



Conservancy NEWS

Protecting the special natural features of the Couchiching region for future generations.

Seasonal Highlights from The Couchiching Conservancy

MAY 2009

Help preserve another piece of Carden Alvar

The Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) has successfully negotiated an agreement to purchase a 654-acre property immediately north of Prairie Smoke Alvar. This fine piece of alvar habitat, to be known as Little Bluestem Alvar, has been near the top of our priority list for years, and The Couchiching Conservancy has once again volunteered to help raise the funds necessary for its purchase.

The good news is that acquisition funds from both federal and provincial programs are available to assist in this purchase and will cover over \$475,000 of the total project cost of \$544,000. That means we and NCC only have to raise the remaining \$69,000 to close the deal. That funding needs to be in place by mid-September.



The other good news: this is a wonderful property for conservation. The grassland alvars include not only the Tufted Hairgrass communities found to the south, but also extensive areas of a native prairie grass known as Little Bluestem and a great mix of other alvar specialties.

Mark Bisset to lead the Conservancy staff



Mark Bisset, who has been a fixture at the *Orillia Packet & Times* for the past decade and is currently its managing editor, has accepted the position of Executive Director for the Couchiching Conservancy. He takes over on June 1 from Ron Reid and will have a month of training for the role before Ron leaves. Ron will return to the Conservancy on a part-time basis after the summer to work on Carden Alvar projects.

Mark's background is in journalism, based on a degree in English and history from the University of Western Ontario, but the natural environment has long been of special interest. During

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Carden Alvar *continued from cover*

A limestone escarpment that cuts across the property features several springs that gush from the rock and feed wetland areas. A series of walking trails will guide visitors through conifer woodlands to the open alvar beyond, with the main access point linking directly to the Carden Recreation Centre grounds.

The Couchiching Conservancy has promised to raise at least \$25,000 toward this project and, if possible, to also put some money away in a special Carden fund to help with future costs. If you can help, or if you would like further information, please contact Ron Reid at the Conservancy office at 326-1620. ∞

What's new in Carden

The Integrated Carden Conservation Strategy process helped conservation organizations understand the needs and desires of a diverse group of communities. Conservation and stewardship projects flowing from the Strategy have attracted support from federal and provincial species-at-risk funding programs, local quarry companies, and landowners. The Couchiching Conservancy has been busy with various projects through the winter and spring, including:

- Installation of interpretive signage on the Prairie Smoke property
- Walking trail and interpretive signage on Cameron Ranch
- A parking area along Wylie Road, as well as at the entrances to Prairie Smoke Alvar, Cameron Ranch and Prospect Marsh
- At Prospect Marsh Nature Reserve, a wetland enhancement project in partnership with Ducks Unlimited
- Installation of mallard hen houses on several Conservancy properties
- Creation of a free brochure entitled "A Guide to Responsible Rural Birding on Carden Alvar," which is distributed to visiting naturalists and at the Carden Nature Festival
- Eleven private-landowner stewardship projects, including installation of solar-powered water supplies, cattle fencing and thinning of hawthorn brush
- 3.5 kilometres of fencing completed on conservation lands. ∞

On the hunt for cryptic hybrids: the Golden-winged Warbler study

This summer, Kristen Field is coordinating a project to gather information on the distribution and status of Golden-winged Warblers in this area. Because this threatened species often hybridizes with their close relative the Blue-winged Warbler, in many places birds that look like Golden-winged Warblers actually have mixed DNA - so-called cryptic hybrids.

This year's study, being carried out largely by 29 dedicated volunteers, will give a much more accurate picture of where these birds occur in this area. To fully understand the extent of hybridization in our area, we have also partnered with the Cornell Lab of Ornithology to assist with a DNA analysis under the direction of a researcher who has been studying Golden-winged Warblers for eight years. Conservancy volunteers are already signed on to collect DNA samples from the birds in our area, which will add to the data being collected throughout eastern North America. ∞

Mark Bisset *continued*

his tenure at the Packet, the paper received awards from both Ontario Nature and the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority for its excellence in environmental reporting.

He also has a strong record of community involvement in Orillia and area, serving as a volunteer with Georgian College, the Orillia and Area Community Foundation, the Stephen Leacock International Poetry Festival, Scouts Canada, and other organizations. Those community connections, as well as his experience as a manager, will be valuable assets to the Conservancy.

Mark was chosen by the Conservancy Board from among 40 applicants. Everyone at the Conservancy looks forward to working with Mark to continue our strong record of protecting natural lands. ∞



Golden-winged Warbler
Photo by Larry Kirtley.

Summer is a great time for learning and helping

Every year we hire summer staff to assist with various field and outreach activities and as a way to help train the next generation of conservation leaders. This year we were able to attract two well-qualified assistants with a keen interest in conservation biology, stewardship and working with the public.

Lynda Ruegg, a student at Sir Sandford Fleming College, is studying Ecosystem Management. She brings with her a wealth of experience in flora and fauna identification as well as enthusiasm to learn more. Lynda has worked extensively across the country, specializing in environmental projects. In her spare time Lynda volunteers at the Kawartha Turtle Trauma Centre in Peterborough.

