



THE BULLETIN

NEWS AND VIEWS FROM THE RICHMOND HILL NATURALISTS

April 2011 — No. 497

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Zion Canyon - one of the great National Parks of the American Southwest Photo by Marilyn M

Potluck Dinner and AGM

All Richmond Hill Naturalists are reminded to bring a favourite potluck dish, cutlery, plate and mug to this year's final meeting on Thursday, April 21. The Potluck Dinner begins at 6pm followed by the Annual General Meeting at 7:30pm.

Naturalist Mike Turk will talk about his and wife Kaari's travels through the great National Parks of the American Southwest.

Meet at Wallace Hall, R.H. Presbyterian Church, 10066 Yonge Street, Richmond Hill (west side, first block north of Major Mackenzie Drive). For further information contact Marianne Yake, 905-883-3047, or visit the web site <http://www.RHNaturalists.ca>.

Bring a friend! All are welcome. Admission is free.



Mike Turk

The Federal Election is coming up quickly on May 2! The Richmond Hill Naturalists do not endorse any party or candidate but we do want our government to take steps to care for the environment. Nature Canada has a very good website with issues and a few questions for candidates on protecting nature at:
<http://www.naturecanada.ca/election2011.asp>



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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.

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Don't forget to Renew your Membership! Your membership fee helps pay for our monthly hall rental, website registration, speakers, printing and postage for the Bulletin (all Website and Bulletin contributions and editing are on a strictly volunteer basis), and special events. Please renew by clicking on the "Membership" link on the website at rhnaturalists.ca or at the monthly General Meeting. A single membership is \$30; get a membership for the whole family for only \$35.

Join the Baillie Birdathon Team!

Do you enjoy getting out in the spring and spending the whole day looking for Wood Warblers and other spring migrants? If that's your cup of tea, maybe you'd like to join the Richmond Hill Naturalists Baillie Birdathon Team.

Birdathon donations are tax-deductible and 25% of the donation comes back to the Richmond Hill Naturalists.

It's a lot of fun and a great fundraiser for the club as well as for Bird Studies Canada.

Participants also have the opportunity to win prizes for most bird species seen in a 24-hour period and most funds raised.

Grand Prize this year is a choice of three Eagle Eye Tours birding trips: to Central Mexico, Quebec or Trinidad & Tobago. Other prizes include spotting scopes, binoculars, bird feeders, hiking gear and many more. All participants get at least one chance to win a prize and get additional chances for each \$250 raised. Contact Denise Potter at denise_potter@hotmail.com or call 905-770-4586 if you are interested in joining this year's Richmond Hill Naturalists Club team.

Coming Events



Thursday, April 21, 2011 at 6:00pm - Annual Potluck Dinner followed by General Meeting beginning at 7:30pm. Last meeting until the Corn Roast in September! Club Member Mike Turk speaks about the glorious National Parks of the American Southwest. Richmond Hill Presbyterian Church, Wallace Hall. 10066 Yonge St., North of Major Mackenzie Dr., West side. For info contact Marianne Yake at 905-883-3047, or visit www.RHNaturalists.ca.

Please note: Richmond Hill Naturalists welcomes anyone to volunteer as an outing leader. Contact trips@rhnaturalists.ca if you would like to organize or promote an outing.



Tuesday April 19, 8:00 am – 3:00 pm, Earth Week Fair - York Region Administrative Centre, 17250 Yonge St., Newmarket. Visit over 20 exhibitors and talk to York Region staff about environmental programs and initiatives. There will be a passport for kids visiting the exhibits, earth friendly giveaways and more. For more information, call 905-830-4444 ext 1226 or visit: www.york.ca



Saturday May 7, 10:00 am – 3:00pm. North American Native Plant Society (NANPS) Native Plant Sale – , Markham Civic Centre. The North American Native Plant Society annual sale is the best place to get native plants at reasonable prices. Native wildflowers, ferns, grasses and sedges, as well as trees and shrubs, are available for every garden, from the sunniest to the shadiest! Experts will be on hand to help you find the plants for light and soil conditions in your garden, and the habitat you want to recreate. There will also be free presentations and a great selection of nature books. For more details including the plant list, visit the website www.nanps.org



