

THE BRODIE CLUB



Established 1921

THE 1,065th MEETING OF THE BRODIE CLUB

The 1,065th meeting of the Brodie Club was held at 7:30 pm on Tuesday, 16 April, 2013 in Room 432 of the Ramsay Wright Laboratories of the University of Toronto.

Chair: Sid Daniels
Secretary: Trudy Rising

The meeting was called to order at 7:38 PM and was attended by 35; 27 members and 8 guests.

Roll Call:

Present: E. Addison, R. Addison, Beadle, Bertin, Currie, Curry, Daniels, Dunham, Dunn, Eadie, A. Falls, B. Falls, D. Hussell, J. Hussell, Kotanen, Machin, McAndrews, Obbard, Riley, J. Rising, T. Rising, Seymour, Slessor, Speakman, Sutherland, Tomlinson, Zoladeski.

Regrets: Abraham, J. Bendell, Y. Bendell, Bryant, Carley, Currie, Iron, A. Juhola, H. Juhola, Kotanen, Larsen, Lumsden, Martyn, Pittaway.

Guests: Emily Drystek (guest of R. Addison); Sharon Hick (McAndrews); Anne Bell and Jerry De Marco (J. and T. Rising); Jose Mendoza, John Nishikawa, Greg Parsons, Greg Stuart (Seymour).

Minutes: Bruce Falls had one correction to the Minutes of the March meeting; he saw only one European Little Egret in Trinidad. Minutes were approved as corrected.

Reports of Committees

- **Program:** B. Falls: Speaker for next month's meeting, May 7, yet to be determined, as prospect Bob Curry will be away next month. [Later addendum: James Paterson of Ontario Nature will speak on the Ontario Reptile and Amphibian Atlas. Thanks to Anne Bell for the suggestion.]
- **ON Nature Representative Report:** Glenda Slessor reported on a regional 2013 Spring Meeting of 18-19 clubs that she and Bob Curry attended on behalf of Brodie Club. Ours is probably the least conservation oriented, but is a founding member of FON. ON Nature is presently campaigning to try to rescind changes to the Endangered Species Act, and is working on the problem of dogs loose on reserves. A new Ontario Reptile and Amphibian Atlas App is now available for iPhone, and about to be produced this summer as an android version. ON Nature membership of 30K people, includes constituent club members, and only about 5,000 are actual ON Nature members; this needs to be increased. The Rouge Bio Blitz will be happening on Sept. 14 and 15 (Bill Rapley can probably tell us more as the time grows closer). ON Nature is organizing a Youth Summit for Biodiversity, May 22-24, hosted by ON

Nature's Youth Council, and they requested funds to sponsor one student's attendance (cost about \$300). Glenda took up donations for this purpose and by the end of evening had \$325. "Thank you, Brodie Club members for your generosity!" said Glenda and Dr. Anne Bell, ON Nature's Director of Communication and Education, who was a guest at Brodie Club for the meeting.

- **Field Trip and Picnic:** There was considerable discussion about possibilities at the meeting. After the meeting, Jock and Sharon stepped forward to highly recommend [Crawford Lake](#) and have provided more information (see below). They will lead aspects of the outing on June 2, but we need one or more volunteers for birds, butterflies, herps, etc. Please consider volunteering, either at the meeting of May 7 or by contacting Rose Addison.

Jock's reasons for recommending Crawford Lake Conservation Area for a field day:

- *easy access by road (50 km from Toronto city hall via corvid flight)
- *free parking with admission of \$7.50 per adult
- *boardwalk around lake
- *hiking trails that include view from Escarpment with vultures at eye level
- *130 year old conifer-hardwood forest
- *Escarpment cedars, the oldest trees in Ontario and maybe in all of Canada
- *reconstructed Iroquoian village
- *picnic tables and washrooms and coffee and candy and souvenirs
- *[field guidebook](#) available for the geologically perplexed; see also other materials posted on his [lab web site](#)

Announcements

Trudy Rising announced that Dr. Anne Bell is the Celebrity Birder for The Carden Challenge 2013, which raises funds to support the stewardship of Carden's alvar and bird habitats. Brodie Club's Jean Iron did this last year. Trudy encouraged us all to pledge an amount to Anne to support this area we all admire.

Dr. Bell provided postcards to members to fill in and mail, urging the provincial government to reject the current proposal of MNR to reduce the impact of the 2007 Endangered Species Act.

