



# Conservancy NEWS

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

Seasonal Highlights from The Couchiching Conservancy

MARCH 2008



## Bird monitoring in Carden

**B**irdwatchers and naturalists who have visited the Carden Alvar will not be surprised to learn that this area was recognized as a nationally significant Important Bird Area (IBA) in 1998. An IBA steering committee, which still operates under the umbrella of The Couchiching Conservancy, initiated a bird-monitoring project to track 30 different species of grassland and shrubland birds. A staff person spent the summer of 2000 creating a monitoring project from scratch, and completing the extensive field work and data analysis it entailed.

This study documented very significant populations of vulnerable, threatened and endangered bird species. Ultimately, the project aided the development of a conservation action plan for the Carden Plain IBA, and many of the conservation actions that have followed.

Eight years later, we are planning to repeat the study to gain comparative data to see how much has changed and whether new issues need to be addressed. For example, the province-wide data from the recently released *Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Ontario* shows a striking decline over the past two decades in both grassland birds and aerial insectivores such as swallows, nighthawks and flycatchers. It will be interesting to see if those same patterns show up in Carden.

*continued – see Bird monitoring, page 2*

## Annual meeting draws a crowd

**O**ver 100 members and supporters attended the Conservancy's annual general meeting in Orillia in late January. The enthusiastic crowd heard about a banner year in 2007, with three new properties accepted as nature reserves, a growing membership and grant program with revenues up by 47%, and total assets increasing by over \$1 million.



Joan Rosebush

Conservancy President Jane Ball noted that these figures reflect a 15-year history of growing success, and that the Conservancy is poised to continue its development. She was re-elected for another one-year term, and three new Directors – Rob Cutler, Ingrid Vandermaerl and Peggy Foley – were elected to join the Board.

*continued – see AGM, page 4*

## Volunteer profile: Mary E. Mick

No non-profit organization is complete without a dedicated and enthusiastic troupe of volunteers.

The Couchiching Conservancy is blessed with a strong team of eager individuals ready to roll up their sleeves and help out on a wide range of activities. Keeping track of these people and how their skills fit in with the tasks required is a job unto itself. That's why a volunteer coordinator is so important. Mary E. Mick has been in that role for the Conservancy since 2005.

Volunteering for charitable organizations has been Mary's passion for decades, and has included time with the Literacy Council and Helping Hands. Mary brings dedication and a seemingly limitless energy to her volunteer work, with a get-up-and-go attitude that belies her 70-plus years.

Mary became involved with The Couchiching Conservancy after wearing many hats in the Orillia Naturalists Club, where she met Ron Reid. The Couchiching Conservancy was in need of volunteers and Ron was quick to recruit Mary. One of the biggest projects that attracted Mary's help was the transformation of the Grant House on Division Road into an office.

The Conservancy's previous volunteer coordinator, Gwen Drew, recognized Mary's skills and asked her to help with phoning and mailing. It wasn't long before Mary took over the position when Gwen moved to another town.

"I really like the option of being able to work from home. I can call or e-mail volunteers to help out with



Mary and Omer Mick

specific jobs or events," Mary says. "But I also enjoy getting out and meeting the volunteers at the activities. It has been a very positive experience; everyone is so enthusiastic."

Being the volunteer coordinator doesn't stop Mary from enjoying natural areas directly. She and her husband Omer hike almost every week through Grant's Woods to monitor the network of trails. Since 2002, she has been the volunteer team leader for that busy property. Staying physically active, in Grant's Woods and elsewhere, is just as important to Mary as staying active in the community.

So hats off to Mary E. Mick for her tireless work to help protect natural areas and to encourage other volunteers to do their part, as well. ☺



## Bird monitoring *continued*

This time, bird counts will be completed by teams of enthusiastic volunteers between May 31 and June 7. It will be a busy week for birders given the flurry of activities available in Carden during that period: two conservation volunteer bird counts (May 31 and June 7), the Carden Challenge (May 30–31), and the Carden Nature Festival (June 6, 7 and 8).

When the data from this year is analyzed, we hope to be able to draw some general conclusions that will be shared with our partner organizations. As well as providing an understanding of bird-population dynamics on the Carden landscape, the study may also

indicate the success of current conservation efforts and provide guidance for future efforts. For example, the data may influence the priorities within an integrated conservation plan that is currently under development.

If all goes well, this project will recur every five to 10 years, which will build a solid base of data and ensure that conservation efforts in Carden achieve tangible results for local bird populations.

If you are interested in helping out as a birder or a recorder this June, please contact Lou Probst at [lepco@lindsaynet.com](mailto:lepco@lindsaynet.com). ☺

# UPDATES

## Upcoming Events for a Busy Spring

As usual, the warmth of spring encourages everyone to get active and get outside. The Conservancy is hosting a series of activities and events this spring, so mark your calendars to take part:

**Saturday, May 3**

### **Native tree planting at The Church Woods**

The Church Woods in the village of Shanty Bay needs your help to plant native trees to restore a small section of lawn and add to the forest.

