



THE BULLETIN

April 2008 No. 472

2007-2008 EXECUTIVE

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Events calendar

Walk at David Dunlap Observatory

When: **Saturday May 3 & 10**, 2008. 2pm – 4pm.
Leader: Joe Agg
Where: Observatory Front gate, 123 Hillview Dr.

Executive Meeting Tuesday May 13, 2008. 7:30pm
- *If necessary* -

General Meetings are now suspended for summer season

Don't forget our **Annual Corn Roast** in September!

Date: **Saturday September 6**, 2008. **6pm.**
Location: **Russ Tilt's, 25 Bridgeford St. S.**

Our first General Meeting of the new season will be:

Thursday September 18, 2008. 7:30pm
Look for a speaker and topic in the May / June
edition of the Bulletin
Location: Richmond Hill Presbyterian Church

Check for more Events and Outings on Page 2

Last year Toronto went through the driest summer it had experienced in nearly 50 years.

Toronto received only half of the normal rainfall for the period amid a regional drought that had injured everything from trees in city parks to crops across Southern and Central Ontario.

Drought conditions brought on by low rainfall and high temperatures prevailed across a broad swath of the province, from Chatham and across the Golden Horseshoe to Peterborough.

Although Toronto had a good start with a healthy 73.6 millimetres of rain in May, the drought spread into the city during the three summer months, with the second-lowest rainfall in 70 years of records, at only 51% of normal. It was the lowest recorded summer rainfall since 1959.

The dry weather impact was even more severe because of the heat. The average temperature in Toronto last year was two degrees above normal, and the city had 22 days of temperatures higher than 30 degrees Celsius, which was nearly three times the long-term average of eight days.

In the city, the drought hit trees especially hard. Trees planted even four or five years ago succumbed to the drought and went dormant or just died entirely even through the city and the contractors it hired were watering them "like crazy".

The worst impact of the drought was felt across the north shore of Lake Erie and into the Niagara Peninsula, where rainfall for the May-August growing season was less than half of normal levels while temperatures were above average. Some areas had only 129mm of rainfall all season – only 47% of normal levels -- and the lowest since 1936, when it was in the heart of a dust bowl.

Let's hope and pray that these same weather patterns do not repeat themselves again this year.



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 **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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Visit our Website at 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:

No new members



Meet new members at club events and say Hello!







EVENTS FUTURE








-  - **Saturday May 3, 2008. 2pm – 4pm. RHN Walk at David Dunlap Observatory.** Join Joe Agg for a tour around David Dunlap Observatory and Park. Meet at the front gates of the Observatory at 123 Hillview Drive.
-  - **Saturday, May 10, 2008. 2pm – 4pm. RHN Walk at David Dunlap Observatory.** Meet Joe Agg in front of the Observatory at 123 Hillview Drive. Weather permitting.
-  - **Tuesday May 13, 2008. 7:30pm. Executive Meeting** will be held only if necessary. Executive members will be contacted as required.
-  - **Saturday September 6, 2008. 6pm. Our annual Corn Roast!** The Corn roast costs \$5.00 per person to attend. Renew your Richmond Hill Naturalists membership at this time. For those unable to attend the corn roast you may pay for your membership at the September general meeting. Russ Tilt's, 25 Bridgeford St. South (south off Centre Street, west of Yonge Street). Bring your own cutlery, plate, mug/glass and lawn chair. Contributions to the dessert table would be appreciated.
-  - **Thursday September 18, 2008. 7:30pm. General Meeting.** 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 info contact Marianne Yake at 905-883-3047, or visit www.RHNaturalists.ca.
-  - **Monday October 7, 2008. 12:30pm. Botany Group Meeting.**
-  - **Wednesday October 8, 2008. 7:30pm. Bird Group meeting.** Information about the topic and location will be published in an upcoming issue of the Bulletin.