Saturday May 07, 2011 09 : 30 AM - 04 : 30 PM Birding for Beginners Ever wondered how to identify local birds and their songs? Explore the wonderful hobby of birding with 'Barry the Birder' Wallace! Learn how to spot birds in the many different habitats of Koffler Scientific Reserve, identify song, and navigate identification manuals. For more information about this and other events visit <http://ksr.utoronto.ca/events>



Friday, May 13 from 2pm to 7pm: Healthy Yards Event. Pick up pre-ordered plant kits and rain barrels. Receive free mulch. Win gardening prizes. Learn about gardening and organic lawn care. Location: Richmond Green



Saturday May 14, 2011, 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tommy Thompson Park Spring Bird Festival GO WILD, GO BIRDING! Located on the Toronto Waterfront, Tommy Thompson Park is Toronto's largest greenspace that provides critical stopover habitat for migrating birds. Over 315 species have been recorded to date at the park! Join the Toronto Region Conservation Authority at the Spring Bird Festival to learn about the amazing phenomenon of migration and the importance of bird conservation. A variety of activities will be offered for people of all ages and all birding abilities! Please visit www.springbirdfestival.ca for more detail and note that some activities require registration.



Sunday, May 29, 2011, The 13th Annual Mill Pond Splash, a popular eco-festival hosted by the Don Watershed Regeneration Council, Toronto and Region Conservation, the Town of Richmond Hill, and the Richmond Hill Naturalists, will be taking place on Sunday, May 29, 2011 at Mill Pond Park from 12:00 - 4:30 p.m. For more information, please visit: <http://www.trca.on.ca/millpondsplash/>

Wild Plants may be Edible, Tasty, Healthy - or Toxic

Contributed by Ted Hampton

The Richmond Hill Botany Group met on April 7 for the last time until next autumn. Freddy Whillans was our hostess, and six members explored the intriguing subject of EDIBLE wild plants. Plants and herbs were of course staples for our ancestors for millennia, long before we had supermarkets or pharmacies, and some saved many lives from winter illnesses like scurvy.

Many of these plants are tasty and nutritious, rich in valuable vitamins and minerals and yet on our farm we considered them weeds to be discouraged or destroyed. Among them are Pigweed (Amaranth), Purslane and Dandelions (*Traxacum officinale* = of pharmaceutical value), while Wild Leeks and Puffballs might be considered more innocent bystanders.



Invasive weed or medical hero? A number of studies combined with centuries of folklore indicate that the oft-maligned dandelion is a potent source of vitamins A, B complex, C, and D, and minerals such as iron, potassium, and zinc, while also assisting with digestive issues, liver and gallbladder issues, and skin problems.

Make sure if you go to gather wild plants that the area has not been sprayed or otherwise polluted.

And go with someone who knows their plants! Healthy and tasty Purslane for example is a terrific source of one of the omega 3 fatty acids as well as vitamins A and C...but the succulent plant looks very similar to the toxic spurge, a family of plants whose milky juice can cause injury to eyes and skin on contact.

The Mighty Oak, continued...

Further to last month's Botany Group meeting about the Oak, Naturalist Club member Gloria Boxen strongly recommends the following books:

Oak: The Frame of Civilization by William Bryant Logan; W.W. Norton & Company, 2005. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2005/nov/05/featuresreviews.guardianreview8>

Tree: A Life Story by David Suzuki and Wayne Grady.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VFB5d8Foblk>,

http://www.accessmylibrary.com/coms2/summary_0286-14185576_ITM. It follows the life cycle of a Douglas Fir.



Above: Wild Leeks rescued from the 404 extension last summer survived the transplant and are growing in the editor's back yard. After reading Ted Hampton's story we remembered them and went out in the pouring rain to see how they were doing. Lo and behold there they were. Yes squirrels and blue jays have buried peanuts around them -- and dug them up again -- but they're clearly a tough plant. We sniffed them to make sure they really are leeks and yes, they smelled amazingly oniony. We picked a couple and chopped them up in a salad to munch on while assembling this bulletin. Delicious!

