



# THE BULLETIN

February 2008 No. 470

## 2007-2008 EXECUTIVE

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## Events calendar

- Botany Group Meeting**      **Monday March 4, 2008. 12:30pm**
- Executive Meeting**      **Tuesday March 11, 2008. 7:30pm**  
Where: Robert Holland Centre
- Bird Group Meeting**      **Wednesday March 12, 2008. 7:30pm**  
Topic: Black and White and Blackpoll Warbler  
Host: Theo Hofmann
- General Meeting**      **Thursday March 20, 2008. 7:30pm**  
Speaker:  
Topic:  
Location: Richmond Hill Presbyterian Church,  
Wallace Hall. 10066 Yonge St.

**Check for more Events and Outings on Page 2**

## The "Wow Factor" is Big Here

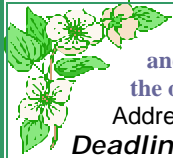
Leave the city behind and discover a world of beauty, science, and nature.

The [David Dunlap Observatory and Park](#) is a breathtaking treasure. It is not just of importance to Richmond Hill and Ontario, but to all of Canada, and also internationally.

The curving tree-lined driveway leading to the main observatory grounds opens up to reveal the distinctive white Observatory dome and the stately administration building, the work of noted architectural firm, Mathers and Haldenby. Alvan Sherlock Mathers (1895-1965) took a leading role in the design of many of Canada's outstanding buildings. His partnership with Eric Haldenby produced many building designs which earned prestigious honours and awards. The firm of Mathers and Haldenby earned national and international attention for excellence, and includes the buildings of the Head Offices of Imperial Oil, the Bank of Nova Scotia and the Globe and Mail, which comprise part of Toronto's current skyline. Haldenby also designed the Sir James Dunn Science Building for Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

Entering the elegant library of the David Dunlap observatory, one is immediately transported to the gracious world of benefactor Jessie Dunlap. If you are lucky, Observatory staff may offer you a tea. One gaze through the open Observatory dome is to understand why generations of students have been inspired to study astronomy. Here is where Dr. Clarence Chant, father of Canadian astronomy, started it all. Although the facility bears the name of the late David Dunlap, a wealthy lawyer and mining entrepreneur, the observatory is as much the legacy of Dr. Clarence Chant (1865-1956). He is referred to by many as "the father of Canadian astronomy" and is best known for his contributions to astronomical education in Canada. He was a central figure in establishing the Department of Astronomy at the University of Toronto, introducing optional astronomy courses into the mathematics and physics curriculum in 1905.

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*The Bulletin* is published 9 times per year, from September to May inclusive, by the **Richmond Hill Naturalists**, and is mailed free to members. The Bulletin is the official publication of the Richmond Hill Naturalists, a non-profit organization the objectives of which are to stimulate public interest in natural history and to encourage the preservation of our natural areas.

Address Correspondence to: **Richmond Hill Naturalists, P.O. Box 32217, RPO Harding, Richmond Hill, ON, L4C 9S3**

**Deadlines:** The editor encourages submissions from any member on any topic related to nature or conservation, and in particular, any issue that might be of interest or concern to members of this club. e-mail: [editor@rhnaturalists.ca](mailto:editor@rhnaturalists.ca) **Deadlines are the 2nd Thursday of each month.**

**Bulletin Advertisers** have been selected because of their relevance to member interests.

Members are encouraged to patronize our advertisers and please mention that you saw their ad in our Bulletin.

**Change of Address:** Any change of email or street address should be sent to Mike Turk who prints the envelopes for the Bulletin mailing. See the Executive List for contact information.

Editor: Lloyd Helferty

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Distribution: Athena Antiochos

Visit our Website at [www.rhnaturalists.ca](http://www.rhnaturalists.ca)

### MEMBERSHIP IN RHN

The *Membership Application Form*, is available at each General Meeting from Mike Turk, or in our club brochure, available from any executive member. You may also sign up or renew at <http://www.rhnaturalists.ca/membership/>

### NEW MEMBERS:

Anne and Peter Shaw, Carla Monk,  
Hong Ha (Paul) Lee, Anne Todd, Laura McMullen

*Meet new members at club events and say Hello!*

## EVENTS FUTURE



- **Monday March 4, 2008.** 12:30pm. Botany Group Meeting.