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


Spring is an *extremely busy* time of the year. All events are listed in the order that they occur


-  - **Saturday April 19, 2008. Earth Day.** April 19 to 25 is also "*International Downshifting Week*", designed to encourage people to slow down, Green up, and live more sustainably. See www.downshiftingweek.com
-  - **Saturday April 19, 2008. 10am. Waterfowl Viewing Day** at the Tiny Marsh Interpretive Centre. Guided hikes, BBQ lunch, children's nature workshops and guest speaker David McLachlin, head of the Ontario Habitat Restoration Program of Ducks Unlimited. For information please call 705-322-2200 or e-mail mtm@csolve.net


-  - **Sunday April 20, 2008. 10am. *Spring Tree Planting Event*** at Grovewood Park. Shovels provided. Wear proper footwear, hat and gloves. For information call Richmond Hill Natural Heritage 905-771-8870, ext. 3885.
-  - **Monday, April 21, 2008. 7pm. *GreenTOpia, BlueTOpia***. The Future of Water in Toronto, with Eduardo Sousa, Chris Hardwicke, Wayne Reeves and Andrew McCammon moderated by Clean Water Foundation. North Toronto Memorial Community Centre, 200 Eglinton Avenue West Toronto, ON. Free. All are welcome. 416-979-2217
-  - **Monday April 22, 2008. 10am – 3pm. *Earth Day Celebration & Tree Planting*** at Sunset Beach Park site of the new Community Centre at the east end of Lake Wilcox. For more information call 905-771-8870, ext 3885 or e-mail naturalheritage@richmondhill.ca.
-  - **Wednesday, April 23, 2008. 6-9pm. Ministry of the environment *Lake Simcoe Protection Act Public Information Forum***. If you have an interest in the protected of Lake Simcoe please plan to attend. Newmarket Community Centre, 200 Doug Duncan Dr. For background info see the Discussion Paper “Protecting Lake Simcoe: Creating Ontario’s strategy for Action” from the MOE at <http://www.ene.gov.on.ca/en/water/lakesimcoe/index.php>
-  - **Friday April 25 to Sunday April 27, 2008. *Green Living Show*** at the Direct Energy Centre, Exhibition Place in Toronto. This is Toronto’s highest profile green event of 2008, and this year the show is featuring Bill Clinton, Ed Begley, Jr., Michael ‘Pinball’ Clemons, Jean-Michel Cousteau and Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., among others.
-  - **Saturday April 26, 2008. 10am. *Oak Ridges Community Clean Up Day***. Call 905-773-7415 or e-mail orfe@oakridgesfriendsoftheenvironment.ca. Note: This is good for students who need community service hours.


-  - **Saturday April 26, 2008. Starting 2:30pm. *Earth Day/Earth Night at Seneca King Campus***. Tree planting, wetland walks, old growth forest discoveries, archaeology talks, interpretive canoe rides, horse-logging demonstrations... The event will open at 3pm with a special ceremony performance by Lisa Odjig, First Nations World Class Hoop Dancer. Evening program and night activities starting at 6:30pm (astronomical “Star Party” and campfire). For more information and to register on-line visit: www.senecac.on.ca/kingenvironment
-  - **Sunday April 27, 2008. 1:30pm to 3:30pm. Free *Nature walk with Robert Marshall*** at Rouge Marsh. Rouge Hill Drive at Lawrence Ave. East. Snow, rain or shine. Dress appropriately. For more information call 416-282-8265.
-  - **Saturday May 3, 2008. 10am. Markham “*Trees for Tomorrow*”** at Milne Dam Conservation Park, McCowan Rd north of Hwy 407. RSVP Anna Cowan by Thursday April 24 at 905-477-7000 x 5930 or acowan@markham.ca
-  - **Saturday & Sunday May 3 & 4, 2008. 9am. *Rouge River Headwaters Spring Tree Planting***. Over 500 trees and shrubs in a headwater area of the Rouge River need to be planted and will contribute towards the creation of a wildlife corridor. Rain or shine. Shovels provided. Bring gloves. Refreshments will follow the event. For info contact Christine Pritchard, 905-713-7399 ; christine.pritchard@ontariostreams.on.ca Located at Yonge Street and Towerhill Drive (Take Yonge Street north, past 19th Ave. The planting site is on the north-west corner.)
-  - **Tuesday May 6, 2008. 7pm. *Solar Energy Workshop*** at the Thornhill Community Centre Library. This is an introductory workshop that will cover the basics on how it works, installation, costs and incentives. Experts will also be on hand to answer more technical questions and you will get to see solar panels. Additional workshops will be held at the Markham Village Library on Thursday May 15, the Angus Glen Library on Thursday May 29 and at Milliken Mills Library on Wednesday June 4. Register by calling 905-477-5530. All participants receive a gift bag (made of recycled paper) containing energy conservation tips and an energy efficient LED night light.
-  - **Friday May 9, 2008. 9:30am. *Oak Ridges Corridor Park Hike*** with ORTA. 10km, 2 hour moderately fast paced hike through the Oak Ridges Corridor Park. Meet at the parking lot on Old Colony Rd. just west of Bayview. For more information contact the hike leader, Joan Taylor at 905-477-2161.
-  - **Saturday May 10, 2008. 10am - 3pm. *North American Native Plant Society Annual Sale***. A huge selection of native wildflowers, grasses, ferns, shrubs, trees, vines and related books brought together in one easily accessible location. Informative seminars and free parking. Markham Civic Centre, 101 Town Centre Boulevard (Hwy 7 at Warden Avenue). For more information and to view the preliminary plant list visit www.nanps.org.


