



Conservancy NEWS

MARCH 2011

Seasonal highlights from The Couchiching Conservancy
Protecting the special natural features of the Couchiching region for future generations

Record-breaking gathering at AGM

A new venue and a beautiful winter's day combined to create the perfect setting for the Conservancy's Annual General Meeting on Saturday, January 29.

As part of a new partnership, Lakehead University in Orillia provided its large lecture hall and foyer for our event. By donating the use of the space, Lakehead is now being recognized as a Friend of the Conservancy. The Conservancy is pleased to join with such a valuable member of the community.

Volunteers and board members welcomed AGM attendees at the doors of the new campus. Other board members helped people with membership renewal or sign-up and provided information on Conservancy trust properties, Conservancy merchandise sales, blue jay-woodcarving raffle-ticket sales and the 2011 Carden Nature Festival.

Once the meeting started, Brian Jeffs from Lakehead University welcomed everyone to the new campus. Conservancy Executive Director Mark Bisset shared updates on the Conservancy's 2010 work. Treasurer Peggy Foley reported that the Conservancy is in a strong financial position, having completed the year with a small surplus despite the current economic climate. Outgoing President Isabelle Thiess spoke about her experience during her term and welcomed incoming President Jamie Powell. Jamie in turn presented Isabelle with a gift to thank her for her time and support. Board members Peggy Foley, David Homer, David Hawke, Kristi McKechnie, Lou Probst, Bob Sullivan and Ingrid VanderMarel were re-elected as Directors for another year.

Each year, the Conservancy is proud to honour some of its volunteers for their exceptional service. This year, Jane Ball and Dr. Nancy Ironside received gold

pins, while Lynn Russell, David Homer and John Rosebush received silver pins for their contributions to the organization.

Special guest speaker David Phillips, Senior Climatologist with Environment Canada, entertained the group for over an hour with a riveting and informative presentation on climate change and its possible effects on the environment.

After the meeting, friends new and established



Guest speaker David Phillips shares weather stories with attendees at the Conservancy AGM. Photo: Arni Stinnissen

mingled in the university foyer while enjoying light refreshments and good company. Two university student volunteers, Nicki and Rosalyn, took groups of people on tours of the new campus.

Many thanks to Lakehead University for providing the venue and the volunteer tour leaders, and to David Phillips for providing such a memorable presentation. We would like to extend our gratitude to our volunteers who provided their time. A special thanks goes to Arni Stinnissen for his photographic talents during the event. 🍀

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Patrick Reilly: Patrick, a new Couchiching volunteer, has worked very hard to update and maintain our website. The Conservancy is grateful to Patrick for providing his expertise and time. Stay tuned for our completely re-designed website, which should be ready in a few months.

Protect An Acre: We thank all the generous people who purchased Protect An Acre certificates in the fall and for Christmas gifts. Collectively you contributed \$2,872 toward protection of natural lands. This is truly a gift that keeps on giving.

Carden Nature Festival: Registrations are coming in daily for the fifth annual Carden Nature Festival, scheduled for June 3–5. This popular weekend event features over 100 nature-related activities including bird watching, watercolour painting, photography, night-sky viewing, flora and fauna identification, and cycling. Registration is easy — visit the website at www.CardenGuide.com/Festival. See you in June!

A great addition to your library: If you do not already have a copy of Margo Holt's informative field guide, *Alvar Specialty Plants of Central Ontario*, please contact our office. The books sell for \$17 (tax included) and proceeds go to the Conservancy. To date, sales of the book have raised thousands of dollars. Many thanks go to Margo for contributing her time and expertise to create this distinctive publication.

Start your own forest! Once again the Conservancy and Ego's Nurseries Ltd. have teamed up to help gardeners enhance wildlife habitat. Ego's will be selling native shrub and tree species grown on their own property and donating a portion of the sales to the Conservancy. Species include white spruce, white cedar, nannyberry and red-osier dogwood and many more. Plants are available for a reasonable cost and can be pre-ordered through Ego's at 705-326-9922. Pick-up will take place from April 18 to April 22. Contact Gayle at 705-326-1620 for more information, or check our website.

One Wild Night fundraiser: Building on the success of this new event from last fall, plans are well underway for the 2011 version of One Wild Night. A fun and different concept, the event features home-cooked dinners served up in host homes. After dinner, everyone heads to a central location to enjoy desserts, coffee, live entertainment and socializing and to bid on silent-auction items. If you'd like to host a dinner or be a guest, please contact Kristi McKechnie at 705-689-9491 or email her at kmckdesign@xplornet.com. 🌿

Bluebird Ranch to join Conservancy holdings

Fast on the heels of the acquisition of Wolf Run Alvar, The Couchiching Conservancy has an agreement to purchase a beautiful 206-acre tract at the corner of Kirkfield Road and Wylie Road. Owned by Bill and Faye Duggan, the property is immediately behind the Important Bird Area sign and is highly visible from the two roads. Cattle have been grazing on the property for years, and that practice will continue under Conservancy ownership.

