-Lou Davidson

In the final part of his presentation, Rafael discussed how birdwatching activities are organized in Costa Rica, covering tour details and notable bird species. He also highlighted the cost and challenging terrain, including high-elevation areas in the mountains. Rafael considered this section essential, as it allowed him to offer valuable precautions to members planning a trip to Costa Rica and provided a great heads-up for future trip planning. This guidance remains a key part of his presentation, which offers practical tips for birdwatching in Costa Rica or any country in the Neotropical Region. He also shared important logistical details, such as flight information and visa applications, which were helpful for members to hear.

Rafael was eager to present his knowledge of the Neotropical Region and encouraged members to develop a sense of good environmental education. Rafael can easily transfer his understanding of complex, technical subjects into accessible, comprehensible concepts in environmental research. Rafael has been making significant contributions to the Peninsula Field Naturalists, and he is always available to share his experiences.



White-faced Capuchin. © Mary-Lou Davidson

## Heartland Forest Youth Symposium

by Mary-Lou Davidson

On April 4, 2025, Heartland Forest in Niagara Falls held its first Youth Symposium. The Peninsula Field Naturalists Club was invited to attend, along with the Niagara Falls Nature Club, the Bert Miller Nature Club, and other groups involved in environmental issues.

Attendance was not compulsory, and there was no school on that day, but 29 students, some accompanied by adults, chose to attend. They were given a list of questions to ask the groups attending and had many hands-on experiences,



Mary-Lou and Maria with the PFN display board.  
© Mary-Lou Davidson

including art projects, meeting (and handling if wished) a live snake, and even roasting a marshmallow at the fire pit.

Maria Grande and I set up the PFN display board and gave interested students a list of our planned hikes, inviting them to take part.

Lisa Staton, Forest Discovery



Tom Staton holding Noodles, the Heartland resident butterfly morph Corn Snake.  
© Mary-Lou Davidson

Director, advised that this was their first symposium and that they plan to hold it again next year. The event is funded through McCall MacBain. Eco Leaders is held every Thursday as a volunteer program for teens. Environmental projects are worked on at Heartland, and they also have fun activities, such as roasting marshmallows, hiking, or holding a paint or movie night as a reward for all the hard work. Volunteer hours count toward High School community service hours.

The afternoon wrapped up with the winners of the art and questions contests, pizza, and Heartland Forest backpacks for everyone.

Heartland Forest is a jewel for Niagara and will have a positive effect on young people, encouraging them to protect our environment and the natural world.



Mary-Lou and Maria with students.  
© Mary-Lou Davidson

# PFN Annual Picnic 2025

by Mary-Lou Davidson

On June 20, 2025, the PFN held their annual picnic at Burgoyne Woods. The weather cooperated, and it was a lovely June evening.

About 15 members enjoyed a spread of sandwiches from Subway, potato salads, chips, veggie trays and other treats. The



PFN Executive.

© Mary-Lou Davidson

grand finale was a large chocolate cake inscribed with PFN 2025 and a Canadian flag.

After dinner, we enjoyed a leisurely hike around the woods.

It was a fantastic opportunity for members to socialize before the summer break.

# Bird Walk at Malcolmson Eco-Park

by Barb West



Virginia Bluebells. © Bob Highcock

On Saturday, May 3, we went on our annual outing to Malcolmson Eco-Park to look for migrating birds. Even though it was still early in the season, we did see quite a few species.

Warblers: Yellow-rumped, Black-throated Green, Palm, Northern Parula and Nashville

Migrating Birds: We saw several Baltimore Orioles, a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Song Sparrows, Northern Flickers, a Red-bellied Woodpecker, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Rusty



The group on a trail.

© Bob Highcock

Blackbird, Gray Catbirds, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, House Wrens, Tree Swallows, Warbling Vireo, American Robins, and White-throated Sparrow.