 - **Tuesday May 13, 2008.** 7-9 pm. **Wildflower Stroll** at York Region Forest's Porritt Tract. Spring flower identification and lore. West side Kennedy Road, 300 metres north of Aurora Road, follow unmarked driveway toward communication tower. Peter Attfield 905-773-3935.

 - **Friday May 23 to Sunday June 1, 2008.** 11th annual **Huron Fringe Birding Festival** at MacGregor Point Provincial Park takes place during the peak of warbler migration. An average of 175+ species have been spotted each year. Over 80 different sessions including bird hikes, field trips, in-depth species workshops, photography sessions, nature rambles, astronomy, botany, biking, canoeing and painting. See www.friendsofmacgregor.org


 - **Saturday May 24, 2008.** 9:30am -12:30pm. **Trillium Trek** in Jefferson Forest. 8 kilometre loop, quick pace, big steep hills. Take Bayview Avenue 2 kilometres north of Stouffville Road to Bethesda Sideroad, turn west toward Lake Wilcox and go 30 metres to parking lot on right. Call beforehand. Peter Attfield 905-773-3935.


 - **Thursday May 29, 2008.** 2pm – 7pm. Richmond Hill **Healthy Yards Event**. The Healthy Yards Program seeks to encourage and educate residents about the importance of planting native trees, shrubs and wildflowers on their own property as well as ecologically-sound lawn-care practices. It also features subsidized native plant kits and organic lawn care kits (available to residents of Richmond Hill only). Order early! Call 905-771-8870 ext 3885

 - **Friday May 30, 2008.** 2-3:30 pm. **Lake St. George Field Centre**. Hike at an outdoor education centre not normally open to the public, learn all about kettle lakes. Trail could be muddy. No dogs. Take Bayview Avenue 2 kilometres north of Stouffville Road to Bethesda Sideroad; go 400 metres east to #950 Bethesda, follow driveway 800 metres to parking lot on right. Peter Attfield 905-773-3935.

 - **Friday May 30 & Saturday May 31, 2008.** The 4th annual **Carden Challenge** in the Carden Alvar. The Challenge goal is to raise funds to support the stewardship of Carden's alvar and bird habitats. Teams of four gather pledges based on how many bird species they see in a 24-hour period. \$60 registration; includes a wrap-up dinner. For more info or to register contact Ron Reid 705-326-1620, nature@couchconservancy.ca.

 - **Sunday June 1, 2007.** 11am - 5pm. **10th Annual Mill Pond Splash**. A Family Environment Day featuring native wildlife demonstrations, tree and shrub planting, nature walks and games, bird-box building and all sorts of exhibits on local environmental issues, plus musical entertainment and refreshments. Located at Mill Pond Park in Richmond Hill at the corner of Mill and Trench streets. Free admission.

 - **Friday and Saturday June 13 & 14, 2008.** Ontario Historical Society **Environmental History Conference** "From Nature to Ecology, Landscape to Ecosystems: An Historical View of Ontario Environments" at the University of Guelph. Contact 416-226-9011 or ohs@ontariohistoricalsociety.ca or visit www.ontariohistoricalsociety.ca

 - **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 or 1-877-319-0285.

- Don't Forget! -

The Carden Nature Festival and Ontario Nature's 77th AGM

June 6, 7 and 8, 2008 in The Carden Plain at the [Sir William Mackenzie Inn](http://www.sirwilliammackenzieinn.com) in Kirkfield Ontario.

