THIS ISSUE
The Birds - Common Raven
If You Build It They Will Come!
More on Bats
The Frogs
New Moths for the List
Dragonflies and Damselflies
Committee
Carol Allan - Margaret Bain - Dennis Barry - Barb Haynes
Phill Holder - Sue Holder - Kelly Holder

PURPOSE
To find students with a passion for nature and provide them with opportunities to fund their research within Thickson’s Woods Nature Reserve. To develop baseline documentation on the Reserve biodiversity so that changes can be monitored. And if necessary, take appropriate steps to protect and improve the biodiversity of the Reserve for future generations.

We are currently looking for Students.
Contact us today!
Despite its evil reputation through the ages, the Common Raven (Corvus corax) really is a majestic bird. Its display flight during courtship is spectacular, and until relatively recently was seen only as far south in Ontario as Algonquin Park. A few years ago I felt fortunate to see displaying ravens on the Oak Ridges Moraine. Now, seeing and hearing ravens flying over Thickson’s Woods on the north shore of Lake Ontario is a daily occurrence.

It is fascinating to realize that the raven’s recent southward range extension is probably merely the reclaiming of its former territory. In Alexander Wilson’s description of his journey along Lakes Erie and Ontario during August and September 1804, he noted that “ravens abound” and were seen every day. In contrast not a single American “Common” Crow was seen.

Several factors must have contributed to the shrinkage of the raven’s range – loss of habitat due to rapid human settlement, being shot in large numbers as vermin, and eating poisoned bait put out for wolves seem likely explanations. It was a fairly rapid decline - Fleming reported in 1907 that the last known pair in Toronto was killed in Queen’s Park around 1848, and during a visit to Kingston by Hadfield in 1857 no ravens were mentioned.

Listed as rare in southern Ontario in many publications, there has been a slow but steady increase in sightings and breeding records over the last 20 years or so. In the last couple of years, raven populations have increased even more rapidly, and many of this year’s Christmas Bird Counts in the extreme south of the province are reporting record numbers.

Most ornithologists believe that the raven is reclaiming its former territory, the range from which it was forced out and replaced by crows over 150 years ago. But many questions remain. Why did it take so long? The habitat in southern Ontario is certainly very different than it was 150 years ago, and different too from the raven’s more traditional range in northern Ontario. We know that several bird species are expanding their breeding range northwards, possibly due to climate change, but such a southward move after 150 years is puzzling.

Glenn Coady documented the first present-day Common Raven in the Thickson’s Woods Nature Reserve when he saw one there on April 15, 2009. The now almost daily observations of ravens flying over Thickson’s Woods and the Meadow has led to speculation that they may have attempted to nest at the Geradu Ameristeel Plant just west of Thickson Road but still within the 1.6km radius of the Reserve. In the spring we will try to get access to the area to look for any breeding activity.

Often when a raven is seen flying, it is being chased by several very excited, vocal crows. It will be interesting to see how the Common Raven and the American Crow co-exist over the next decade now that they share so much habitat in southern Ontario.

Phill Holder
If you build it, THEY WILL COME!
If you protect it, THEY WILL STAY!

Sue’s Insect Garden

A few years ago, my friend Sue bought a small house in a mining village near Canterbury, in the south of England. The house was charming, but around it was a dismal area of cement and stone chippings with only a couple of forlorn, straggly rose bushes in one corner.

Very few birds or bees or butterflies visited.

Within a couple of years, everything had changed – the stone chips were replaced with flowerbeds and terracotta pots full of lavender, rosemary, golden marjoram, tall grasses and dwarf hebe, and fountains of climbing roses. The insects loved it.

Hoverflies, crickets, beetles, ants, and spiders appeared in profusion and Sue bought a camera with a macro lens to record some of this amazing variety. She found four types of crickets, one at least quite rare for the area, many kinds of beetles, and even a slow-worm. The insects attracted wrens and blackbirds and robins and soon the garden was teeming with life.

Sue was hooked, and has taken part in several insect studies, identifying and following the life histories of many of the species enjoying the lush habitat she had created.

Just imagine what hidden treasures exist in the Reserve. We hope to have Macro Photography workshops later this year.

