



Conservancy NEWS

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

Seasonal Highlights from The Couchiching Conservancy

JUNE 2008

A great opportunity to “Double the Green”

Last summer, Hope Smith from Toronto entrusted 113 acres of woods and wetlands just north of Washago to The Couchiching Conservancy through a generous property donation. Part of the attraction of that property is more than a kilometre of frontage on Boyd’s Creek, a marshy waterway that’s home to turtles and beavers and birds galore.

Now we have the opportunity to secure the north bank of this productive wetland as well. Stan Hope-Smith of Washago has signed an agreement with us to acquire his 110 acres, effectively doubling the size of this protected green space.

Mr. Hope-Smith has agreed to a generous donation of part of the value of his land through the federal Ecogifts program. But we still must raise over \$150,000 to protect the future of this property. Some of that funding will be used to help with ongoing stewardship costs for the nature reserve, as well as with purchase costs.

This property is a great example of the diverse habitats in the transition zone along the southern edge of the Canadian Shield, an area known as The Land Between. It shelters at least one endangered species – butternut trees at the very northern edge of their range. As well, it

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Acquisition of the Hope-Smith property on Coopers Falls Road will double the size of the existing nature reserve just north of Washago.

Summer is a time for learning



Conservancy summer students Elaine Ferrier, Kristy Wakeling and Erin Vandermarel puzzle over plant identification on the Carden Alvar.

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

Elaine Ferrier completed her Honours BA at Trent University with a major in Environmental and Resources Studies. She will be returning to school in

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Looking ahead for the Carden Alvar

To a casual visitor, the Carden Alvar might seem timeless – a gentle rural landscape knit together by split-rail fences and one-lane roads, where herds of contented cattle munch among fields of wildflowers, and birdsong greets the dewy dawn. It is all those things, of course – at least in June – but Carden is also a landscape undergoing an enormous transition. A great deal of effort is underway to ensure its special values are not lost in the process.

The Conservancy and many other organizations have led the way with land acquisition, securing over 5,000 acres of natural habitats already, with more yet to come. But the aggregate industry has also purchased major tracts of land to supply the voracious GTA market, and the Carden Plain will be a major quarry area for many decades. Many local landowners are feeling threatened and uncertain about both of these newcomers.

In these arenas of conflicting goals and values, it is easy to hunker down behind a wall of self-interest, but we felt there had to be a better way to resolve the inevitable conflicts. A trio of conservation groups – Wildlife Preservation Canada, Nature Conservancy of Canada, and The Couchiching Conservancy – set up a six-month process with a series of community forums and small group meetings to identify and discuss issues and potential solutions.

The quarry industry soon became strong participants, as did some local ranchers and landowners. Others chose to keep their distance, including governments at all levels who were supportive but cautious. But, in the end, the process produced an Integrated Carden Conservation Strategy (ICCS), with broad consensus on five strategic directions and a healthy roster of things to do next.

Some of those recommended actions are already underway. For example, we have published the *Guide to Responsible Birding on Carden Alvar* to encourage visitors to respect the privacy of local landowners and to reduce irritants such as blocking traffic. Other actions are longer-term, including setting up an ongoing Carden Futures Forum and a conservation fund. Notably, the ICCS calls for further planning on aggregate expansion, ranching, and community landowner concerns.



Ron Reid welcomes one of the lead sponsors of the Carden Nature Festival, Richard Deacon (left) of Invenergy Canada, a green company that is planning a windfarm project north of Woodville.

The strategy also calls for continuation of the Carden Nature Festival as a way of providing economic support to local businesses. This year, 350 participants made the festival a resounding success, with spin-off benefits over three days for accommodations and food, as well as income for local service organizations and exhibitors.

Copies of a six-page synopsis of the ICCS are available from the Conservancy office. ∞

A great opportunity

continued

provides the right kinds of habitat for other rare species, including Blanding's Turtles, Golden-winged Warbler, and Five-lined Skink.

The properties on both sides of Boyd's Creek will be known as the Alexander Hope Smith Nature Reserve. Visitors will be welcome to walk a series of trails or to canoe the creek, but motorized vehicles will not be permitted.

Please consider a donation in support of this great opportunity to double the size of the Alexander Hope Smith Nature Reserve. Your donation is crucial; we can double its value by using it as a local match to access funds from other sources of grants.