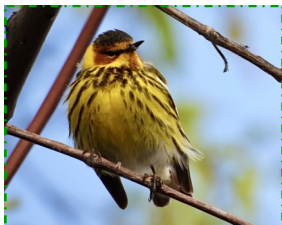
These birds can usually be found in the park during the winter as well as in the spring: Chickadees, Blue Jays, and Goldfinch. Jean saw a Green Heron in a big puddle, but unfortunately, it flew away before the rest of us got to see it. All in all, it was a pretty good day.

# Searching for Birds During Spring Migration

by Jean Hampson

May was a busy month for PFN outings. It is the best time of the year in Niagara to find birds that pass through our Region as they travel from their wintering area to return to their breeding grounds.

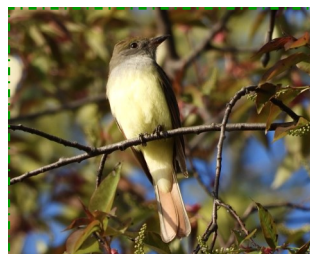
Barb West led a very productive bird walk at Malcolmson Eco Park on May 3. We observed many species of warblers. Read her article above for more details.



Cape May Warbler. © Jean Hampson

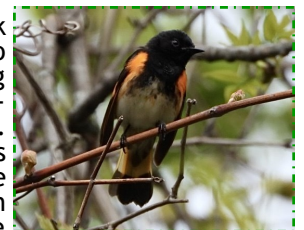
We held a walk on the Port Weller East Pier in conjunction with the Niagara Falls Nature Club on May 10. We had a great day, with 53 bird species observed. Highlights were Peregrine Falcon, Bald Eagle, and some great views of warblers such as Cape May, Northern Parula, and Blue-winged. We spent almost 3.5 hours exploring this important bird migration hotspot.

To maximize our chances of finding Spring-migrating birds, we had a Thursday evening walk at Cherie Road Park on May 15. We again had good luck and found Blackburnian, Blackpoll, Chestnut-sided, Bay-breasted and Black-and-white Warblers, to name a few. Three vireo species were seen: Red-eyed, Warbling, and Blue-headed, and we were delighted to find Rose-breasted Grosbeaks.



Great Crested Flycatcher. © Jean Hampson

Saturday, May 24, found us back at the Port Weller East Pier to look for some late-spring migrants. John Black and Mary-Lou Davidson were our leaders. We discovered that the swallows had returned and identified five species: Tree, Barn, Northern Rough-winged, Cliff, and Purple Martins. The group was pleased to see the Baltimore Orioles and to hear a Northern Waterthrush. A male American Redstart showed off his beautiful black and orange feathers.



American Redstart. © Jean Hampson



Cave at Eramosa Karst Conservation Area. © Jean Hampson

On May 31, we ventured outside of the Niagara Region for our first club visit to Eramosa Karst Conservation Area in Stony Creek, Hamilton. Unfortunately, the weather was overcast and chilly, but the few of us who attended enjoyed exploring the interesting geological formations. We also tallied 33 bird species here.

Flycatchers were well represented, and we saw both Willow and Alder Flycatchers, as well as Eastern Phoebe and Eastern Wood-Pee-wee. Sparrows were numerous, and we saw Swamp, Field, Savannah and Song, but we were a little late to find the Clay-colored Sparrow that had been reported there a few days earlier. Indigo Bunting and Common



Eastern Phoebe at cave entrance. © Jean Hampson

# Searching for Birds During Spring Migration

*continued*

Yellowthroat were other highlights here.

outings every year and to seeing all our feathered friends returning from the South.

The Peninsula Field Naturalists look forward to our May

## Summer Evening Walks

*by Jean Hampson*

Early summer evenings are the perfect time for some relaxing club walks. The weather was just right, and the sunsets were beautiful for the two outings we held in June.