- o Birding
- o Insects
- o Plants
- o Paddling
- o Watercolour painting
- o Wine tasting
- o Tours
- o Programs for children & youth

Members of the Richmond Hill Naturalists can receive a rebate of 25% of the registration fees if you provide our Group Number on your registration form. Go to www.CardenGuide.com/festival for activities and registration

Festival Passes are \$22 or \$39 for the weekend (Activity Fees extra). A single event pass is \$12 plus the associated Activity Fee. The Richmond Hill Naturalists Group Number is: **0708**

[Please quote this number and our group name "Richmond Hill Naturalists" when you register to ensure you receive your rebate.]

For more information please contact Diana Piché at 905-773-4199 or diana.piche@sympatico.ca

MEMBER SUBMISSIONS



'A Case of Mistaken Identity'

In what some observers believe could be a turning point for the country, Statistics Canada says that for the first time since it started studying how Canadians get to work in 1996, a smaller percentage of us were making the trip behind the wheel.

It may appear to be a small decline. But the 2006 census data yesterday showing the percentage of Canadians who drive to work at 72.3 per cent, down from 73.8 per cent in 2001, is a departure from a century-long trend of increasing automobile use. The numbers also show gains for public transit, carpooling and cycling, although the median distance travelled each day to work continues to rise, hitting 7.6 kilometres in 2006, up from 7.2 in 2001 and 7.0 in 1996. Carpooling is up slightly partly because of increasing gas prices. Between 2001 and 2006, the share of commuters that rode to work as a passenger in a car rose to 7.7 per cent from 6.9 per cent. Cycling to work, while showing a 20-per-cent increase, still accounted for only 1.3 per cent of commuters, up from 1.2.

← This photo was taken on a poster affixed to a telephone pole in suburban America. One wonders if the individual who posted this is still awaiting a call from the "owner". (Note: the picture is of a Virginia opossum)



Have you been considering adding trees and shrubs to your yard?

LEAF (Local Enhancement and Appreciation of Forests), together with the Town of Markham and York Region have announced a subsidized **Backyard Tree Planting Pilot Project**. The cost to property owners ranges from \$80 to \$160 per tree and include a 40 minute backyard consultation with a qualified arborist, five to ten foot tall tree, and full planting service. Native shrubs are also available in the range of \$25. They provide excellent songbird and butterfly habitat. Learn more by calling 416-413-9244 or visit www.leaftoronto.org/bytp.

New Ecological Footprint calculator launched

The **Global Footprint Network** and EPA Victoria have just launched a new personal Ecological Footprint calculator for Australia. Built in partnership with Free Range Studios (the creators of the viral film *The Matrix* and *The Story of Stuff*) the new calculator provides a graphic representation of your impact on the planet.

The launch of the Australian calculator is the first phase of a global roll-out of a world calculator which will launch later this year. Following the Australian calculator, a US version will be available this spring, and Canada will follow shortly thereafter. See: <https://auscalc.footprintnetwork.org>



On April 2nd opposition party leaders Stéphane Dion, Gilles Duceppe and Jack Layton signed a pledge to fight climate change. The **KYOTOplus pledge** is part of a national global warming petition campaign launched on Parliament Hill by Canadian environmental and public interest organizations. The Prime Minister and Environment Minister John Baird were also invited to sign the pledge, but declined.

KYOTOplus will gather the pledges of citizens and politicians who want Canada to take a leadership role on global warming - both domestically and internationally. It calls on elected Canadian politicians to "work to ensure that Canada honours its Kyoto commitment and sets a national target of cutting its greenhouse gas emissions by at least 25 per cent, relative to the 1990 level, by 2020."

The KYOTOplus campaign calls for action on Canada's Kyoto commitment and support for crucial U.N. negotiations on a post-2012 global agreement that will conclude in Copenhagen, Denmark, in December 2009.

Canadians can sign on at <http://kyotoplus.ca>





The Regional Municipality of York (York Region) began an **Individual Environmental Assessment** (EA) for the **North Yonge Street Corridor Public Transit** and Associated Road Improvements in 2004 to define transit needs and associated road improvements along the northern portion of Yonge Street from Green Lane to 19th Ave. As part of the EA study to date, rapid transit service has been recommended for Yonge Street ending with two branches; one on Green Lane to the East Gwillimbury GO Station and the other on Davis Drive. In September 2007, The Ministry of the Environment approved a new Class EA process for municipal transit and rapid transit projects. Look for the next Public Consultation scheduled for this Spring (2008).