SPEAKER:

Bruce Falls introduced the speaker, **John Ambrose**. John was educated at the University of Michigan (BS and MS) and Cornell University, from which he obtained his PhD in Botany in 1974. He was Curator of the University of Guelph Arboretum from 1974-1991, and then served as Curator of Botany/Manager of Horticulture at the Toronto Zoo until November 1999. He now lives in Guelph as well as at Swallow Haven Farm, Pelee Island, and continues to do research there on the plants of Pelee Island as well as farming and growing seeds for a seed company.



Pelee Island Trees and Other Curious Creatures



John started his presentation with a map of Pelee Island, and a brief introduction to it. It was an archipelago of three connected islands before the central marshlands were drained in 1866 and converted to farmland. The higher areas have limestone at the surface, forming alvars on most of the upland areas.

Species diversity overall, as is typical of islands, is rather low, but many of the alvar

species are special, and with a latitude of 41°N, the island has many Carolinian species. John became interested in doing research on Pelee Island because he was most interested in herbaceous monocots, whereas most focus at the arboretum where he worked was on woody dicots.

Sheridan Point is on the northwestern “corner” of the island. The Pelee Club, dating back to the 1800s as a hunting and fishing club, continues to have accommodate its members. At that location is a *Kentucky coffee tree* which was probably there before the house was built. Like aspen, Kentucky coffee trees grow from shoots arising from the root system, sometimes resulting in an entire forest of genetically identical trees.

To the west of that is an old winery, whose vineyard has now become a *hackberry* forest. The old winery building, Vin Villa, is in ruins but has been restored a bit by its owner, a Texas contractor whose grandmother once lived on the island.

The *emerald ash borer* infestation, which started in the Detroit-Windsor area and has been working its way across southern Ontario, has now reached Pelee Island, brought in almost certainly by firewood. (John encouraged the Canadian Wildlife Service not to allow firewood to be brought to the island, but was unsuccessful.) *Red ash* and *white ash* are being devastated, but *blue ash* appears to be fairly tolerant to the beetles with only about 3-5% infected. This species is very drought tolerant and has soft, spongy bark, similar to *black ash* but unlike the other ashes with firm bark. It has distinctive square stems (see photo at right).



Lighthouse Point is at the northeast end of the island, and has quarries, a historical lighthouse, and a nature reserve. There was a conflict between a quarry owner that wanted to expand and people wanting to preserve habitat for *blue racer* (photo to left). MNR was caught in the middle, looking after both concerns. It was resolved by giving the quarry limited expansion, while The Nature Conservancy purchased other lands for habitat preservation. Other reptiles at Lighthouse Point include the *fox snake*, a great climber, and *painted turtles* in abundance.



Nearby Lake Henry is a marshy pond formed when a berm protecting drained farmland was breached in the winter of 1972-73. The lake has a large colony of *American lotus*, which first appeared there in the 1990s. Lotus pods with viable seeds are sometimes found on

Pelee's beaches. John thinks that the lotus came from an Essex County population, with seeds arriving on currents from the Detroit River washing into the lake during a period when the marsh was open to Lake Erie.

Fish Point, on the south side, has a view of Ohio. The point is a sand spit similar to Pt. Pelee, with a marsh in the middle where *swamp rose mallow* grows and *Prothonotary Warbler* has occasionally been found. To its east is an upland forest with a large population of *wild hyacinth*, and woodland wildflowers such as *bloodroot* and *May apple* abound. John thinks it possible that native people brought wild hyacinth with them when coming to the many Erie islands for summer residence, as these are the primary places where that plant occurs. To the north is a maple swamp with *pin oak* and *spicebush*.



Common and *dwarf hackberry*, and *red mulberry* (photo of leaf at left), grow on the sand spits, along with *black oak* on the dunes. The dwarf hackberry trees have hardly grown at all in the 30 years John has been visiting the island, and may well be much older than their size suggests. Red mulberry has long pendulous catkins and fruit. The Pelee Island population is one of only six in Canada, and is not doing very well.

Switchgrass is common on the shoreline at Fish Point. Other beach annuals such as *sea rocket* also occur, as does the threatened *trumpet creeper*. The latter occurs at two sites here and a few on the mainland, but is not yet listed as endangered. ATV use of the beach potentially threatens the very sensitive vegetation.



On the windward edge of Fish Point, vegetation includes *common hoptree*, *sycamore*, and *red cedar*. Endangered *Prickly pear cactus* grows here in the openings, and is endangered (photo at right).