- **Saturday, March 8, 2008.** 2pm – 4pm. **RHN Walk at David Dunlap Observatory.** A fun and informative tour around David Dunlap Observatory and Park with Richmond Hill Naturalist, Joe Agg. Meet at the front gates to the Observatory at 123 Hillview Drive. The hike will take place weather permitting.



- **Tuesday March 11, 2008.** 7:30pm. **Executive Meeting** will be held at [Phyllis Rawlinson Park](#).



- **Wednesday March 12, 2008.** 7:30pm. **Bird Group meeting.** The topic is Black and White and Blackpoll Warbler. The meeting host is Theo Hofmann. Location: 199 Arnold Ave, Thornhill. Call 905-889-7156 for info.



- **Saturday, March 15, 2008.** 2pm – 4pm. **RHN Walk at David Dunlap Observatory.** A fun and informative tour around David Dunlap Observatory and Park with Richmond Hill Naturalist, Joe Agg. Meet at the front gates to the Observatory at 123 Hillview Drive. The hike will take place weather permitting.



- **Thursday March 20, 2008.** 7:30pm. Our next **General Meeting** will feature \_\_\_\_\_. The meeting will be held at the Richmond Hill Presbyterian Church, Wallace Hall. 10066 Yonge St., first block North of Major Mackenzie Dr., West side. For further info contact Marianne Yake at 905-883-3047, or visit our web site at [www.RHNaturalists.ca](http://www.RHNaturalists.ca).



- **Saturday, March 22, 2008.** 2pm – 4pm. **RHN Walk at David Dunlap Observatory.** A fun and informative tour around David Dunlap Observatory and Park with Richmond Hill Naturalist, Joe Agg. Meet at the front gates to the Observatory at 123 Hillview Drive. The hike will take place weather permitting.

**Please note: Richmond Hill Naturalists welcomes anyone to volunteer as an outing leader.**



- **Saturday, March 1, 2008.** 10am – 2pm. Workshop: **How to start a Community Garden.** The first in a series of Community Food Animators. Topics covered include: What you need to start a garden, simple suggestions of where to get resources, getting people involved, finding suitable land – where to look, who to contact, what constitutes a good location, developing garden rules and “contracts” for your garden members, getting people involved and much more. RSVP 416-248-5639 [info@africanfoodbasket.com](mailto:info@africanfoodbasket.com) <http://africanfoodbasket.com>  
Where: Driftwood Community Centre, 4401 Jane Street, Toronto.



- **Saturday and Sunday March 8/9 and 15/16, 2008.** **Waterfowl Festival** at Presqu'ile Provincial Park  
Celebrate the return of spring! Volunteer naturalists will help you view and identify over 25 different species of ducks, geese and swans. Also check out the daily children's activities. [www.friendsofpresquile.on.ca/events.htm](http://www.friendsofpresquile.on.ca/events.htm)



- **Tuesday April 22-26, 2008.** 7th International Ecocity Conference and World Summit. San Francisco, California. For more information contact [Kirstin@ecocityworldsummit.org](mailto:Kirstin@ecocityworldsummit.org) or visit [www.ecocityworldsummit.org](http://www.ecocityworldsummit.org).



- **Friday May 23 to Sunday June 1, 2008.** *Huron Fringe Birding Festival* at MacGregor Point Provincial Park, Bruce County. The 11th annual Huron Fringe Birding Festival has traditionally been the peak of warbler migration along the Huron Fringe. A total of 239 species have been spotted during the festivals with an average of 175+ species each year. This year we are offering over 80 different sessions from bird hikes and field trips, birding for beginners, in-depth species workshops, photography sessions and field trips, nature rambles, astronomy, botany, biking, canoeing, painting, and more. Register early at [www.friendsofmacgregor.org](http://www.friendsofmacgregor.org).



- **Friday to Sunday June 6-8, 2008.** Second Annual **Carden Festival** and **Ontario Nature AGM**. Register online at [www.cardenguide.com/Festival](http://www.cardenguide.com/Festival). Contact [diana.piche@sympatico.ca](mailto:diana.piche@sympatico.ca) / 905-773-4199.



- **Saturday and Sunday June 14 & 15, 2008.** The second "*Moraine For Life*" **Adventure Relay**. 24 hour relay from Rice Lake to King City. Find out more at [www.moraineadventure.com](http://www.moraineadventure.com) or 1-877-319-0285.