NATURE NEWS

Canada's Water Woes

It may be difficult to believe, but Canada may be on the brink of a fresh water crisis, and unless Canadians start taking notice, our economy may suffer. That's the conclusion of leading water expert Bob Sandford, chair of the Canadian Partnership Initiative of the UN Water for Life Decade.

Warnings from Canadian NGOs and a report from Environment Canada that asserts Canada faces numerous threats to its valuable fresh water resources. Water scarcity has already constrained economic growth in parts of Western Canada and low lake levels have caused a reduction in shipping loads and reduced water availability for hydro-electric power on the Great Lakes. With climate change, water quality and availability in parts of Canada will further deteriorate. Our economy will be seriously impaired by the effects of climate change.

The health of the Canadian economy is directly linked to the availability of fresh water. Environment Canada estimates that water contributes up to \$23 billion annually to Canada's national economy.

Yet, Canadians don't seem to appreciate that our long-term supply of fresh water is at risk. We are seeing more and more incidences of water shortages, infrastructure problems, do-not-water advisories and drier summers. We need to start changing our attitude toward water and implement conservation techniques in our everyday lives. When it comes to water sustainability, everyone -- from NGOs to governments to corporate Canada to individual Canadians -- has an important role to play.

Canada possesses only 6.5% of the world's renewable fresh water resources and Canadians are considered to be the second largest wasters of water, second to Americans. (Canadians pay approximately one quarter of European water prices.)

The greatest threat to Canada's supply of fresh water is our belief in its abundance. The reality is that our freshwater supplies are being seriously challenged by heavy use (primarily overuse by agriculture), rapid growth and by climate change and global warming-induced drought.

Estrogen in water threatens minnow males



The persistent discharge of even small concentrations of female sex hormones into lakes and rivers can completely decimate wild fish populations. The study by Fisheries and Oceans Canada found minnow populations in an experimental lake in northwestern Ontario began to collapse after prolonged exposure to small amounts of synthetic estrogen, similar to that found in birth control pills.

The study found male fish, including larger species like trout and suckers that have longer lifespans and feed on minnows, began producing egg proteins and that early stage eggs were even found in the testes of some of the fish. The hormones also impacted the potency of male sperm, while female fish were found to produce more egg proteins.

The seven-year study involved adding five to six nanograms of estrogen per trillion litres of water — the equivalent of a few grains of sand in an Olympic size swimming pool — and studying the effect on the fish population. This ratio is based on what's been found in the natural environment. Even though they are not persistent, they can still have a very dramatic effect on fish health.

A recently released draft report by provincial and federal officials has stated that, "Canada must prepare for the impact of global warming on its forests, such as increased fires in the west and ice storms in the east". Canada's lumber and paper industry must also address its declining competitiveness and use trees for non-timber products. The report went on to say that "Forests will feel the impact of global warming even if steps are taken internationally to reduce emissions of greenhouse gasses linked to climate change. Potential problems include more large-scale fires in Western and Northern Canada, outbreaks of tree-eating insects that are normally controlled by cold weather, and wetter conditions and ice storms in Atlantic Canada". (source: Reuters, 2008-04-02)

Uranium mining & production suspended in Labrador



On April 9, 2008 it was announced that Labrador's Inuit government is imposing a moratorium on uranium mining and production on their land for the next three years. The moratorium prohibits mining or milling until the Nunatsiavut government develops its own environmental laws, by 2011. Aurora chief Mark O'Dea said it's too early to know the impact on schedules, but he predicted some job losses and some decline in exploration activity in Labrador. Lands and Resources Minister William Barbour said the decision was taken to ensure Inuit have a say in protecting the environment of their ancient lands. The moratorium doesn't apply to exploration.

- From the Toronto Star

EVENTS PAST

On Saturday March 29th from 7pm to 9:30pm as a tribute to our beloved Observatory and Parkland the group "DDO Defenders" hosted a public event entitled, '**EARTH HOUR AT THE OBSERVATORY**'.



Dr. Tom Bolton, the renowned astronomer who discovered of the first Black Hole in Cygnus X-1 and a lead researcher at the David Dunlap Observatory gave lectures entitled, 'Light Pollution - How Richmond Hill Tamed the Lightbulb'. Tours of the Administration Building and the main 1.8m telescope were also provided for the public.