**Saturday, May 10**

### **Mother Earth Day at Grant's Woods**

An annual tradition with loads of fun for the whole family. Admission: \$5 each. Park at ODAS Park and ride the free shuttle bus to the site.

**Wednesday, May 28 and Wednesday, June 18**

### **Wetland restoration on Grant's Wetland**

On a residential lot recently donated by the Hewetson family to add to Grant's Wetland, we will be removing non-native species and planting native trees and shrubs along the stream.

**Friday, May 30 to Saturday, May 31**

### **4th Annual Carden Challenge**

You can participate in the birding challenge of a lifetime. Teams of four traverse the Carden Alvar for 24 hours in search of birds, and raise funds for conservation at the same time.

**Friday, June 6 to Sunday, June 8**

### **Carden Nature Festival**

Over 60 workshops and field trips for nature lovers at all skill levels. Spruce up your birding and botany skills, or explore the world of dragonflies and spiders. See [www.cardenguide.com/Festival](http://www.cardenguide.com/Festival) for a complete program and registration information.

### **Other volunteer activities: dates to be determined**

- Garlic mustard removal on The Church Woods property;
- Trail creation on the Alexander Hope-Smith Nature Reserve near Washago;
- Continuation of mushroom farm decommissioning on Elliott Woods near Craighurst;
- Property clean-up on Wilson Point Wetland.
- Removal of invasive Scots Pines from the Severn Woodlands property near Coldwater.



*For more information about these activities or to get involved, please contact Kyra Howes, Stewardship Coordinator, at 326-4643, or Mary E. Mick, Volunteer Coordinator, at 325-3618. ∞*

## AGM *continued*

Meeting attendees were also treated to a video featuring author Farley Mowat, who recently donated 200 acres on the shore of Bras d'Or Lake to the Nova Scotia Nature Trust. Then Mark Shoreman, the new district manager for the Ministry of Natural Resources in Midhurst, Ont., provided an illustrated talk about the return of nesting Piping Plovers to Sauble Beach after an absence of over 30 years. A 13-year-old birdwatcher and strong community support get the credit for a successful nesting of this endangered species.

Each year, the Conservancy honours some of its volunteers for exceptional service. This year, gold pins recognizing 10 years of active involvement were presented to Lou and Judy Probst for their leadership on the Carden Alvar; and to Dave and Mary Wilkins, who donated a conservation easement on their Oro-Medonte property. Silver pins went to Reid Byer of Dalrymple, Tim Crooks of Shanty Bay, Julie Cayley of Wyevale, and Paul McCreath and Joan Rosebush of Orillia.



President Jane Ball and Executive Director Ron Reid at the AGM.

For more information on the Conservancy's activities in 2007, see our Annual Report on our web page at [www.couchconservancy.ca](http://www.couchconservancy.ca). ☺



## Pelee Island wine partnership is back for 2008

Naturalists who enjoy a glass of wine are likely familiar with the distinctive labels on Pelee Island wines, which feature various birds and plants of far southern Ontario, and even a skink on one label. Last year, The Couchiching Conservancy teamed up with the winery to launch a successful partnership by creating special Conservancy labels featuring Eastern Bluebirds, Wood Ducks and other wildlife species that benefit from our work.

This spring, we have added two more vintages to the five VQA wines offered in 2007, again using the superb photographs donated by Larry Kirtley to distinguish each label. We can't sell the wines directly, but we do take orders for cases of 12, and Pelee Island Winery delivers those cases to Grant's Woods for pick-up. There is no extra cost to the purchaser, but for every case ordered the winery contributes \$24 to the Conservancy.

Our next order date is April 4, with delivery a few weeks after that. Please use the enclosed order form, and remember that your cheque must be made out to Pelee Island Winery. ☺

## The Couchiching Conservancy Board

Jane Ball, President	.....835-2674
Isabelle Thiess, Vice-President	.....259-5547
Rob Cutler, Treasurer	.....robert.cutler@td.com
David Kennedy, Secretary	.....835-5131
Peggy Foley	.....325-2287
Lou Probst	.....438-1324
Jane Sloley	.....689-1252
Bob Sullivan	.....325-8775
Ingrid Vandermarel	.....739-7596
Ron Reid, Executive Director	.....326-1620
Kyra Howes, Stewardship Coordinator	
Gayle Carlyle, Outreach Coordinator	

The Couchiching Conservancy  
P.O. Box 704, Orillia, ON L3V 6K7  
[nature@couchconservancy.ca](mailto:nature@couchconservancy.ca)  
[www.couchconservancy.ca](http://www.couchconservancy.ca)

The Couchiching  
Conservancy   
Charitable Reg. No. 139725030RR0001