## MEMBER SUBMISSIONS

... Continued from Page 1

Chant was the faculty's sole astronomer until 1924, when one of his former pupils, Dr. Reynold K. Young, joined the department. Over the next ten years, Chant focused his remarkable energy on the establishment of the Dunlap Observatory, retiring upon its completion.

[Dr. Helen Hogg](#) also spent endless, uncomfortable evenings at the observatory in her painstaking study of star clusters. In addition, the David Dunlap Observatory is the very spot where Dr. Tom Bolton verified the existence of black holes, predicted by Einstein's theory of relativity, and it is here that Dr. Bolton continues to study the skies with his students and a variety of esteemed visitors -- international scientists who produce valuable research, some of which is destined for NASA.

The site presents a slice of Ontario history. The beautiful 'Elms Lea', the pre-Confederation (1864) home of Alexander Marsh, is located on the property as well. Dr. Chant had moved into the building on his 70th birthday, on the year of the opening of the DDO, and lived there until his death in 1956. The original home was built on the promontory where the Observatory buildings now stand, but has since been moved just to the south of the administration buildings. The assistant director of astronomy and astrophysics now resides there.

Alexander Marsh, who participated in the 1837 Mackenzie Uprising to overthrow the rule of the Family Compact may have used this property as a staging point for the Rebellion. The heritage consultant, Andre Scheinman, has indicated that it is likely that the observatory lands were used as a campsite for the native peoples before the arrival of the white man into the area. After Europeans settled in the area, but before the observatory was built, the site was part of a farm purchased by the Dunlap family for the observatory, and remnants of the original farm field can still be found in the northeast corner of the property.

The Observatory also is linked to the early history of Ontario's mining boom. The wealth that built the DDO came from David Dunlap, who was a lawyer and one of the founding partners in [Hollinger Gold Mines](#), which eventually became Hollinger Inc. under Conrad Black; a kind of 'alchemy' that has turned gold into precious science.



A walk through the grounds reveal a variety of landscapes: groomed lawns around the buildings, meadows, areas with tree plantings, re-naturalized bush, and a wetland containing many distinctive environmental features and curiosities. At the southeast corner of the property there is evidence of German Mills Creek that once ran through the property. The town of Richmond Hill engineering department diverted the creek underground, channelling it beside Bayview Ave when the road was widened.

Scramble through brush and you may come upon the sprawling roots of yellow birch above the soggy ground. Along the way, you will pass the shell of a tree trunk filled with woodpeckers' holes and another tree trunk covered with plates of fungus growth. If you are lucky you may also catch a glimpse of a deer or stumble on a coyote pup.



If you don't see the deer, which is likely since they are so elusive, you could simply scan the trees to find a distinctive line below which is free of any leafed branches since they have been nibbled away by the deer. The trunk and bark of some trees also bear the rub marks of their antlers.

Now the U of T wants to turn a sparkling gem into an ordinary development?  
 - Gloria Boxen

DDO Panorama © Rod Pater. All rights reserved. Jan 3, 2008



### Caring for Heritage Woods - Part 5

Heritage Woods is a special little green park which doesn't need mowing and pruning. It basically looks after itself. It harbors and protects the animals that manage to survive in this green oasis in our urban savannahs and deserts. Field mice, rabbits and groundhogs make a living in the underbrush. Blue jays fly over Yonge St and the Highways. Mocking birds, like the one that was heard by the railway tracks beyond the movie theatre, have found a place to survive in Richmond Hill. Big hawks still use the old oak tree across the highway. Birds from across the city, as well as butterflies from fields and gardens, use this little oasis as a resting place while crossing the city and its wide suburbs, and during the spring and fall the woods become a small sanctuary for the migrating birds.

And all of this can be enjoyed and valued by those who know or use Heritage Woods and other green spaces in their Town, workplace or home. The woods can serve for lunches and breaks. In Heritage Woods it is relatively quiet. There is fresher air, shade and a bit of green, at least in the heat of summer. And there will be some natural wild company, including animals, birds and black and orange butterflies.

In fact, the little group who was working to manage the garlic mustard Thursday afternoon, the Town of Richmond Hill worker, and the young guy from the motorbike shop across the road who had come to find out what was going on, got a special bonus when they witnessed the amazing phenoma of the orange butterflies gathering in the early autumn woods. One wonders if John Langstaff and his family saw the same event in the 1800's and whether we will still see it next year.