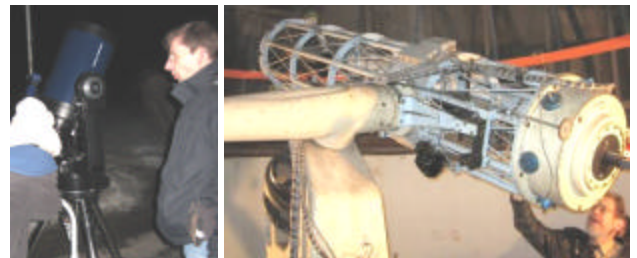


Just before the main event, which began outside on the front lawn of the observatory, Jack Layton, leader of the Federal NDP, gave an impassioned speech in support of preservation of the David Dunlap Observatory.

A very special Aboriginal Ceremony coinciding with the start of Global Earth Hour, which began at 8pm, was hosted by representatives of our First Nations and was led by David Grey Eagle. This was followed by additional tours of the buildings, telescope viewing and sky tours.



More than four hundred people from all over the Province as well as residents of Richmond Hill came to the event, and for many it was the first time they had stepped foot onto the property even though the university has been running public tours of the facility for years.



During Earth Hour Ontario reduced electricity demand by ~5%, most of the savings came from the Toronto Area.

David Tomlinson is an Aurora resident that has enjoyed and learnt from nature over many years and who has developed a beautiful garden called "Merlin's Hollow" that is open to the public. David is an Ornithologist and Landscape Architect who has been involved in improving many natural sites in our area.

On the Richmond Hill Naturalist's **March General Meeting** on Thursday, March 20th David discussed Changes in Bird Life Caused by Humans. David Tomlinson spoke about the methods and importance of keeping records of local bird populations and how the statistics can be used.

Michael White, past President of the Richmond Hill Naturalists, wrote the following about David:

"I accompanied David one very early morning to his St. John's Road marsh and "met" a hundred nesting families. They were tree sparrows, song sparrows, warblers, blackbirds and wrens that David knew for several preceding years – a very special relationship with a community of free neighbours. From this work, David became their advocate – successful advocate - before the Ontario Municipal Board to define their necessary boundaries in the face of competition from expansion of our human communities.

Some time later we followed David to southeast Cuba to meet members of his Aurora friends in their winter habitat. It has been a help in building a sensitive and sensible position about how we can live in this one world and use our short lifetime of energy to help others – including fellow humans – live in this world."

The province of Ontario has eliminated the **Bradford bypass** and **extension of Hwy. 404** north of Ravenshoe from its plans, angering York chairperson Bill Fisch and Newmarket-Aurora MPP Frank Klees.

Fisch has charged that the province's Places to Grow legislation is "simply unacceptable" and has "threatened York Region's economic viability". The bypass would have linked highway 400 and 404 in the north, but the area where the highway would need to be built has been protected from development and subject to a number of environmental assessments.

York's elected representatives, along with York Region's planning and economic development committee chairperson Tony Wong, would have liked to see growth and "industrial and commercial developments" in Holland Landing, Sharon, Queensville and Georgina. (From: yorkregion.com, Sean Pearce)

GENERAL INTEREST

Help the Economy: Clean up the Environment

A new study by McKinsey & Company of Chicago, IL has found that Germany's ambitious goal to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by up to 40 percent of their 1990 level over the next 12 years is **achievable and economically viable**. The costs and opportunities of various carbon abatement measures were weighed into the study, which found that achieving a 30 percent target, while challenging, would neither curb economic growth nor require lifestyle changes or lower levels of comfort. They indicate that the higher targets may begin to become politically contentious and somewhat costly, however the technological and employment opportunities would be considerable.

A Little History of the DDO

After the First World War, an enterprising and determined physics professor named Clarence Chant approached a mining magnate, David Dunlap, about installing a huge telescope a short drive north of Toronto - before farms in the vicinity of the provincial capital became over-run by subdivisions. The David Dunlap Observatory was finally opened in 1935, becoming home to what was then the second-largest telescope in the world. It was truly a stunning facility, located in what was at the time the "middle of nowhere". The Dunlap Observatory became renowned the world over for important astronomical discoveries and was once the absolute centre of science and education in the British Empire and has now become a magnificent 189-acre world-class heritage property.

