

# Natural South Marysburgh

## A Peninsula of Many Offerings

-By Terry Sprague

From the wilds of Big Island on the north shore of Prince Edward County, it is a good hour's drive to Point Traverse. As a budding birder in the early 1960s, it was recommended that I go here if I wanted to find birds. I was not disappointed—it was May, and the bushes were seething with spring migrants. Later, I learned it was due to the position of South Marysburgh. Jutting into Lake Ontario, it was a natural catch basin for weary neotropical migrants that had just crossed the open lake and were now looking for a spot to rest and refuel before continuing their long journey north to the boreal forests of Ontario to nest.

That was 60 years ago, and I am still making the annual pilgrimage down there.

For much of my life, I was employed as an interpretive naturalist—first, with Sandbanks Provincial Park and later, with Quinte Conservation, as well as doing interpretive events under my NatureStuff Tours banner. I am retired now, but what is retirement? It is doing the things you really enjoy, and I enjoy identifying plants and animals and explaining how everything ties in with each other. Nature interpretation. So, I still offer the occasional guided hike and other events. During the current pandemic, much of the nature interpretation has been done through a Zoom format. At almost 77, I can't quit just yet—we need biodiversity and an understanding of how vital a diversity of nature is to our own survival as a human species. We must continue to teach.

Since that maiden voyage to Point Traverse, I have discovered new areas in South Marysburgh to explore. It's properly called a "ward", but I much prefer "township" as the term seems to flow more smoothly with South Marysburgh. Through this new column, I am hoping to introduce you to some of my favourite areas and tell you a bit about them, and why I think they are so important. South Marysburgh is a treasure trove of unique and biologically diverse habitats, from the high

mesa at McMahon Bluff and the limestone escarpment at Little Bluff, to the 26-km sweeping shoreline from Gull Pond and Point Petre to Prince Edward Point—a stretch of shoreline known as The South Shore Important Bird and Biodiversity Area. Within this biologically rich identified area are some properties that have been set aside as conservation areas, like the Point Petre Provincial Wildlife Area, the Ostrander Point Crown Land Block, the Hudgin-Rose Nature Reserve, MapleCross Coastline Reserve, the NCC Bass Family Nature Reserve, the Miller Family Nature Reserve and, of course, the Prince Edward Point National Wildlife Area.

The South Shore IBA encompasses some 15,000 acres which includes everything south of Army Reserve Road, but also identifies all of South Bay, Prince Edward Bay and Timber Island. It is a huge area. The South Shore is the last undeveloped public land on the Canadian side



Gull Pond—Photo by Terry Sprague

of Lake Ontario. Despite more than 200 years of human use for recreation and agriculture, it hosts a very high

level of biodiversity and it is home to dozens of species at risk including birds, plants, animals and fish. It is now recognized as a remarkable opportunity to study and enjoy nature.

Needless to say, there will be no lack of subject material for this monthly column. The biggest challenge will be picking what subject to focus on in each column! So, come with me quietly as we explore a few of these rich areas and the plants and animals that have made them so special.

This month, however, let's all go down to Prince Ed-

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