Naturalists take Late Winter Trip to Algonquin Park

In late March several Richmond Hill Naturalists and West Humber Naturalists visited Algonquin Park. Early spring is a great time to visit the Park and there's no need to rough it anymore. The intrepid travellers spent the nights comfortable and warm in local motels in nearby Whitney, near the Park's East Gate. Not far from the East Gate, the Visitor's Centre has been the place to be in Algonquin during the winter. Winter finches gather at the filled feeders, and rarely-seen mammals such as Martens and Fishers occasionally make an appearance.

The Naturalists were fortunate enough to see both Marten and Moose as well as spotting Park specialties such as Boreal Chickadee, Gray Jay, Black-Backed Woodpecker and Ruffed Grouse.



Above: a young moose kneels for a drink of water. Above Right: Boreal Chickadee. Note the pale brown cap that distinguishes the Boreal from our local Black-Capped Chickadees. There is also a lot more chestnut on the flanks. Photos by Gene Denzel, Algonquin Park, March 2011



A Naturalist's Nightmare

It's the question of our age: can we co-exist with our fellow creatures? In the same house?

by Joe Agg (*Sleepless on Hillsview*)

Our house has a seasonal problem with mice which is not helped by all the bird seed around. I do not know how they get in but my cat has learned to open windows -- but not shut them -- which may be the cause. He is an excellent hunter but when they get into the attic or false ceiling he is unable to dispatch them.

The thought of a mouse getting into bed with me is rather unsettling which has led me to setting traps which are usually quite effective with one exception. The mice are not always killed instantly but parts of them are caught. Last night this was the case. I was awakened to a horrible thrashing noise above my head as a small critter was caught but not killed. The thought of getting up into the suspended ceiling to catch the animal at 3am did not appeal to me so I waited, sleepless until dawn. All the while I was thinking what "true" naturalist would do this to a little mouse. Then the memory of my mother got in my head because she loved all living things and would harm nothing. She was even known to try to rescue flies that spiders had wrapped up by unwinding the web around them. My black cat would who sleeps with me most nights would look up at the commotion at times but then go back to sleep. He knew it was a lost cause.

Finally it was daylight and with some difficulty I used a magnet on a pole to retrieve the trap with the rodent attached and released it alive, outside. For all I know the mouse has come back in but maybe now it will avoid those peanut butter laden traps.

Bird Group closes year with Potluck and Waterthrush

by Joe Agg

The annual 2010-2011 bird group pot luck was held on April 13th at Martin and Judy Chen's on April 13th. The meeting was very well attended and it was especially nice to have Theo with us. The food variety was good and delicious which was helped by a little prior planning.

The in-house birds at Martin's provided background 'music' especially when bird songs were being played. The birds featured were the Louisiana and Northern Waterthrush.

It is easier to tell these wood warblers apart by their habitat than by their very similar appearance. As the name implies the Northern Waterthrush is found across Canada but the Louisiana Waterthrush comes only as far north as the lower Great Lakes. Both birds display a curious habit of bobbing and dipping as they walk along the forest floor. The Northern Waterthrush prefers still water but the Louisiana Waterthrush prefers water moving over gravel. Both winter in Latin America and are mainly insect and larva eaters. We all enjoyed learning about these interesting birds.

Phyllis Rawlinson Park Tree Planting event rained out

by Joe Agg

On Saturday April 16, I attended a tree planting at Phyllis Rawlinson park. Unfortunately the tree planting was rained out on what for even a weather nut like me was a particularly nasty day. As it turned out it was also opening day for the heritage home and barn. Phyllis Rawlinson had a varied and interesting life and was a great lover of horses, nature and the outdoors. This park, homestead and park is a wonderful gift to the people in this area and well worth a visit. Funding for the restoration was shared equally by all three levels of government. Federal, Provincial and Local."

