

Bell Park Field Trip

- by Pooja Vijayaraj

(photos by Pooja Vijayaraj, Elizabeth Mills and Don Flemming)

Date: Sunday, 2 November 2025

Place: Bell Park, Mount Uniacke

Walk Leader: Bernie McKenna

Weather: Sunny 9 C

Participants: 18

We began by noting that conifers are gymnosperms, plants that produce seeds without flowers, unlike angiosperms, which bear flowers and enclose their seeds within fruits.

Among the shrubs, we compared huckleberry, lowbush blueberry, and velvet blueberry. Although all three turn reddish in the fall, their distinguishing features include differences in height, leaf shape, and texture —the lowbush blueberry being the shortest, forming low mats close to the ground; huckleberry growing taller; and velvet blueberry notable for its soft, velvety leaves due to fine hairs on their surface.

The white oak and red oak offered a striking comparison: white oak leaves have rounded lobes, while red oak leaves have pointed tips. Another interesting distinction is that white oak acorns germinate soon after falling in autumn, whereas red oak acorns remain dormant through the winter and germinate the following spring.



White Oak



Red Oak

Scent played a key role in our observations. The Northern Bayberry emitted its distinct aromatic fragrance, while the Northern Wild Raisin gave off a noticeably pungent smell. As the viburnum's leaves begin to break down in the fall, they release butyric acid, producing an odour often compared to sour milk or stinky socks.

On the rocky areas near West Lake, we found Juniper, a hardy shrub with scale-like leaves and a fresh, resinous aroma. We also identified the colt's foot and greater plantain, both common ground plants with unique leaf shapes.

We learned to identify yellow birch by the thin, curly strips on its bark that reveal a lighter layer beneath.



Witch Hazel

An interesting highlight was noticing witch hazel, one of the few plants that blooms in late fall and winter, its bright yellow ribbon-like flowers adding unexpected colour to the cold season.

Other species observed included sheep laurel, trailing arbutus, heath speedwell, and calico aster. The Mountain Holly stood out with its bright red-orange berries. We compared the leaf structures of partridgeberry and wintergreen, noting partridgeberry's smaller, opposite leaves versus wintergreen's thicker, glossy ones.



We also came across Tree Lungwort, a beautiful greenish lichen growing on tree bark, an indicator of clean air and moisture.

Tree Lungwort

Nearby, a few False Chanterelle mushrooms were spotted on the forest floor.



False Chanterelle Mushrooms



We observed Green Alder as well, bearing clusters of woody cone-like fruiting structures.

Green Alder

Backgrounder: *Bell Park* by *Bernie McKenna*



Today's walk was slated for Saturday, Nov. 1st; however high winds with gusts to 60Km caused us to delay for one day. This proved a good decision as Sunday brought a great day and made for an excellent walk. We were also fortunate to have a botanist (Jeremy) in our midst to identify many plants and offer interesting details on them.



Bell Park itself is a small 55- acre nature park on the north shore of West Lake in Mount Uniacke. It is part of a larger “Crown Grant” given to Samuel bell in 1784. He, in turn passed it on to his son the Hon. Hugh Bell in 1845. From there his descendants donated it to the province of Nova scotia in 1961. In 2001 a small group of Mount Uniacke citizens formed the Bell Park Development Association to administer stewardship of this wonderfully diverse park.



West Lake