Your help will make this project possible for the benefit of everyone. Please send your donation to The Couchiching Conservancy, Box 704, Orillia, ON L3V 6K7. ∞

Species on the Edge

Did you know that our corner of Ontario is a hotspot for rare species, especially reptiles such as snakes and turtles? It's easy to forget that species that still occur commonly in the right habitats here, such as Five-lined Skinks on rocky granite openings, actually have a very restricted range. Chimney Swifts, which still can be seen chittering in good numbers above downtown Orillia, are designated a threatened species, and their populations have fallen dramatically across their range.

To help people in this area learn more about rare species, the Conservancy is working in partnership with the Waterway Wildlife program of the Trent-Severn Waterway and the Species at Risk Stewardship program of the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources. By the end of this year, we will be publishing a "Species on the Edge" guidebook, which will outline the species, habitats, relative abundance, and distribution of over 30 rare species in this region.

Part of this project is gathering reliable data on where these species occur locally.

For example, we know that Chimney Swifts nest only where there are old-fashioned brick chimneys. Orillia has a population, and there are single Golden-winged warbler by Larry Kirtley. pairs in the villages of Sebright and Victoria Road, but Kirkfield and Washago seem to have lost this winged insect-eater. Does Coldwater still have Chimney Swifts? We hope this project will tell us.

Volunteers are a vital part of this project, and you don't need to be an expert to help out. You might not be able to identify Yellow-eyed Grass or a Least Bittern, but nearly everyone knows a Red-headed Woodpecker or the call of a Whip-poor-will, and reports of those species are valuable data. Volunteers will be listed in the published guide and will receive a free copy as thanks for their participation.

Call Kristen Field at 326-4643 for more information, to obtain species-reporting forms, to link up with outings to search for species at risk, or to take part in training.

Stewardship Coordinator Kyra Howes teaches a group of visiting naturalists about the rare wildflowers of this region at the Carden Nature Festival.



For members and volunteers only

Each summer, we offer an opportunity for our volunteers and members to see some of our projects up close. This year, the date is **Saturday, August 16th**. We will hire a bus to show you the Alexander Hope Smith Reserve, shoreline restoration work we coordinated in Washago Centennial Park, and other projects in the Washago area. We also provide lunch at Severn River Inn.

You can reserve your spot by calling Gayle at 326-4643; no cost but donations are always welcome.

Summer *continued*

the fall to complete her Masters of Environmental Studies focusing on participatory stewardship. Elaine brings extensive knowledge in natural heritage from working with The Land Between project, Kawartha Heritage Conservancy and various Ontario Parks interpretive and research programs.

Erin Vandermarel from Horseshoe Valley has completed her degree in Biology specializing in Terrestrial and Aquatic Ecology and Environmental Sciences from Laurentian University. She knows the Oro Moraine well, but she also brings to the Conservancy her experience from a research project on small-mammal diversity in re-vegetated natural areas.

Kristy Michelle Wakeling, who is also a local, from the Washago area, is working on her degree from University of Waterloo focusing on Environmental and Resource Studies. Kristy has wide-ranging knowledge from wetland-restoration projects and from working with the

Toronto District School Board's environmental education programs.

Our summer staff is working on various stewardship projects such as removing invasive species, planting native trees, monitoring conservation easements and assisting with biological inventories for management plans. In their first few weeks they have gotten their feet wet in Grant's Wetland, learned their alvar plants in Carden, and paddled the Black River to identify birds and plants in that area.

This summer gives them the chance to hone their field identification skills, experience working with volunteers, and learn about organizing stewardship activities and special events such as the Carden Nature Festival. We welcome their energy and their enthusiasm, and hope they have an educational and fun summer. ☺



Back by popular demand

Raising funds for conservation can sometimes take us down paths with surprising twists and turns. Such was our partnership with Pelee Island Winery. The company agreed to donate \$2 for every bottle sold of specially labelled wines featuring photos and text about some of the wildlife species the Conservancy helps protect.

But here's the hitch: these labels are not available in the liquor store but only by ordering through the Conservancy, and only by cases of 12. As a customer, you pay the same price as you would for the usual Pelee Island wines, but you do have to pick up your wine at the Conservancy office.

Sounds a little complicated? Maybe, but it works! Our first three orders totalled over 150 cases (that's nearly 2,000 bottles!), and people keep asking when they can place an order again. So we are offering a summer order to be placed in early August, and we are planning a November order as well for Christmas shoppers. An order form is enclosed – please remember to make out your cheque to Pelee Island Winery. ☺

The Couchiching Conservancy Board

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