Creating habitat works! Maintaining habitat is essential and monitoring habitat is critical. Let’s see if we can do something like this in Thickson’s Woods.

Margaret Bain

*Photos by Susan Tomkins*
Many Thanks!

Thank you to Wally and Pat McBride of Whitby, who donated 11 Bat Boxes to the Fund. If you know students who are interested in a Bat Program, please contact us.

Thank you to Leslie Ray from Leslie H Ray Accounting in Newcastle, who kindly donated the money for a Bat Detector, which we will use for our Bat Walks and Bat Identification Program.

Thank you to Margaret and Wilf Carriere for donating Butterfly Nets and Colin and Helen Ray for donating the cost of the Mercury Vapour Bulbs for our Moth Nights.

COMING SOON:

FIELD IDENTIFICATION SERIES
- Common Dragonflies and Damselflies of Durham Region
- Sphinx Moths of Southern Ontario

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Margaret Carney wrote about our “Bat Night” in her newspaper nature column and the response has been amazing. We have had so much interest in the Bat Walk that we may have to conduct more than one! Others have asked about another “Bat Night” as well as a Moth talk and a presentation on Thickson’s Woods itself. We will consider all these ideas for 2015.

Wally and Pat McBride contacted us and donated 11 bat boxes, which is a fantastic gift.

A very worried Don McNaughton also called Margaret Carney and sent photos of a bat that had decided to hibernate in the corner of his 9th floor apartment balcony.

Toby “Bat Man” Thorne

Phill and Sue Holder hosted a “Bat Night” on Friday 28th November. Bat expert, Toby Thorne, gave a fascinating and enlightening presentation to a group of 30 seasoned naturalists. He started by explaining how at 11 years old he went on a “Bat Walk” in a local park with bat experts and a week later got to hold his first bat as part of a bat conservation initiative. It was life-changing! Toby was hooked.

His passion was evident in his presentation which had the perfect balance between the academics of bat ecology and bat echolocation and the excitement of using Bat Detectors to identify Ontario bats. Toby explained the studies being done to understand bat migration on the Great Lakes and suggested ways that The Matt Holder Environmental Education Fund could encourage students to get involved in learning about bats within the Thickson’s Woods Nature Reserve. Everyone had a great time and learned a lot about bats and how complex they are. The next morning I took Toby and his girlfriend, Jenna, to tour the woods and he was excited at the habitat and the possibilities. Toby will be at Thickson’s Woods in the Spring to conduct a “Bat Walk” – I can’t wait!

The Balcony Bat

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The “BAT NIGHT”
The rescue *(Don McNaughton)*

It was a beautiful Big Brown Bat that had decided this 9th floor balcony in Oshawa was a good place to hibernate – not a smart move, as it probably would not have survived the winter. Don asked if it could be rescued, so I contacted Wild Earth Refuge in Oshawa, which has a licence to care for bats, and Kelli Polsielli suggested that the bat be taken to them. I enlisted the help of Mike McEvoy and with the use of a fishing-net, carefully collected the bat and took it to the refuge. The bat although deep in hibernation had a tenacious grip on the concrete wall. Toby explained “Bats’ toes grip passively – their body weight hanging on the toes causes them to grip, rather than having to use muscles as we would, which explains why it was hard to pick up.” By the time we arrived at Wild Earth Refuge it was quite active.

It turns out that this bat is a female, which may complicate things a little. Bats mate in the fall but the female is not fertilized until the spring. If a female awakes from hibernation for more than three days, it will become fertilized and start growing a foetus. By the way, at birth, baby bats weigh 30% of their adult weight!

So the "Balcony Bat" had to be checked over, fed meal worms and put back into hibernation within three days. It will be woken up to be fed periodically over the winter. It is healthy and doing well at Wild Earth Refuge. Check on its progress on their Facebook page.

Please note that bats should never be handled unless absolutely necessary, and then only with protective gloves.
Nine species of frogs have been recorded in Ontario. In recent years, three of these have been found within the Thickson’s Woods Nature Reserve: Wood Frog, Northern Leopard Frog, and Green Frog. Corbett Creek, the Meadow and the woods have habitat that could support other species and it is reasonable to assume that historically the Reserve has also held Spring Peepers, Gray Tree Frogs, and Striped Chorus Frogs at least.