Boardwalk. © Bob Highcock

On June 13, we met at 6:30 at Mel Swart Park for a casual stroll in this City of Thorold park. Robins were abundant in the grass, hunting for worms. We had a Great Blue Heron and Bald Eagles fly over. Barn Swallows swooped over the water, and we saw a Yellow Warbler and Baltimore Oriole. We saw a cute little Midland Painted Turtle in the marshy area. But the highlight of the walk was watching the family of Mute Swans that had nested beside the boardwalk. The young had just recently left the nest, and the parents



Mute Swan family. © Jean Hampson



Belted Kingfisher. © Jean Hampson

were teaching them to feed on the aquatic plants. We lingered to watch them and were treated to a lovely sunset.

We had our annual Ice Cream walk on the evening of June 26. We always enjoy the walk from Jaycee Park into Rene Park in Port Dalhousie via the pedestrian bridge over Martindale Pond. Both Cliff and Barn Swallows nest under this bridge, and we observed both species zooming beneath us into their nests. The Common Terns were entertaining.



Great Blue Heron. © Jean Hampson

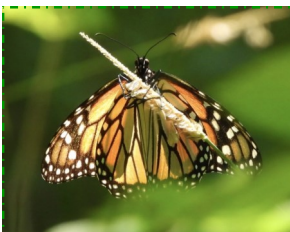
We made our way to the Old Port Dairy Bar to enjoy our ice cream cones. The perfect start to summer!



The reward, ice cream! © Jean Hampson

## Woodend Conservation Area Walk

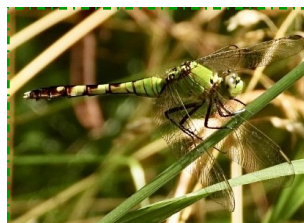
*by Jean Hampson*



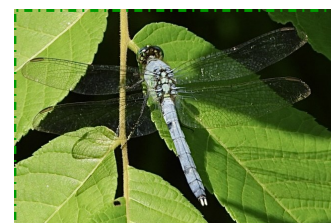
Monarch Butterfly. © Jean Hampson

On July 5, the PFN explored the grassy area at the far end of the road into Woodend Conservation Area. Our goal was to find and identify the variety of insect species that can be seen here. We successfully added species to our iNaturalist project. Butterflies were very active this day and included Little Wood Satyr, Northern Pearly-eye, Monarch and Orange Sulphur. Many dragonflies were zipping about, such as Blue Dasher, Common Whitetail and Eastern Pondhawk. We found Black Fireflies, multiple moth species, including a cool-

looking Common Bagworm moth larva that resembles a bundle of sticks, assorted other beetles, bees and a Praying Mantis. It is incredible what you can find if you take a closer look.



Female Eastern Pondhawk. © Jean Hampson



Male Eastern Pondhawk. © Jean Hampson

## Lake Moodie/Brock Bruce Trail Walk

*by Bob Highcock*

Jean Hampson led a small group of PFN members on the north side of Lake Moodie in Thorold and St. Catharines on Saturday, July 12. It was a sunny morning, and we hiked on the Bruce Trail from the east end of Lake Moodie to the hydro channel at the top of the Niagara Escarpment and then returned along the gravel road known as Brock Road.



Walking out on the spit at Lake Moodie. © Bob Highcock

Water levels on the reservoir were lower than usual, and members walked out on the narrow spit in search of shorebirds. Here we found



The group at Lake Moodie. © Bob Highcock

one Killdeer and two Spotted Sandpipers. Continuing the hike along the mixed-forest section of the Bruce Trail, we observed flowering plants, ferns, fungi, butterflies, and dragonflies.

A total of 26 bird species were observed. In addition to the shorebirds, notable species included the Great Egret, Great Blue Heron, Belted Kingfisher, Hairy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Eastern Wood-Pewee, Great

# Lake Moodie/Brock Bruce Trail Walk

*continued*



Common Yellowthroat.  
© Jean Hampson

Crested Flycatcher, Gray Catbird, Cedar Waxwing, Common Yellowthroat and Indigo Bunting. Thanks to Jean for leading the outing and to Ken Smith for tracking the eBird list.