Caring for Richmond Hill's Heritage Woods will help it continue to happen for many years to come.



- Michael White, Past President



## NATURE NEWS

### Canada's Newest Threatened Bird: the Olive-sided Flycatcher

On November 28, 2007 the [Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada](#) (COSEWIC) added a new bird to the growing list of species at risk in Canada, the Olive-sided Flycatcher.

The Olive-sided Flycatcher is the largest member of the Wood Pewee genus. Its ringing and distinctively Canadian "Quick-three-beers" song that drifts across expansive bogs, riparian zones and burns, has endeared it to birders across Canada. Unique in many ways, this species captures all of its meals in flight, specializing in bees, wasps, large flies, beetles and dragonflies.



Breeding only in North America, the Olive-sided Flycatcher breeds in every Canadian province and territory, in the boreal forest and in treed portions of the Hudson Bay lowlands, south along the Canadian shield, and into the United States in higher elevations, south to California. Its remarkably long migration, longest of any flycatcher in the Americas, takes it to South America where it winters primarily in the Andes from Panama to Bolivia.

According to the most recent [Breeding Bird Survey](#) (BBS) data analysis for all of Canada, this species has declined an average of 4% per year between 1966 and 2006, meaning that the population is about 18 percent of what it was 40 year ago. In Ontario, the decline has been an astounding 9.5% per year, meaning that if there were 1,000 birds in 1966, only 18 are left now.

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### Protect Canada's Boreal Forest For Birds

Ontario Nature and the **Boreal Songbird Initiative** have developed a nation-wide petition to protect the most significant bird nursery in North America: The Boreal Forest.

The goal is to have thousands of signatures on a petition asking for the protection of Canada's Boreal Forest by May 10th, which is *International Migratory Bird Day*. The petition will then be publicly submitted to federal and provincial leaders to demonstrate that citizens expect the Boreal Forest to be protected and that the bird declines that we've been experiencing are not acceptable. Your help can make this a big success!

By signing the petition at [www.saveourborealbirds.org](http://www.saveourborealbirds.org) and encouraging others you know, including friends and family to sign the petition -- and asking them to pass it on to people they know, we can protect the Boreal Forest for birds. For more information contact Jen Baker at [jenniferb@ontarionature.org](mailto:jenniferb@ontarionature.org) or 1-800-440-2366, ext. 224.

## EVENTS PAST

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### The David Dunlop Observatory and Park - a Cultural Heritage Landscape

Below is a summary of the Town of Richmond Hill Council meeting that took place on Monday February 11, 2008.

Even through the [Ontario Heritage Act](#), which includes as elements of "cultural landscape, farmscapes and natural features" clearly allowed them to do so, Richmond Hill Town Council chose **not** to extend the application for a cultural heritage designation to the entire park property.

[Last night's Council meeting](#) was somewhat disappointing in the decision of Council to receive the Report written by their newly hired staff and heritage consultant André Scheinman 'as-is', with the recommendation to designate less than half (only 48%) of the property as a "Cultural Landscape Heritage Site".

The Mayor and members of Council, especially Councillors Chan, Hogg and Spatafora, were very specific in articulating to the public gallery that "this is only the first circle" of a much greater process that we have to go through and it in no way indicates a final decision. This was, on an otherwise disappointing evening, a very welcome statement, although the members of Council were also very specific that the 'rule of law' must be followed and not be circumvented in any way which might adversely impact any final outcome.

There was palpable disappointment that Council did not take an opportunity to directly influence the new Landscape Heritage portion of the designation and take immediate and specific action to include 100% of the property in the whole Heritage designation because of its 'Farmland' status. The property can be protected using a 100% cultural heritage designation as recommended by Heritage Richmond Hill, a committee of council. A strong designation bylaw and update of the current official plan could have easily protected the entire property by now.

Council made a unanimous motion to contact any and all Provincial Ministries which could relate to the Dunlop Observatory and Park Lands, and will urge them to visually and vocally bring to bear whatever is necessary to protect these lands under provincial jurisdiction, but they did nothing more than accept the existing report.

