HALIFAX TREE IDENTIFICATION WALK

- by Bernie McKenna - photos by Jane Flemming

Date: Saturday, April 26th Location: Halifax Street Scapes Weather: Dampish, cool breeze 4C Leader: Peter Duinker Participants: 31

This field trip had us at the mercy of the Nova Scotia weather god, and she can be fickle. However, the weather app was bang on and as predicted the rain stopped about an hour before walk start time. The cool breeze did persist though and cost us a few participants along the way. Note, both today's Tree Identification Walk and tomorrow's Belchers Marsh Walk are being done in conjunction with the 2025 City Nature Challenge, and both had a number of enthusiastic iNaturalist devotees on them.

This walk was a continuation of Peter Duinker's presentation at the Nova Scotia Museum of Natural History (NSMNH) on Feb. 18th. As at the meeting, Peter clued us in to the various tree characteristics to use in tree ID, they are; tree form, bark structure, needles, leaves, buds, flowers and fruits, and all taken together they can be very helpful. He also listed a few aids we can use: binoculars, a hand lens, a good reference book and a handy reference app. As a

reference book he prefers "Trees in Canada" by John Laird Farrar. In categorizing trees he has 3 categories, native (N), non-native (N-N) and nearnative (N-NE), the latter being trees that may become more common as a result of a warming climate.

We started at the NSMNH parking lot, proceeded to Bell Road and further. The trees will be covered in the sequence we found them, starting with a spruce on the museum grounds.



It was a Sitka Spruce (N-N), with horizontal branches, reddish bark and large, loose scales. A Pacific Coast tree, it is normally found in close proximity to the ocean.



Sitka Spruce Picea sitchensis



Only a few feet away was a mystery tree, nonconiferous, it was assessed as either a Butternut or Black Walnut. He felt it was a walnut, but confirmed ID would be easier in its summer foliage.

Black Walnut, Juglans nigra (or possibly: Butternut, Juglans cinerea)

Heading to Bell Road we passed a White Pine, with 5-needle clusters and typical branching form. He said it is often attacked by the White Pine Weevil, which mates and lays its eggs on the terminal lead. On hatching its young feed on the needles and often kill the actual lead, causing the tree to grow a new lead or leads to continue its growth.



White Pine Pinus strobus



Directly across Bell Road was a coppice of 2 (likely) Linden Trees, that had been cut to ground level for some reason; this allowed the roots to send up numerous new shoots to carry on.

Linden coppice

The next tree was a White Ash of maybe 60 years of age, its vertical bark structure, and up sweeping branch tips made for good ID. It had some internal rot and a cavity further up the trunk where a pair of starlings were lugging nesting material to. Peter allowed a tree can handle a lot of internal rot as the strength and nutrient flow is in the outer wood.



White Ash Fraxinus americana



Further along, growing within the HRM property fence, was a tree he identified as the Tree of Heaven (N-N). Not a welcome tree, it supports no insects for the birds, and has no local enemies or diseases. Why HRM would have a highly invasive tree growing on HRM grounds beats me.

Tree of Heaven Ailanthus altissma





On the corner of Sackville Street and Bell Road is a Ginkgo Tree (N-N) another tree, nonfriendly to birds. The Ginkgo also does not host insects for birds and has no local enemies or diseases. It is monoecious, meaning it has both male and female trees; HRM only plant male trees (the females produce fruit with a stinky odour), consequently no seeds are produced.

Ginkgo *Ginkgo biloba* Crossing Sackville Street, we entered the Halifax Public Gardens, which has a wonderfully, diverse variety of both native and non-native trees. The first specimen we came to was a large tree, with a wide canopy that was covered in early flower buds, like a magnolia on steroids. It was a Tulip Tree (N-N), it has light bark, with regular or uniform valleys and ridges. Well-named, its leaves actually resemble the tulip flower profile.

> Tulip Tree Liriodendron tulipifera





Peter next pointed out a Horse Chestnut Tree (N-N) with its typical, large buds and flaky bark, misidentified in a row of 3 Linden Trees.

Its neighbouring lindens had the normal bulbous base and multiple root shoots or whiskers. Behind this row, against the fence was a row of Witch Hazel shrubs, of which there are three species in North America, and all these were showing their yellow, flower development.

Horse Chestnut Aesculus hippocastanum Next was a large Cypress Tree (N-N), looking much like its cedar relatives, and like them cypress wood is desired for its rot resistance.

Cypress, Cupressaceae Spp. (probably Chamaecuparis sp.)





Here also was a Weeping Birch (N-N), Peter said 3 to 5 of these had to be removed because of previous senseless vandalism girding damage. In this area was a Camperdown Elm (N-N), originally found in Scotland around 1840, and a popular species, he said all Camperdown Elms have descended from this original tree.

Weeping Birch Betula pendula This brought us to the pond edge, where a Paper/White Birch and Yellow Birch were growing within 6 feet of each other, and each having bark colour descriptive of their names. Peter discussed both and how this particular Paper Birch had tighter than normal bark. He also explained that the Yellow Birch is a long lived, tree with strong, hard, close-grained wood suitable for multi-use.





Paper Birch Betula pendula

Yellow Birch Betula alleghaniensis



Also, here we saw a Norway Maple (N-N). These trees are not very desirable because they have shallow roots and can be very invasive. They're also the only maple that is susceptible to tar spot. An American Beech, was just on the edge of the pond a few of last year's leaves were hanging on, and this year's tightly curled bronze buds were gleaming on the branch tips.

> Norway Maple Acer platanoides



Coming to an oak, Peter said there are 2 types that are easily discerned by their leaf shape, which have either pointed leaf lobes or rounded ones. Pin oaks have sharp, pointed lobes, while English oaks have more rounded lobes. Oaks are very bird-friendly and host more insects and caterpillars than any other tree. They commonly have wide canopies, although columnar types have been developed. HRM has used the columnar type in street medians, but with large canopy trees on either side of the street, it doesn't seem to be of much benefit.



Red Oak Quercus rubra (palustris)



Columnar-shaped Oak

There was also a Sycamore Maple (N-N) which is of the Acer or maple family. It has large, 5-lobed, coarse leaves, with flaky and loose bark on larger trees.

Sycamore Maple Acer pseudoplatansu



At this point we crossed Summer Street and entered Camp Hill Cemetery, the last leg of our tree journey. Here we saw the aftereffects of Hurricane Juan as well as the negative situation trees can have on headstones. The first tree we came to in the cemetery was a Scots Pine (N-N). It is another invasive species that's been introduced. Its 2needle-clusters bear needles of 1–4 inches in length, the bark has an orange tint and can be flaky on the upper trunk.



Scots Pine Pinus sylvestris

Not far away was a Freeman Maple, a naturally occurring cross between a Red Maple and Silver Maple; long lived (about 100 years) and has colourful orange-red to yellow fall leaves. This left one tree to go, a Stone Pine (N-N), again 2-needled, with redbrown bark plates, this specimen was most likely planted by a family member in years past.

Freeman Maple Acer freemanji (natural hybrid of red and silver(



That brought us to the walk finish, where by now the cool breeze had dwindled our numbers somewhat but more than half had stayed on. It was interesting to see Peter bounce ideas off of Henry Doane, an accomplished arborist who had accompanied us this morning. This walk was a very informative and practical complement to Peter's previous Tree Identification Talk last February. As a wrap up, we thanked him for his generosity in sharing his time, knowledge, and experience with us.