The town of Richmond Hill also enacted the first "dark skies" bylaw in Canada as a result of increased development around the observatory. The law is now being used as a model for Toronto and other municipalities. Last fall the University of Toronto put the Dunlap up for sale, potentially ending a legacy of more than 70 years. However, the David Dunlap Observatory is still of national importance and continues to be the largest optical telescope in Canada. Researchers very often collaborate in international research studies such as the collection of data for NASA. The modern electronics now installed on the telescope has multiplied its potential to well beyond its capabilities when first opened in 1935 under much darker skies. The Dunlap Observatory has been a continual source of international astronomic and aerospace discoveries – globular star clusters between 1939-93 by Dr. Helen Hogg, the development of 2-star sextant navigation by Dr. Frank Hogg in 1940, pressurized G-suits by Wilbur Franks in 1941, dwarf galaxies by Dr. Sidney van den Bergh in 1959, and the proven existence of Black Holes by Dr. Tom Bolton in 1971. In 2006, 19 academic papers were produced using observations taken with the telescope.

- From the Thunder Bay Chronicle-Journal & Gloria Boxen

Danger in Suburbia

Despite airs of child-friendliness, the actual built environment of suburbia is extremely hostile to children's most basic needs. Richard Gilbert and Catherine O'Brien, writing for the Centre for Sustainable Transportation, have surveyed a huge body of research on how our built environment affects children, coming up with a list of 27 guidelines for creating safer, healthier communities. The low density development of "family friendly" subdivisions all but guarantees that parents must drive their children anywhere they need or want to go.

According to **Child- and Youth-Friendly Land-Use and Transport Planning Guidelines**, children need fresh air, exercise, time to run and play, and a chance to move through neighbourhoods and interact with others. Instead, they are strapped into car seats and shuttled from destination to destination, missing exercise, breathing poisonous exhaust, and isolated from their communities.



Children who do try to walk face automotive exhaust and the gauntlet of speeding cars if they want to get anywhere. The constant noise of traffic increases children's stress levels and the presence of cars forces children inside, where their opportunities to play and exercise are severely limited. The results of sprawl development are clear: overweight children at higher lifetime risk of diabetes and heart disease, a significant increase in respiratory illness, even measurable effects on emotional development, concentration, and school performance. Amazingly, as bad as air pollution is for pedestrians, Gilbert and O'Brien found that levels of air pollution inside vehicles are several times worse than levels outside vehicles.

Another more direct and immediate danger are crashes, the leading cause of injury and death in Canada for children older than one year old. For all the understandable fear parents have of attacks and abductions, cars are much more risky than strangers. See: <http://cst.uwinnipeg.ca/completed.html> for more information.

Pesky Pesticides

Many doctors and researchers, including the Ontario College of Family Physicians, the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario, the chair of the Canadian Leukemia Studies Group, a past president of the Canadian Paediatric Society and hundreds of others, have looked at the pesticides commonly used in landscaping. They say the risk is not worth it for a cheap, quick way to maintain turf.



Pesticides are persuasively linked to birth defects and genetic damage. They harm the nervous system, the immune system and just about every other system that keeps us ticking. The fetus may be irrevocably harmed before birth; children playing on the floor or ground, with their immature organs and propensity for putting everything in their mouths, are particularly at risk.

The benefit of a weed-free lawn cannot balance even a small risk of lifelong impairment or malignancy, especially when more benign methods will successfully establish and maintain a beautiful landscape. Pesticides are linked to cancers such as leukemia, brain tumours, neuroblastoma, lymphoma, asthma, allergies, neurological and endocrine conditions and other environmental sensitivities. Pesticides don't stay where you put them. Children may be exposed to much more pesticide tracked and blown into the house than they do from food and water.

Sweden has all-party support for the goal of a "non-toxic environment" within a generation. Ontario's children deserve no less. Least-toxic landscaping is one of the easiest, effective steps we can take toward this goal.

- Meg Sears, adjunct investigator for the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario Research Institute in Ottawa

Rising Food Costs

After an initial burst of enthusiasm in 2005 and 2006, environmentalists and some economists now blame biofuels for a host of global problems including a sharp jump in the price of corn (used to make ethanol) and other crops like palm oil (used to make biodiesel). The demand for food products for use as fuel has triggered a rise in global inflation and protests in poor nations.