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*York Mills*  
**GARDEN CENTRE**

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There were many speakers who gave excellent deputations and implored the Council to designate 100% for all the historical and factual reasons already well-known, including David 'Grey Eagle' Sanford, who both listened and spoke on our behalf. We clearly have the attention of both himself and his people, and it was extremely comforting to know that this incredible man acknowledges our just struggle to save these lands and will do everything he and his people can to ensure it is protected and revered as an integral part of Mother Earth as it should be.

The property, which lies between the railroad tracks & Bayview Avenue north of 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue, was donated by the late Jessie Dunlap to create a memorial to her husband, and includes a number of significant historical aspects from early paleo-indian use and early settler farming, to the 1837 Mackenzie Uprising and links to Ontario mining history (Dunlap's held partnership in Hollinger Gold Mines), to the scientific verification of black holes. The natural heritage is equally abundant. The property contains a diversity of habitats that allow a number of different species to exist on the lands that would otherwise be lost if only a portion of the property is protected.

In addition, there are significant opportunities for a number of scientific, artistic and cultural events to be created that could add to the richness of living in this part of central Ontario.

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- On Tuesday February 12, 2008 the Toronto Star also published an article, written by staff reporter Phinjo Gombu, about the meeting by Richmond Hill Town Council the day before. Further details about the meeting can be found in the article at <http://www.thestar.com/article/302680>.

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- On Saturday February 9, 2008 a **Rally for the David Dunlap Park & Observatory** took place at 12 noon.

Participants of this community included residents of Richmond Hill and surrounding areas, members of the Richmond Hill Naturalists, the DDO Defenders group, professional and amateur astronomers, Richmond Hill area students as well as all concerned and dedicated friends and families of the Observatory and Parkland who wished to show their support for the survival of the Observatory and its property. There were speakers from the community and area schools, as well as speakers from all levels of government and political parties.



The rally was organized to protest the unilateral declaration of The University of Toronto to declare surplus the David Dunlap Observatory and surrounding lands in September, 2007, with no public input or consultation whatsoever. A hearing before The Conservation Board of Ontario is pending in order to declare the entire site a Cultural Heritage Landmark under the protection of The Ontario Heritage Act.

The David Dunlap Observatory is of great historical importance to the whole of Canada, a quiet dark oasis in the middle of urban Richmond Hill. The 188 acres of pristine greenspace is a thriving living ecosystem which acts as a carbon sink for the GTA and, as the southern most point of the Oak Ridges Moraine, provides vital water drainage to Lake Ontario. It is home to many species of native North American trees, plants and flowers, and a multitude of thriving wildlife species, including hawks, owls, migrating birds, deer and rabbits.



In addition to being an internationally recognized and respected astrophysical research facility, the David Dunlap Observatory operates one of Canada's longest-running public astronomy outreach education programs. For over 70 years, thousands of students and community residents have been inspired by DDO lectures given by world-reknown astronomers and astrophysicists, and have had the unique and thrilling experience of viewing the celestial heavens with the aid of the historic 74-inch telescope, and through smaller telescopes which are set up outside on the front lawns on viewing nights when weather permits in the spring, summer and fall.

The Rally started at the Chinese Community Church at the corner of Bayview and Weldrick in Richmond Hill, proceeded south to the corner of Hillsvievw and Weldrick and then went west on Hillsvievw up to the Observatory grounds where demonstrators then gathered in front of the Administration Building and The Great Dome of the David Dunlap Observatory at 123 Hillsvievw Drive.



During the rally Richmond Hill Naturalist Joe Agg took the [Don Watershed Regeneration Council](#) and [TRCA](#) staff for a hike on the property while Karen Cilevitz, a member of the group "David Dunlap Observatory Defenders" and member of the [Royal Astronomical Society of Canada](#) (RASC) made the following observations regarding the rally:

The initial gathering was at Bayview and Weldrick, proceeding up Hillsview and on to the DDO site. The walk was superbly baggiped all the way by Patrick McDonald up to the rally point in front of the Administration Building and Great Dome. At best guess about 130 supporters showed up, including residents, families, students, RASC members, Naturalists and politicians, including representatives from all the major political parties from all levels of government.



Richmond Hill MP Bryon Wilfert gave the most informative political speech telling everyone he had met with various U of T people the whole day before and came away with a sense that 'they may delay' the date for the final Request For Proposals (RFP).