With its alvar communities of Prairie Smoke and Balsam Ragwort, this property both complements and buffers Windmill Ranch to the north. Henslow's Sparrows (endangered), Bobolink (threatened), Sedge Wren and Upland Sandpiper are among the birds that have been seen on the property, and birders will be familiar with the bluebirds that make their homes in Carden Bluebirds boxes along the Wylie Road fence line. It is from those birds that we have selected the name Bluebird Ranch.

The Carden Acquisition Fund, set up by an anonymous donor to provide matching funds for the purchase of conservation lands by The Couchiching Conservancy and the Nature Conservancy of Canada, continues to be a driving force in our efforts on the Carden Plain. Every dollar donated for the purchase of Bluebird Ranch will be doubled by the fund.

The Nature Conservancy is also working on the purchase of a significant tract in the northern portion of the plain's Area of Natural Scientific Interest (ANSI). More news on this important acquisition will be available shortly.

With these acquisition projects underway, 2011 promises to be another big year for the protection of important natural land on the Carden Plain. 🌿

Mack's Woods



"I will end my days convinced that the forest of southern Ontario, both urban, near-urban and rural, is capable of providing, in perpetuity, a far greater and more diverse bounty of economic, environmental, social and spiritual benefits than most of us may imagine," wrote Mack Williams last April in correspondence with The Couchiching Conservancy.

It was a tidy summary of his life-long efforts to promote good forestry in the province. If we take care of the forest, Mack believed, it will take care of us.

Mack passed away in January at the age of 87, just a year after securing the future of

the place where he practised what he preached — a 100-acre tract of woods on the Oro Moraine. Late in 2009 Mack donated a conservation easement on the property, formerly a farm that, once denuded of trees, had seen its topsoil blown away by the wind. Over the decades following the Second World War, Mack and his family worked to re-forest the property, which many now fondly refer to as Mack's Woods.



Mack Williams's greatest legacy: forests for future generations. Photo: The Couchiching Conservancy.

Part of his desire for the woods was that it be used as a broad

teaching tool to demonstrate what he died believing: humans can coexist and thrive with a healthy forest.

The Couchiching Conservancy is thankful to have earned Mack's trust and is keen to fulfill the promise it entails. His days are at an end, but his vision and his woods will continue on. 🌿

Wine order

The spring order forms for Pelee Island wines will be sent out in March. If you would like to be included in the newly formed Wine Club and receive a copy of the order form, please let us know at 705-326-1620 or gayle@couchconservancy.ca. Thanks to those who have already added their names to the list. 🌿

Spare time on your hands?

Volunteers needed to monitor turtle nests

In October and November over 40 volunteers helped us reach our goal of creating safer nesting sites for turtles at the Robert and Emily Fawcett Natural area and an adjoining private property in Washago.

We created artificial nesting beaches by layering gravel, sand and mulch on areas close to the water that had been cleared of vegetation. At several other sites, where evidence of nests had already been found, we cleaned up garbage and broken glass and removed vegetation that would shade out the nests.

Constructing the nesting sites was only the first stage in this ongoing project. This May and June during the nesting season we will be looking for volunteers to



Volunteers helping with the turtle nesting project last fall.

monitor these locations. Once we know a female turtle has laid eggs in a particular location, a nest-protection device will be placed on top to prevent predators from digging up the nest and eating the eggs. The devices then need to be removed by August before the baby turtles start to hatch.

We will hold volunteer-training sessions this spring. For more information, or to sign up to help, contact Sarah Hodgkiss at shodgkiss@couchconservancy.ca or 705-326-4643, or see our Facebook page.

We will also require four or five volunteers to help set up and take down equipment for the Carden Nature Festival on Thursday, June 2, and Monday, June 6. The work will involve some heavy lifting, and volunteers will need to provide their own transportation to the Carden Recreational Centre. If you can help out, please contact Gayle at 705-326-1620 or gayle@couchconservancy.ca.

Couchiching Conservancy



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The Couchiching Conservancy Board

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Mark Bisset, Executive Director
Gayle Carlyle, Outreach Coordinator
Sarah Hodgkiss, Stewardship Coordinator

Up for a challenge?

The Carden Challenge, a unique and exciting way to raise funds for the Conservancy, is taking place Friday, May 27, to Saturday, May 28. All proceeds will go to support the stewardship of Carden's alvar and bird habitats. Put together a team of four, or sponsor your favourite birder, to see how many bird species can be counted in a 24-hour period. Richard Pope, author of *The Reluctant Twitcher: A "Quite" Truthful Account of My Big Birding Year*, is the celebrity birder for the Challenge. For more information, contact Ron Reid at ronreid@couchconservancy.ca.

Join the Green Team

If your business wants to be a part of a greener future, join the Couchiching Conservancy Corporate Membership Program. Please call Gayle Carlyle at 326-1620 or e-mail gayle@couchconservancy.ca for details.