And more tree planting events...

We don't have room to mention all the numerous tree planting events going on. Ironic, when you read John Bacher's story about the Dunlap forest being threatened by development. But here are a couple:

Community Tree Planting – Saturday April 30, 10:00 am – 12:00 noon, Humber Flats Eco Park Join Richmond Hill to plant trees and shrubs along this headwater stream of the East Humber River. Equipment will be provided but please dress for the weather with sturdy footwear, a hat and sunscreen, and bring water. Also bring a garbage bag or pick



Northern Waterthrush bobs along a log at Point Pelee. Photo by Rod Potter, May 2007

one up at the Oak Ridges Clean Up headquarters at 39 King Rd. to clean up some trash in the park too. Meet at the trail head on Red Cardinal Trail just north of Mallard Marsh Cres. For further information and a map, visit:

http://www.richmondhill.ca/documents/tree_planting_humber_flats.pdf or e-mail naturalheritage@richmondhill.ca 905-747-6465

Ontario Streams: Saturday May 14, 2011 from 12:00pm—3:00pm Robinson Creek Native Shrub Planting, Markham. 16th Avenue and Roy Rainey Avenue, Markham (From McCowan Road, head east on 16th Avenue. You will see Roy Rainey Avenue and the planting site on the north side of 16th Avenue. Signs will be posted.) Come out and help Ontario Streams and members of your community plant native shrubs along Robinson Creek. This tributary of the Rouge River is home to the endangered redbreasted dace. You will be helping to protect and restore habitat for this species, as well as positively affect water quality. This event will take place rain or shine, so please wear sturdy footwear and dress appropriately for the weather. Shovels and gloves will be provided. Light refreshments will be provided following the event. For more information please contact: Peter Davis, Project Coordinator/Biologist Tel: 905-713-7399 (office); 416-554-6262 (cell) E-mail: peter.davis@ontariostreams.on.ca

Maybe she's called Wisdom for a reason

Immutable Albatross has probably seen one or two tsunamis before. Back in February we celebrated the new chick hatched by Wisdom, the Laysan Albatross (*Phoebastria immutabilis*), known to be well over 60 years old. The oldest wild bird ever known, Wisdom has worn out five bands since she was first banded in 1956 by US Geological Survey scientist Chandler Robbins. At the time Robbins estimated her age at five years...which if accurate would make her a spry 70 years old this year.



Barely had we heard about Wisdom's new chick (perhaps her 30th sprout given that Albatross tend to hatch out a new one every second year if conditions are good) when disaster struck.

On March 10 at 11:45pm, a tsunami spawned by the massive earthquake in Japan stormed over the Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge where Wisdom had nested along with tens of thousands of other Albatross. The tsunami washed over 100% of the beach and into the vegetation on three sides of the atoll and 50% of the fourth, south side. The giant wave swept away part of the National Marine Fisheries/National Wildlife Service camp and came within 50 feet of the hurricane shelter where every human on the atoll had taken shelter. Bird carcasses littered the shore. Wildlife Service experts estimated that more than 110,000 chicks and 2,000 adult albatross were destroyed by the tsunami. Wisdom disappeared and many feared the worst. Humans were evacuated from the atoll on March 14th and returned

Pete Leary of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service took this photograph of Wisdom feeding her chick after the tsunami. This photo was taken on March 22, 2011. The photo and more information about the tsunami, the project and the albatross can be found at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/usfwspacific/5546703373/>

on March 21.

And one of the first birds they looked for -- and found -- was Wisdom. On March 21, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced that Wisdom had returned to feed her chick, surviving the tsunami that has killed so many albatrosses on the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands.

Barry Stieglitz, Project Leader for the Hawaiian and Pacific Islands National Wildlife Refuge Complex, said he was thrilled to learn that Wisdom had survived.

"Although wildlife biologists generally manage at the level of populations," Stieglitz said, "we, too, become entwined in the fates of individual animals. Wisdom is one such special creature. She has also provided us valuable information about the longevity of these beautiful birds - in her case over 60 years - and reinforces the importance of breeding adults in the population. It's also very humbling to know

this bird has been producing chicks longer than I have been alive."