In addition to rising prices for foods used to create biofuels, a sharp rise in the price of rice is raising fears of public turmoil in the many parts of Asia. Higher prices have already sparked protests in the Philippines, Cambodia has banned rice exports and Vietnamese exporters and farmers are stockpiling rice. Rice prices have jumped 50 per cent in the last two months and at least doubled since 2004. Price increases are being caused by rising fuel and fertilizer expenses as well as crops that have been curtailed by disease, pests and climate change. There are concerns prices could rise a further 40 per cent in the coming months.



A Guaranteed Nuclear Future for Ontario

Ontario's Energy Minister Gerry Phillips announced in March that the Government of Ontario has decided to give nuclear power companies a monopoly to supply up to 72% of Ontario's electricity even though nuclear power is the highest-cost, least reliable and least energy efficient electricity supply source. This decision goes against the government's promise to consider all supply sources equally in an integrated plan.

Many industry experts argue that we can meet our electricity needs at a lower cost through energy conservation and demand management; wind power; power from waste biomass; natural gas-fired combined heat and power plants located in our apartment buildings, recreation centres, hospitals, shopping malls and factories; or water power imports from Quebec, Labrador or Manitoba. An effective monopoly on Nuclear energy in Ontario directly stifles most efforts at undertaking any of the alternative initiatives that would either help reduce demand or increase renewable energy in the province.

BIRD OBSERVATIONS

Please submit Bird Observations using our electronic database, which can be found at: www.rhnaturalists.ca/bird_sightings_form.php

Submissions can be sent by e-mail to:

Sightings@rhnaturalists.ca or birds@rhnaturalists.ca

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.

Birding Tip: Build a Tree Swallow Ladder

Significant numbers of tree swallows perish in bluebird and other bird boxes each spring because they are not able to exit the bird boxes. For any nest box made with relatively smooth lumber, it is important to have a "ladder" beneath the entrance hole to enable tree swallows to exit. Horizontal grooves can be sawed, or a small strip of plastic gutter guard works great and can be stapled beneath the entrance hole.

- Submitted by Chris Grooms, Kingston Field Naturalists

From the Editor

IKEA plans to stop offering plastic bags to its U.S. customers beginning in October of this year, following a successful plastic bag reduction program, similar to programs in the United Kingdom in June, and in Australia in December. The company set a goal last year of slashing plastic bag use by 50 percent from 70 million bags to 35 million in 12 months.

IKEA was able to do this by actually selling the plastic bags to customers for a nickel each. Reusable bags would cost customers 59 cents. Once this was done, ninety-two percent [92%] of IKEA's customers began to eschew the plastic bags in favour of the reusable ones. The company donated the proceeds collected from the bag fees -- more than \$300,000 -- to the group "America Forests" so they could plant trees.

And if IKEA can do it, so can a lot of other companies and organizations in the retail market. Ireland led the way in 2002 by charging about 22 cents per grocery bag and putting the millions raised into recycling programs. In March, San Francisco became the first city in North America to ban plastic bags in grocery stores and large pharmacies. Retailers were given six months to a year to come up with alternatives such as cloth, paper or biodegradable bags. In April, Leaf Rapids, a small town in northern Manitoba, became the first municipality in Canada to ban plastic shopping bags.

But we don't need to ban the use of plastic bags entirely. Our government could go a long way in helping to reduce plastic waste by simply mandating that any plastic bags used for shopping be actually **sold** to the customers who use them and not be given away for free.

This is a lesson in "Green Economics" -- using market forces to drive the changes we want to see.

Ontarians use about 7 million plastic bags every day, which is equivalent to about 4 bags per person every week.

Lloyd Helferty, Bulletin Editor editor@rhnaturalists.ca

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Green Tip: Buy a **low-flow showerhead** and either install it yourself or hire a professional. Take short showers in place of baths, and avoid running the water in the bathroom while you're shaving or brushing your teeth.

A 10-minute shower can use up to 190 litres of hot water with a conventional showerhead. A low-flow showerhead can cut this by half and still maintain water pressure. A family can save up to \$200 a year in the cost of heating water for showers - and over 300 kilograms in greenhouse gas emissions - with a low-flow showerhead.