Cabbage White Butterfly.  
© Jean Hampson



Common Red Soldier Beetle.  
© Jean Hampson



Bluet Damselfly. © Jean Hampson

# September Rotary Park Hike

*by Ken Smith*

PFN members survived a gruelling hike through the Rotary Park and the Power Glen Trails in early September. The sun was shining as the brave naturalists hiked up and down hills and valleys, and then

more hills and valleys. Despite the challenging hike, everyone had a good time, observing a Black-and-white warbler, a very large katydid (Oblong-winged Katydid), and a Speckled Sharpshooter.



Giant Puffball with shoe to show size.  
© Jean Hampson



American Bittersweet.  
© Jean Hampson



The group hiking along a trail.  
© Bob Highcock



Northern Flatid Planthopper.  
© Bob Highcock



Speckled Sharpshooter.  
© Jean Hampson

# In Search of the Purple Sandpiper

*by Mary-Lou Davidson*



The bird-spotting group. © Mary-Lou Davidson

On Saturday, November 8, we gathered at Port Weller for the last fall hike of the year. We were blessed with a beautiful fall day and enjoyed some sunshine and colourful foliage.



American Herring Gull.  
© Mary-Lou Davidson

were also a few Ring-billed Gulls, American Herring Gulls and Double-crested Cormorants.

When we reached the lighthouse, three Snow Buntings did a flyover.

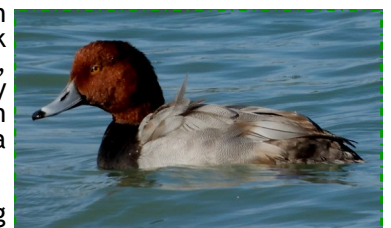
During our return walk along the canal, we were treated to

Waxwings were observed helping themselves to Buckthorn berries. A half-dozen American Robins were seen foraging among the leaves along the path. Two Red-bellied Woodpeckers were busy searching for insects in the tall trees. Also along the path were a couple of Northern Cardinals and a Blue Jay.



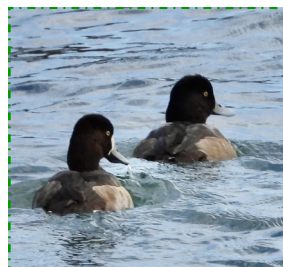
Cedar Waxwing.  
© Mary-Lou Davidson

five Canada Geese, ten Mallards, a Canvasback and eight Redhead ducks, as well as two Downy Woodpeckers, an American Goldfinch and a Black-capped Chickadee.



A beautiful Redhead duck. © Mary-Lou Davidson

Thanks to Bob for keeping the list and to all our



Greater Scaup.  
© Mary-Lou Davidson

As we continued along the edge of the water, a Belted Kingfisher flew over. Numerous water birds, including about 200 Greater Scaup and 300 Red-Breasted Mergansers, were in the water



Birdwatching on the trail. © Mary-Lou Davidson

great bird-spotters.

Alas, no Purple Sandpiper, but we had a delightful walk with our Peninsula Field Naturalist friends.

and flying over the lake in large flocks. There

The Peninsula Field  
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**2025–2026 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 on the fourth Monday of each month from September to April (except December) at 7:00 pm (doors open at 6:30 pm) 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: Nature Around Niagara**



The elusive Purple Sandpiper has been spotted in Niagara, just not on its annual namesake hike.  
© Jean Hampson



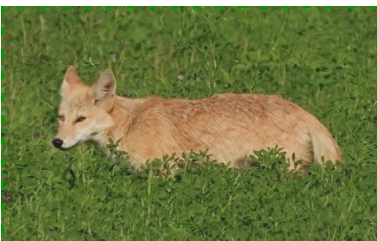
Striped Skunk out for a walk.  
© Jean Hampson



Hepatica in Spring.  
© Mary-Lou Davidson



Common Greenshield Lichen on a dead tree.  
© Bob Highcock



Coyote in a field.  
© Jean Hampson



Spotted Cucumber Beetle on a Strawflower.  
© Bob Highcock



Orange Mycenae fungi.  
© Bob Highcock



Snow Bunting.  
© Jean Hampson