There has been a global decline in frog populations and Thickson’s Woods is not immune. Marsh Monitoring in Ontario, conducted by Bird Studies Canada, has determined that among the reasons for this decline are human disturbance, pollution, climate change, invasive species, and habitat loss and degradation. We need to monitor our remaining species. Are you interested in Frogs? Contact us!

Frogs of Ontario
Spring Peeper
Gray Treefrog
Striped Chorus Frog
Wood Frog
Northern Leopard Frog
Pickerel Frog
Green Frog
Mink Frog
Bullfrog

Green Frog (Mike McEvoy)
This frog spends the winter by burrowing into the mud at the bottom of the marsh in water deep enough to prevent freezing.
This Wood frog spends the winter by burying into leaf litter away from the marsh and has the ability to survive freezing by having a type of antifreeze in its blood cells. Up to 40% of the water in its body can freeze solid.

Just like the Green Frog, this Northern Leopard Frog also spends the winter deep into the mud at the bottom of the marsh.

Northern Leopard Frog (Sherwood McLernon)
Pandorus Sphinx Moth caterpillar (Rosemary Harris)

Rosemary Harris kindly responded to our request for historical sightings and photographs. The above photograph is of a Pandorus Sphinx Moth caterpillar taken in Thickson’s Woods in the fall of 2009. Rosemary spent a great deal of time to sort through her extensive files to find this photograph – thank you.

The moth shown is one we will hope to see during our Moth Nights later this year.

The moth shown is one we will hope to see during our moth nights later this year.

We are looking for students to set up the moth traps and take photographic records of the species caught.

Pandorus Sphinx Moth Eumorpha pandorus (David Beadle)
Thickson’s Woods Nature Reserve
List of Dragonflies and Damselflies

While I’m sure this list is not complete, this is what has been recorded so far. If you can add to this list please contact us. We will be having regular “dragonfly days” this year and in the future.

We are looking for students to capture and take photographic records of the species caught.

- Ebony Jewelwing *Calopteryx maculata*
- Violet Dancer *Argia fumipennis violacea*
- Marsh Bluet *Enallagma ebrum*
- Hagen’s Bluet *Enallagma hageni*
- Eastern Forktail *Ischnura verticalis*
- Citrine Forktail *Ischnura hastata*
- Common Green Darter *Anax junius*
- Canada Darner *Aeshna canadensis*
- Shadow Darner *Aeshna umbrosa*
- Fawn Darner *Boyeria vinosa*
- Ashy Clubtail *Gomphus lividus*
- Common Baskettail *Epitheca cynosura*
- Prince Baskettail *Epitheca princeps*
- Eastern Pondhawk *Erythemis simplicicollis*
- Blue Dasher *Pachydiplax longipennis*
- Black Saddlebags *Tramea lacerata*
- White-faced Meadowhawk *Sympetrum obtrusum*
- Autumn Meadowhawk *Sympetrum vicinum*
- Twelve-spotted Skimmer *Libellula pulchella*
- Common Whitetail *Plathemis lydia*
- Slaty Skimmer *Libellula incesta*

Female Common Whitetail (Ed McAskill)
CHECK OUT OUR NEWLY UPDATED WEB SITE

www.mattholderfund.com

A REQUEST:
If you have historical sightings of snakes, frogs, turtles, salamanders, bats, butterflies or moths – or any other noteworthy sightings within the Reserve boundary, we would love to know about them. Or if you are at the Reserve and see something that could be added to the list, please send these sightings to Dennis Barry or Phill Holder at hawkowl@bell.net

HELP WANTED:
Students with a passion for wildlife, to conduct Environmental Projects/Studies at Thickson’s Woods Nature Reserve. Grants available. Contact Phill Holder at hawkowl@bell.net

If you have high resolution photographs of birds or other wildlife taken within the Thickson’s Woods Nature Reserve, please contact Phill Holder at hawkowl@bell.net

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