Others who spoke were Godwin Chan, Ward 6 Councillor, Chungsen (CS) Leung, nominated Conservative candidate for the Riding of Richmond Hill, Nella Cotrupi, NDP spokesperson, and Dylan Marando, Green Party candidate for the Riding of Richmond Hill. A statement of support from Susan Kadis, MP for Thornhill, was read to the group as well.

Unfortunately Reza Moridi, recently elected Liberal MPP for the riding of Richmond Hill, was unable to make it or send a representative. All of the honoured guests who spoke were unanimous in denouncing of the actions U of T is taking with regard to the sale of the DDO lands -- including some U of T alumni and students.

Tom Bolton gave the most wonderful "I have a dream" speech about his vision for this beloved facility and property. Tom Karmo, who works at the DDO providing Astronomical Support Services, gave his best speech ever - explaining to all assembled that he found out that the U of T's envisioned "Dunlap Astrophysical Institute" would be situated in half the space of a basement in a building on the St. George Campus in downtown Toronto.

Guy Nason of RASC-Toronto Centre (TC) gave a terrific speech and confirmed the 100% support of the RASC. There were many RASC-TC members in attendance.

Marianne Yake, President of the Richmond Hill Naturalists, gave a wonderful speech and Natalie Helferty, past president of the RHN, delivered a message to us directly from David 'Grey Eagle' Sanford, a Canadian Aboriginal Spokesperson, who, through Natalie, made it known that our First Nations will not allow this land to be taken away - period. They intend to offer it their all-out protection and will occupy it if they have to. Four area students from Langstaff Secondary School and from the RH Montessori School spoke as well and then handed in a huge 'card' and letter to be given to the U of T Governing Council, which will be delivered by Tom Bolton and Tom Karmo.



The rally was finished by giving the Dome a big "hug" while chanting and singing – there were enough people there to form a complete chain around the circular wall of the dome. Even though the day was cold and snowing, the warmth and love that came from all these wonderful people made everyone feel as if they were sitting in front of a wonderful fire, relaxing with a cup of hot chocolate!

The event was well attended by the media, with the CBC, Global Television, Rogers TV, the Toronto Star, and the York Region Press in attendance. I am exhausted but feel so incredibly lucky to be a part of this wonderful movement and belong to a group of citizens who fight so courageously for what is right

and just. After the rally everyone was invited back to have dinner and homemade apple pie.

- Karen Cilevitz, DDO Defenders

P.S. A short video with Dr. Tom Bolton's speech can be found at <http://ca.youtube.com/watch?v=7ackj-DB2Ak>

Please consider asking 5 friends or neighbours to donate \$20 for our legal case to protect the David Dunlap Observatory and Park, the largest remaining greenspace in southern York Region.

Contributions greater than \$20 will receive a charitable tax receipt if cheques are made payable to:

"The Escarpment Biosphere Foundation" with the following notation in the Memo section:

"The David Dunlap Park & Observatory Legal Fund".

## GENERAL INTEREST

On Tuesday, January 29, 2008 the premiers of Ontario and Quebec said that a cap-and-trade system on greenhouse gas emissions is "inevitable". They will be watching closely to decide whether to take similar action on a program being developed by Manitoba and British Columbia. B.C. Premier Gordon Campbell said Tuesday his province will work with Manitoba to develop a cap-and-trade system on greenhouse gas emissions. The announcement came at the end of a two-day summit of premiers and territorial leaders, who spent most of their time discussing climate change strategies. Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty will host a summit of scientists within the next few weeks in order to establish best practices for the initiatives, as well as to identify existing information that will be useful to the projects' design. The following day, Glen Hodgson, Senior Vice-President and Chief Economist at the [Conference Board of Canada](#) echoed this sentiment by stating that the "time has come for Canada to put a price on greenhouse gases (GHGs) produced by the Canadian economy".



### Wild Birds in Thornhill

You will notice a new advertisement for Wild Birds Unlimited [WBU] (see left).

Although WBU has been located in downtown Thornhill for some time, it has only been under the management of Debbie and Andy Neale for about 1 year.

If you have a backyard bird feeder, we would encourage you to use the services provided by WBU as they have been faithfully advertising in the Richmond Hill Naturalists Bulletin for many years. WBU also generously provided some birdseed as a prize for backyard bird feeder participants during our recent Christmas Bird Count.