Pelee Island Bird Observatory does extensive bird work in the Fish Point portion of the island. *Bald Eagles* have been resident for about 10 years. A great diversity of migratory birds can be seen and heard in spring and fall. Among other curious critters found here are *American and Fowler's Toad* (although John hasn't seen Fowler's), *black swallowtail*, *monarch butterfly*, *giant swallowtail*, and various "blues."

Stone Road Alvar, in the southeast corner of the island, is a prairie-like alvar that can be flooded in spring and becomes very dry in summer. It has high species diversity, and supports *prairie rose*, *chinkopin oak*, and *grey-headed coneflower*. *Purple hawkweed* is common, as is *nodding onion*. The Alvar Reserve, ON Nature, Nature Conservancy, and Essex County have all contributed to preserving habitats here.



Further north, the vegetation thickens and limestone is sometimes at the surface. Chinkapin oak and blue ash are numerous. *Hop trees*, and *prickly ash*, with its prickles and little berries that look like miniature oranges, both occur in this area, and are among the main food plants of the *giant swallowtail* (photo at left).

The Entrepreneurial John - As another pastime, John takes advantage of the island's long growing season to grow tomatoes,

peppers, etc. for their seed, supplying a farm-seed company in Palmerston. He has tried a number of marginal plants, such as figs, artichokes, hardy Eucalyptus, and pomegranates--the latter from an area in Turkmenistan with climatic conditions similar to those on the island.

A challenge for Pelee Island farmers now is the huge population of Wild Turkeys that built up after introduction for hunters. There is a season for males only, but it's in the spring, after females have been impregnated. The township doesn't allow a fall turkey hunt because of conflict of the traditional fall pheasant hunt.

Pelee Island Heritage. The community on the island was founded by the McCormick family. Pelee Island has a Heritage Centre, which was established by Ron Tiesson. Tiesson got funding to restore the 1833 lighthouse in 2000. The Island was obviously a centre for native people, at least seasonally, as many arrowheads and other artifacts have been found there. About 10 students attend the island school (which has two teachers), and John is hopeful that several young couples who are currently thinking of buying farmland on the island will do so, expanding the student population.

In summary, John invites us down, but not all at once, please!

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q. Have the blue ash mostly recovered from emerald ash borer?

A. Yes, only 3-5% are infected. Others like red are devastated.

Q: Are there still blue racers on the island?

A: Yes.

Q: Eadie: What about shrikes?

A: There are occasional sightings, but no breeding records.

Q. Dunn: With the alternation of floods and drought, do alvar plants have special adaptations for water balance?

A. Probably.

*Q. Jock: What is *Cercius canadensis*?*

A. Redbud. The only known native specimen in Canada was on Pelee Island, but was washed away years ago. Introductions have led to naturalized populations in SW Ontario, and redbud even grows in Ottawa.

Q. Chris: In a red mulberry mapping project, we found that at Fish Point, there were almost none. Just hybrids.

A. Yes, there was a good population in the past, but only a very few persist. There is a large population on lands of the Royal Botanical Garden, where they are being managed successfully.

John Riley thanked the speaker.

FIELD OBSERVATIONS AND LITERATURE REVIEWS

R. Addison reported seeing her first *mourning cloak* of the season on April 15.

Zoladeski saw his first *bloodroot* in bloom, along with *garlic mustard*, of course. He also had a book to speak about, but as he wanted extra time and the meeting was running late, he was encouraged to put this off to a later meeting.

E. Addison recommended the book *Seasick*, by Alana Mitchell, a local writer. The book is a good overview of the status of the seas of the world and is very well written.

Seymour reported seeing his first *kinglets* and *Yellow-rumped Warblers* today, but seeing a flock of *Cedar and Bohemian Waxwings* yesterday -- from winter to spring in a day!

Meeting adjourned at 9:45 p.m. and refreshments were enjoyed by all.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be held Tuesday, 7 May at 7:30 pm in Room 432 of the Ramsay Wright Zoological Laboratories. **James Paterson** of ON will speak on the **Ontario Reptile and Amphibian Atlas**.

FROM THE ARCHIVES

April 1988: A motion was made to terminate support of the FON, due to its active opposition to a proposed bill to allow private individuals to hold certain wildlife species for purposes of rehabilitation, propagation, educational uses and falconry. The motion was withdrawn in favour of addressing a letter to the Ministry of Natural Resources expressing support for the legislation, with a copy to the FON.



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