Ian Crewe comes to us from Toronto and is excited to be learning more about the Couchiching region. Ian has a degree in Environmental Science and Resource Studies from Trent University and is now taking courses in Environmental Engineering at Ryerson University. Ian has been involved in a wide range of projects, including a volunteer project in Ecuador and as a volunteer coordinator for the Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust.

Our summer staff will be working on various stewardship projects such as removing invasive species, planting native trees, assisting with species-at-risk monitoring and biological inventories for management plans. They will also be assisting with public-outreach efforts, which includes attending various community events and investigating social-marketing tools through the Internet. We welcome their energy and their enthusiasm, and we hope they have an educational and fun-filled summer.

We are also pleased to have the volunteer assistance of **Jessie Wokes**, who is part of the Katimavik group, a Canadian government-sponsored youth program. Jessie comes to us from Churchill, Manitoba, and is thoroughly enjoying her busy volunteer time here in Orillia. She is very interested in pursuing a career in the environment field, perhaps working for Parks Canada in Manitoba, just as her grandmother did for many years. ☺

A bus load of thanks – for volunteers and members only

Every summer, we offer an opportunity for our volunteers and members to see some of our projects up close. The trip this year is scheduled for Saturday, August 15.

A visit to the Carden area to see the special flora and fauna of the area is back by popular demand. The busy day will include a stop at the latest addition to the protected lands in Carden as well as a chance to see some of the interesting projects on Cameron Ranch and Windmill Ranch. Lunch will be included with the trip.

We would like to thank the Casino Rama Community Wellness Program for sponsoring our Volunteer Appreciation trip and First Student Canada for providing a bus and driver for the day.

Seating is limited, so please reserve a spot by calling Gayle at 326-1620 or e-mail gayle@couchconservancy.ca. There is no cost for the trip. ☺



Events



Carden Nature Festival, June 5-7

It's only a few more weeks until this year's Carden Nature Festival, and registrations are coming in daily. Following suggestions from past participants, we have scheduled additional times for several of the most popular outings and added some brand new ones.

If you haven't registered, please do so by visiting the website www.CardenGuide.com/Festival, where you will find a list of available activities and easy on-line registration.

Couchiching Conservancy Fall Event

Plans are underway for a new family event to take place this September. It will be styled on the popular reality-television show "The Amazing Race" and will help promote properties owned or managed by The Couchiching Conservancy. We are grateful to the Casino Rama Community Wellness Program for their sponsorship of this event. For more information, please call Gayle at 326-1620, or watch for details in our August newsletter.

The Carden Challenge, May 22-23

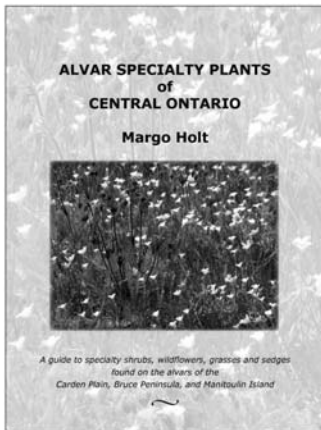
This popular spring event sees teams of four competing to find the most species of birds in a 24-hour period, with pledges to collect funds for stewardship of Carden properties. It's not too late to pledge your support, for either each species seen or a set amount. Just call the Conservancy office at 326-1620, or e-mail us at nature@couchconservancy.ca. ☺

Just off the press...

Alvar Specialty Plants of Central Ontario by local naturalist Margo Holt is a guide to specialty shrubs, wildflowers, grasses and sedges found on the alvars of the Bruce Peninsula, Manitoulin Island and the Carden Plain. The 67-page, spiral-bound book describes 53 species commonly found on Ontario alvars.

The unique features of alvar plants become evident in the full-colour photographs in Margo's book. Each page is dedicated to one species and includes important field characteristics and notes on their occurrence in Ontario. The book also includes a flowering-time chart to help understand what you might expect to see during visits to Ontario's alvars.

The book can be purchased for \$16.95 (there is no tax) by calling 326-1620 or at our office at 1485 Division Road West during regular office hours. Shipping and handling charges will apply to mail orders. Proceeds from book sales will go toward the conservation efforts of The Couchiching Conservancy.



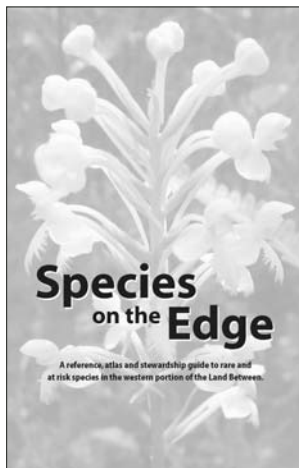
Alvar Specialty Plants of Central Ontario has been produced with assistance from The Waterway Wildlife Program of the Trent-Severn Waterway (Parks Canada), Species at Risk Stewardship Fund, and Environment Canada Habitat Stewardship Program for Species At Risk.



Also on the literary front...

The *Species on the Edge* guidebook will soon be available for purchase. This publication will help volunteers and landowners identify the 38 species-at-risk in our region as well as provide information on their ecology and local distribution.

The book will sell for \$16.95 (tax included). Shipping and handling charges will apply to mail orders. Please call the Conservancy office at 326-1620 for further information.



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- Kyra Howes, Stewardship Coordinator
- Gayle Carlyle, Outreach Coordinator
- Kristen Field, Science Intern

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