



Conservancy NEWS

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

Seasonal Highlights from The Couchiching Conservancy

JUNE 2006

Carden Challenge 2006 nets \$13,000

Each spring, the Carden Plain is home to a competitive event with a difference. Imagine going all-out to find as many kinds of birds as possible in a 24-hour period, and collecting pledges for your efforts to boot. That's the Carden Challenge.

This year's Challenge drew a field of seven teams with a colourful range of names – who wouldn't want to go birding with the Conservancy Cowgirls, the Limestone Cowboys, or the Lagerheads? A Lindsay team captained by Chris Ellingwood took home the Carden Cup for the most species – 119. Leslie Dymont of Fenelon Falls won binoculars donated by Vision Canada Ltd. for top individual pledges, and the Lagerheads were awarded a set of bird guides by celebrity birder Chris Earley, provided by Bird House Nature Company of downtown Orillia.

But the biggest winners of the day were the native plant and bird habitats of the Carden Alvar, which received a

\$13,000 boost as a result of this event. Clearly, the team participants had fun – witness this report by Nathalie Rockhill of the Fine Feathered Friends to their supporters:

We broke 100! In fact, during a 24-hour period June 16–17, our team of five saw birds of 104 different species, all within a 25-kilometre-diameter circle centred on the Carden Alvar.

Seven teams participated in this second annual "birdathon" organized by The Couchiching Conservancy to raise funds for stewardship of protected properties in Carden. A total of 139 species was documented by all teams.

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Dedicating Church Woods to conservation



Church Woods is a 25-acre parcel of mature hardwood trees located within the village of Shanty Bay, to the west of the historic St. Thomas's Anglican Church and close to Kempenfelt Bay. Church Woods has been owned by the same family group since 1832. The church was built in 1832 partly from trees cut from these woods, making for a unique connection between the natural and cultural heritage of this area.

Local residents have used the woods for decades to enjoy quiet walks and to admire the old-growth forest there, which features a diverse mix of over 30 species of trees. This

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Carden Challenge *continued from cover*

Spurred on by incredibly generous per-species pledges, the Fine Feathered Friends scrutinized a variety of habitats: from wetlands, woodlands and grasslands to barnyards, houses in town, and the open skies. The call of the Barred Owl rang out – oh, no; that was Ted, luring birds into the open to defend their nests against the intruder. Then there were the piteous sounds of an injured rodent – no, that was Ted again, hoping to attract a raptor seen too fleetingly in the treetops.

Just as our pre-dawn start and the effects of the heat were causing us to falter, we were revived by Betty Pengelly's now-legendary Carden Challenge lunch and some quick naps. Then Maria Andretti (a.k.a. Louise Horne) whisked us back to the northern woods, where Ted listened for distant rarities from Louise's running board and Morris leaped out with the scope to get close looks at more great warblers while Mary cheered them on.

There were so many highlights: Bank Swallows popping their heads out of holes in a sandbank, Black Terns swooping over Lake Dalrymple, the Loggerhead Shrike on a hawthorn bush and the Upland Sandpiper's wolf whistle at dawn, the Green Heron that flew overhead two

minutes before stopping time, the Black-throated Blue Warbler that sang from the woods precisely where Ted predicted it would – and our triumphant discovery of a single House Sparrow. Then there was our visit with Lou and Judy Probst's beautiful horses while looking at their resident Cliff Swallows. And we can't forget the two bear cubs, the graceful leap of the deer as he crossed the fences, the baby snowshoe hare... and the flowers!

Thanks to the generosity of you and other friends, the stewardship of Couchiching Conservancy properties on the Carden Alvar will benefit from more than \$13,000 in pledges. And preservation of the diverse habitats in this extraordinary area will continue.

Many, many thanks, and best wishes from The Fine Feathered Friends:

Ted Cheskey, birder extraordinaire
Louise Horne, advance scout, organizer and driver
Morris Ilyniak, spotter and telescope man
Mary Walton-Ball, spotter and encourager
Nathalie Rockhill, team leader. ∞

Church Woods *continued from cover*

stand includes fine examples of Butternut, now classed as a threatened species, and uncommon birds such as the Red-headed Woodpecker. It is part of a belt of forest between Ridge Road and the Lake Simcoe shoreline that stretches from Barrie to Orillia.

When the owners of Church Woods decided they should sell, they approached their neighbours to offer the property at a reduced rate on the condition that it never be developed. After looking at several options, the neighbours asked The Couchiching Conservancy to hold and manage the land, with the understanding that they would raise the funds necessary for the purchase. We agreed, and have also begun the process of certifying the property as an Ecogift so the owners will receive the best possible tax options for the donated share of the land value.