Debbie and Andy can now be contacted at [feathered\\_friendships@bellnet.ca](mailto:feathered_friendships@bellnet.ca). Please also check their new website at [www.wbu.com/thornhill](http://www.wbu.com/thornhill)

### Toxic as a Baby's Bottom

Ways to poison your kids: It's not just bottles, car seats, toys, and pesticide-laden foods anymore. According to a new study published in the journal 'Pediatrics', children exposed to baby cosmetics -- lotions, shampoos, powders, and the like -- have high levels of toxic phthalates in their bodies. The use of baby wipes and diaper creams was not found to affect phthalate levels, but lotion exposure led to high phthalate concentrations in infant urine.



Phthalates have been linked to reproductive disorders and fertility problems. Manufacturers are not required to list phthalates as 'ingredients' on cosmetics labels. The infant personal care industry, unsurprisingly, disputed the study's conclusions.

### LCBO and its Customers in support of Ontario Nature



Ontario Nature has been selected to participate in the [Liquor Control Board of Ontario](#) (LCBO)'s *coin box program* for the **month of March**. Ontario Nature will have coin boxes by the cash registers in Liquor Stores across the province for the entire month and will receive **all** proceeds collected. The money collected will help Ontario Nature continue to protect and restore nature in Ontario.

### As people turn on technology, they tune out nature

As people spend more time communing with their televisions and computers, researchers say it's also resulting in less contact with nature and less interest in conservation and parks.

Camping, fishing and per capita visits to parks are all declining in a shift away from nature-based recreation. This declining nature participation has crucial implications for current conservation efforts because any major decline in the value placed on natural areas and experiences will greatly reduce the value people place on biodiversity conservation. Children in particular are spending more time away from the great outdoors to focus on things like video games.



The replacement of vigorous outdoor activities by sedentary, indoor videophilia, the human tendency to focus on sedentary activities involving electronic media, has far-reaching consequences for physical and mental health, especially in children. Videophilia has been shown to be a cause of obesity, lack of socialization, attention disorders and poor academic performance.

Canada's national parks had about 13 million visitors in 2006-07, a slight rise from the previous year and the third straight year attendance rose since 2003-04, when just under 12 million visitors used the areas, but this decade has seen a general decline since the late 1990's when Parks Canada said the country's national parks had 16.3 million visitors.

### The Great Biofuel Debate

Two new studies published in the journal 'Science' concluded that growing and burning biofuels actually increases net greenhouse-gas emissions and exacerbates climate change.



A lively debate regarding the overall net impact of switching from fossil hydrocarbons (coal, oil and natural gas) over to biologically-based fuels such as biodiesel, ethanol and biogas) started a few years ago with Dr. David Pimentel, Professor Emeritus at Cornell University, who critiqued an initial study conducted by the U.S. Department of Agriculture that made biofuels seem like an energy panacea for the United States. This and other studies have asserted that biofuels made from crops like corn could release about 20 percent fewer emissions overall than gasoline, and that fuel from switchgrass could emit up to 70 percent less carbon into the atmosphere.

The recently published research questioned the assumptions of these earlier studies. The new research incorporated the effects of **land-use changes** into the emissions calculations so that any land-use change expected from increased biofuel production, such as plowing up rainforests or grasslands to make way for biofuel crops, would be considered.

The result of the studies showed that the expected increases in biofuel use to make up for losses in conventional fossil fuels would make large-scale use of biofuels more problematic than helpful. One of the new studies found that due to the impact of plowing up new fields, corn-based ethanol could nearly double greenhouse-gas emissions compared to gasoline, and fuels made from switchgrass might increase emissions by about 50 percent.



Not all biofuels are equal, however. Producing biofuels from waste products such as manure, crop residues and straw from existing farmland, waste wood (sawdust, construction waste etc), rice and other grain husks, sewage, and food waste still makes an enormous amount of sense since these processes will also contribute to waste management along with increasing fuel security and helping to prevent climate change by reducing the emission of other more powerful greenhouse gasses like methane.

## BIRD OBSERVATIONS

Please submit Bird Observations using our electronic database, which can be found at:

[www.rhnaturalists.ca/bird\\_sightings\\_form.php](http://www.rhnaturalists.ca/bird_sightings_form.php)

Alternately, submissions can be sent by e-mail to: [Sightings@rhnaturalists.ca](mailto:Sightings@rhnaturalists.ca) or [birds@rhnaturalists.ca](mailto:birds@rhnaturalists.ca)

Or written submissions can be sent by surface mail to: Gene Denzel, 9 Idleswift Dr., Thornhill, ON L4J 1K8

Bird observations are viewable online or, if you prefer to receive a paper copy of this month's bird observations, contact Marianne Yake at 905-883-3047.

### Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Ontario now available

On Sunday February 10th Ontario Nature celebrated the publication of the **Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Ontario**, 2001 - 2005 and the monumental efforts of over 3,400 dedicated atlas volunteers.

Between 2001 and 2005 over 3,400 volunteers, many members of the Nature Network, collected 1.2 million individual bird records, in a systematic grid stretching from the islands of Lake Erie to the shores of Hudson Bay. This latest edition includes, for the first time, maps of relative abundance for many species, showing which parts of the province are most important to each, and allowing for better conservation planning.



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For instance, the atlas shows that compared to just twenty years ago, many bird species have declined precipitously whereas others have made remarkable come-backs. Population trends are generally positive for birds of prey such as Bald Eagle, Peregrine Falcon and Merlin, but biologists are expressing concern about the fate of grassland birds and those that feed on flying insects, including Common Nighthawk, Whip-poor-will, Chimney Swift and 6 species of swallow, most significantly in the Carolinian region between Toronto and Windsor.

More information about the Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Ontario is available at [www.birdsontario.org](http://www.birdsontario.org). Copies of the book can be purchased by calling 416-444-8419 or 1-800-440-2366. The Atlas costs \$92.50 plus GST and the price includes shipping.

To purchase online follow the links from [www.ontarionature.org/shop](http://www.ontarionature.org/shop).

Please note: Ontario Nature is printing bookplates for the Atlas, which can be used to recognize a donation to your club, local library or school. Please let them know whether you would like one when placing your order.



## From the Editor

Even though York Region is a leader in sustainability compared to many other municipalities and has come a long way, “walkable” communities are still nowhere near top of mind for York’s Regional Chair and Council.

Residents continue to fight against several street widenings on Sixteenth Avenue and Bayview Ave and the Region continues to offset its successes by promoting typical suburban low-density buildings.

The connection between walking and health is clear. The connection between walking and ‘liveable communities’ is also clear, and must be made a priority. For all the talk of transit-oriented, pedestrian-friendly “green” developments, the Region is still dominated by the single-family cul-do-sac homes we have become accustomed to seeing, and in practice, people-friendly land use planning has advanced little in the past several decades. Over 70% our housing stock is single-detached homes and most new developments continue to be built this way.

Aside from the continuing expansion of the existing network of roads and subdivisions, little is changing, and we are certainly not making the rapid infrastructure changes necessary that will prepare us for the dual impacts of global warming and a simultaneous energy crisis. Mixed-use neighbourhoods could house up to 10,000 people and jobs per square kilometre and more than half the population of mixed-use areas such as this could be housed in low-rise, multi-unit dwellings, yet York Region’s projected population density target for 2031 is only 2,814 residents per square km.

When cities and towns are planned appropriately for people instead of for cars it suddenly becomes easy to create walkable, friendly neighbourhoods. As important as a convenient and accessible transportation system is, creating communities that do not rely entirely on cars is even more important and requires a shift in the mindset of those who are planning our towns and cities.

[James Howard Kunstler](#), an American author, social critic, and blogger who is perhaps best known for his books “The Geography of Nowhere” and “The Long Emergency” is one of the world’s most outspoken critics of suburban sprawl. He believes that public spaces should be inspired centers of civic life -- the “physical manifestation of the common good” and that when the time comes that the “American way of life” begins to unravel, city planners will likely have to simply throw away their planning books and go back to square one.



Kunstler has said that we cannot “assume that anything we think about the way we live today is going to be the same ten, five, even three years from now.” Given the realities of the multiple crises that are upon us, I have little doubt that many of the outcomes he predicts will manifest themselves. It’s only a matter of time.

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**Green Tip:** Choose Personal Care Products Carefully. Avoid products that contain: Sodium Lauryl Sulphate (SLS), Cocamide DEA (Diethanolamine), Formaldehyde, Benzyl Violet, Nonyphenols, Parabens, Phthalates, Synthetic Dyes and Fragrances. These and other chemicals have various negative health effects from hormone disruption and reproductive damage to cancer. For more info go to [www.cosmeticsdatabase.com](http://www.cosmeticsdatabase.com)