

Welcome to the Peterborough Field Naturalists

81 years of helping local residents know, appreciate and conserve nature

The Peterborough Examiner · 27 Aug 2021 · C5 · MARTIN PARKER AND KATHY PARKER SPECIAL TO THE EXAMINER Martin and Kathy Parker, filling in for Drew Monkman this week, are lifelong naturalists. Martin was president of the PFN from 1971 to 1972 and from 2011 to 2013.

On May 18, 1940, a group of naturalists from around the province assembled in the Peterborough area to participate in the fifth annual Field Gathering. At the end of this day of nature activities, the group met in the Burleigh Falls home of then Peterborough-East MP Gordon Frazer. A new organization was created — the Peterborough Nature Club — with 32 adult and four junior members. Hence was born what is now the Peterborough Field Naturalists (PFN).



The PFN has grown and prospered over the years since its founding. Although the pandemic has meant some changes, the organization still provides a wide range of activities for the members and general public alike. The mission statement of the PFN is “Know-AppreciateConserve Nature in All its Forms.” Although birdwatching is the main focus for many club members, the club strives to provide activities which cover the wide range of flora and fauna in the Peterborough area and beyond. A few of the PFN’s key activities are summarized in this column.

The Orchid

“The Orchid” is the newsletter of the PFN and is published nine times a year. It originated in the late 1940s with the publication of a bulletin called PNC Notes. In 1956, the name was changed to The Orchid. The current editor is Kathryn Sheridan who, along with over 50 contributors every year, offers articles documenting the natural history of the region, trip reports, upcoming events, and numerous photographs submitted by members.

Records of bird sightings in “The Orchid Diary,” are a regular feature of each edition. They were the basis of a research paper by Trent student McLean Smith that was published in the “Journal of Nature Conservation.” The research documents that, on average, club members recorded the arrival of a new species in the region (e.g., red-bellied woodpecker) 10 years earlier than formal wildlife surveys like the Breeding Bird Atlas.

Outings and Meetings

Since its founding, a core activity of the PFN has been yearround nature outings. Prior to the pandemic, up to 50 outings were being offered annually to members and interested members of the public. Every April, May, September, and October, the club holds half-day trips to local natural areas. Day trips are offered in all months of the year.

Some of the outings are general in nature and take an interest in all aspects of local flora and fauna. Others are more specialized. These include butterfly identification with Jerry Ball who introduces participants to the wide variety of butterflies in the region. Every winter Don McLeod takes people out to look for and identify mammal tracks in the snow. A late April outing gives members the opportunity to listen to the spring frog chorus and see the sky dance of the American Woodcock. A fall outing might concentrate on things such as mushroom identification.

The PFN also offers trips to locations outside our region. Presqu'île Provincial Park is a prime destination for observing migrating birds. Each year the PNF visits the park during the spring and fall. A November outing to the Niagara River introduces participants to the world's greatest diversity of gulls. Other destinations include Algonquin Park for boreal species, Amherst Island for owls, and Carden Alvar for rare plants and birds. These destinations have been part of the outing schedule since the 1940s.

From September to June, the Peterborough Field Naturalists also hosts monthly indoor meetings for members and the interested public. Every January a dinner meeting takes place. Meetings feature a speaker on a specialized topic of natural history. Speakers in the past year have covered topics ranging from the plight of right whales to the changing status of bobcats and Canadian lynx in Ontario. Upcoming meetings will feature presentations on monarch butterflies, orchids, and reptile rehabilitation. In the past year in-person meetings have been replaced by talks over Zoom.

The December meeting is special. Club members give a short presentations on a topic of their choice such as a trip to some exotic location. Other recent presentations have included a "Gathering of Egrets" and "Sightings from a Kayak on the Otonabee."

The PFN also organizes special activities for junior members.

Other initiatives

In the early 1990s the PFN erected three bird feeders along the trails in Ecology Park, off of Beavermead Park. Each year from November to March volunteers fill the feeders with black oil sunflower seeds which attract a variety of bird species providing entertainment for trail users. Last year, thanks to a grant from the club's endowment fund, feeders were also installed at Peterborough Hospice.

Over the decades the PFN has been involved in the publication of a number of books on local natural history. The most recent book is "Nature in the Kawarthas," published by Dundurn Press and written by club members. The chapters cover topics such as orchids, mammals, local geology as well as a section detailing places to visit. It is available for purchase from the PFN or at Avant-Garden Shop and the GreenUP Store.

The PFN is a respected participant in various issues which impact our natural world. This includes providing comments and information for environmental assessment studies, making presentations to city council, and making donations to assist in the acquisition and protection of natural areas in the region. The first area the PFN was involved in protecting was Mark S. Burnham Provincial Park in the 1950s. We all need areas where we can know and appreciate our natural world.

Although the pandemic has restricted in-person events, the PFN still hosts monthly meetings over Zoom, outings, and nature surveys such as the two local Christmas Bird Counts and two butterfly counts. The club also offers a grant program to assist members and others to know, appreciate, and conserve our natural heritage. Grants are also given to support thesis projects of fourth-year biology students at Trent University. For infor-

mation on current activities, consult the PFN website at www.peterboroughnature.org.