Because Church Woods is surrounded by residential development and within the settlement area of Shanty Bay, its future as green space would be highly uncertain without this kind of creative solution. To date, the Township of Oro-Medonte has agreed to contribute 10 per cent of the purchase price, and pledges from neighbours totalling several hundred thousand dollars have been received. An intensive neighbourhood campaign this summer will determine the fate of this exceptional natural area. ∞



Coming up: lots of community events

If you would like to learn more about Conservancy activities, you can see us at:

Ontario Nature Doors Open
Grant's Woods – July 23


Orillia Lion's Funfest
Couchiching Beach Park – August 6

Carden Agricultural Fair
Dalrymple Rec. Centre – August 26

Orillia Fine Arts Association: Saving the Planet show
Orillia Opera House – September 8

Orillia Fall Fair
ODAS Park – September 9 and 10

For details on any of these events, contact Rosalie at 326-1620.

*The Couchiching
Conservancy* 

Over 500 attend Mother Earth Day 2006

In hindsight, we made a wise decision in choosing to celebrate Earth Day three weeks late this year. The weather was perfect: just warm enough to be comfortable and cool enough to discourage the bugs. And the link to Mother's Day – hence Mother Earth Day – seemed to resonate with many participants.

Nearly 100 volunteers were on hand to provide numerous activities to over 500 visitors. We are proud to report that our youngest return volunteer was aged 11 and our oldest 85-plus!

Activities were a mix of old and new. Visitors enjoyed guided trail walks and beginners' birding, watercolour painting in the woods, and live entertainment by the Celtic group Alex. By popular request, countless youngsters tried their hand at building whirly-gigs and birdhouses. New this year were Stoneman Brian with his fossils, cooking bannock and cedar tea over an open fire – courtesy of Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre – face painting, and Clarabelle the Clown.

A very special part of the day was a blessing of our celebration with a 'smudge' ceremony by Mark Douglas from Mnjikaning First Nation. Mark reinforced the philosophy that culture and nature have a common denominator and that we must work to find harmony between them.



Mark Douglas (far right) from Mnjikaning First Nation helped us celebrate Earth Day with a traditional 'smudge' ceremony.

We would like to thank local businesses that provided us with products and services as donations or at reduced costs. Once again, Casino Rama provided seed funding to make this event possible, and this year we also welcomed support from the Huronia Communities Foundation. Other major sponsors included:

Artech Promotional Wear
Mariposa Market
Claire's Fine Wines
Complete Rent-Alls Orillia
The Crow's Nest
Laidlaw Transit
The Friendly Fermentor

Waubushene Heritage
ODAS Park
Orillia Today
Orillia Packet & Times

Will we be celebrating Mother Earth Day in 2007? You bet! According to our visitor surveys this year, 100 per cent of those responding said they would like to come back. We'll be celebrating Mother Earth Day II on Saturday, May 12, 2007.

If you have comments or suggestions, call Rosalie at 326-1620 or e-mail her at: outreach@couchconservancy.ca



UPDATES **from the Conservation front**

A warm welcome to Kyra Howes



One of the challenges associated with our success in acquiring a growing roster of natural properties is to make sure they are managed properly. This is especially true on the Carden Alvar, where the properties are large, many organizations are involved, and the use of cattle as a management tool raises issues such as fencing and water supply.

So we are very fortunate to have hired Kyra Howes as our new Stewardship Coordinator. Kyra is a graduate of Fleming College in Lindsay and a keen naturalist. After her marriage this summer, she and her husband plan to build a straw-bale house on their property near Hillsdale.

Kyra is sharing her time between us and the Nature Conservancy of Canada, so she also has responsibility for a roster of properties in places such as Minesing Swamp and the Georgian Bay coast. She has already been walking fence lines and setting up monitoring plots on Windmill Ranch and Prairie Smoke Nature Reserve, and visiting other properties with their volunteer teams.

Kyra can be reached at the Conservancy office at 326-4643, or by e-mail at steward@couchconservancy.ca.

The Couchiching Conservancy Board

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Bob Sullivan, Past-President	325-8775
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Kyra Howes, Stewardship Coordinator	

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RBC Dominion Securities raises the bar for corporate membership



Under the guidance of Outreach Coordinator Rosalie Pratt, our corporate membership program has grown to include over 70 local businesses. Corporate members have contributed funds or in-kind services at three levels, reflecting their commitment to a green and sustainable future for this region. Their assistance is an important part of making the Conservancy a viable organization that can serve our community for the long term.

This spring, we were approached by the Orillia office of RBC Dominion Securities with an offer to create a fourth corporate-membership level at \$2,500 a year. We are delighted to welcome RBC as our first Level IV member, through the initiative of financial planner Paul Russell and manager David Fonseca.

Another honour for Prairie Smoke

Prairie Smoke Nature Reserve, which encompasses 678 acres of alvar and woodland just east of Lake Dalrymple, was our first experience with “split-receipting.” This new technique allows a property to be acquired through a combination of a cash purchase for part of the value and a donation receipt for the remainder. In this case, the Ministry of Natural Resources provided funding to the Nature Conservancy of Canada for the cash portion.

This transaction turned out to be special for another reason as well – it is the 500th property in Canada to be certified under the federal Ecological Gifts program. A community ceremony was held on June 8 in front of the new property sign to celebrate this milestone, followed by a group hike onto some of the property’s alvar habitats. ∞