Here's to you, Wisdom! May you have many more!

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David Dunlap Observatory Forest: Symbol of Threat of Urbanization To Legacy Of Reforestation in Ontario

by John Bacher

Will Proposed Development overturn the good works of the past?

The 145-acre David Dunlap Observatory Forest epitomises the threat posed by urbanization to the now century old legacy of reforestation in Ontario. In the past agriculture led to the almost complete deforestation of Southern Ontario. When the ill effects began to be realized more than a century ago a thrust began to reforest the denuded land. Now the goal of strong land use planning efforts is to preserve the watershed conservation and wildlife protection achievements of the past.

When the David Dunlap Observatory was created in 1935, it was heavily influenced by the ideals of the conservation movement that was propelling the great reform of the passage of the Conservation Authorities Act of 1946. One of the players was Professor of Forestry at the University of Toronto, J. H. White. He was a close friend of the then Deputy Minister of Forests, Edmund Zavitz, the driving force behind government reforestation efforts in Ontario, including the Oak Ridges Moraine.

The dual purpose of the observatory grounds with this long-term objective to create a forested park, was outlined in the deed of the property to the University of Toronto, by its donor, Jessie Donald Dunlap. The deed in addition to granting land for an observatory, called for the "remainder of the said lands" to be "converted into and utilized as an Arboretum and or Botanical Garden."

In the 1930s White teamed up

with a remarkable figure, then University of Toronto Chancellor, Sir William Mulock, to both champion the reforestation of the Observatory site and to campaign for the achievement of conservation authorities throughout Ontario. Mulock organized World War One army veterans into an extraordinary organization, Men of the Trees. He led mass rallies of Men of the Trees in tree planting ceremonies such as those in Toronto's Coronation Park, to pressure the Ontario government to increase reforestation through conservation authorities.

A copy of a congratulatory letter to Zavitz in J H White's papers details how the trees provided for the Dunlap Observatory came from the Ontario government. Zavitz was thanked by the project's superintendent "for your great kindness to supply on such short notice with trees for planting at the David Dunlap Observatory. We received slightly over 8,000 trees of various kinds and these were planted on May 8 to May 10" of 1939.

The efforts of Zavitz and White in reforesting the Dunlap Observatory were later added to by various plantings undertaken by the University of Toronto Forestry Faculty. This created conditions where an oasis of a predominately forest ecosystem emerged in the surrounding urban area of Richmond Hill. Today the forest provides shelter to numerous bird species including the Pine Grosbeak, Brown Thrasher, White-Winged Crossbill, and most spectacularly, the Barred Owl. Linked by the rail corridor and greenbelts to other greenspaces, the Dunlap forest is also home to

a herd of 24 deer, whose numbers are kept in check by a pack of coyotes.

Aware of the fragile nature of a green oasis in an urban setting, Richmond Hill environmentalists are trying to persuade their town council to prohibit development on the entire observatory site. One of their key arguments is the watershed protection goals of York Region's Official Plan. It calls for a modest goal of 25 per cent forest cover and the region has only 22.5 per cent of its landscape forested.

The current tree protection bylaws can only do so much. In November 2009 the new owner of the Dunlap property removed 300 trees. Opponents photographed and filmed the deed. On April 15th 2010 a York Region court convicted the Corsica development on 17 counts of violating the tree by-law by cutting trees without a permit. The fines of \$750 per count totalled \$14,800. The court also issued a replanting order of an amount of \$30,000 to replant the trees illegally destroyed.

York Region is a remarkable success story of environmental protection. Massive reforestation here heavily focused on the headwaters of the Oak Ridges Moraine and the streams that flow from it had greatly improved ecosystem health since Edmund Zavitz first spoke to York County Council in 1920. Despite this remarkable legacy, the battle over the Dunlap Observatory illustrates how urbanization that encroaches on forests can reverse the environmental victories of the past.