



*Cultivating an appreciation of nature  
through learning and action*

# THE HERON

**SPRING 2020**

Newsletter of the  
York Simcoe Nature Club



## Incoming President's Message

*By Rick Berry*

First, I would like to take the opportunity to express our thanks and gratitude to Jeanne Bénéteau for the remarkable job she has done as our President over the past four years. She has guided the club through some pretty significant changes. Over the period of her presidency we have changed our name to reflect our broadening interests, changed our general meeting location to the current Queensville Holland Landing United Church, and introduced revised membership fees to cover our increasing operational costs. Through all of this she has never lost a focus on our mission, "Cultivating an appreciation of nature through learning and action". As Past President on the club Executive she will continue to bring the calm approach and spirit of creativity that we so admire.

Looking forward is a challenge for the club. How we will emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic and what impact it will have on the club is certainly not clear, so in a very real way we will have to take it one step at a time. What will not change is our continued efforts to meet the needs of our members. I look forward to working with the club Executive and all our members to ensure we remain a vibrant and thriving enterprise. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to be a part of it.

### Next Meetings

*Second Tuesday of the month, 7:30 p.m.*

**Tues. June 9, online via Zoom**

"Lyme Disease" by Andrew Peregrine

**Tues. Sept. 8**

**Tues. Oct. 13**

**Tues. Nov. 10**

**Tues. Dec. 8**



*Wood Duck at Cawthra Mulock, May 20*

*Photo by David Eaton*

## Outgoing President's Message

*By Jeanne Bénéteau*

I'm amazed at how quickly the last four years have gone by! I have had many adventures filling the President post and I am happy to have had the experience. It gave me more insight in various areas and I have gotten to know and appreciate the members so much more. But now, it's time to give someone else the chance to be the President.

I am thrilled about the new executive team coming in. All executive members are hard working and dedicated to the club. Rick Berry, our new President, has proven to be an amazing organizer as Recording Secretary for many years and Coordinator for the stewardship of Cawthra Mulock. He is the Energizer Bunny with his never-ending energy! He is passionate about helping out the local natural environment. I wish him the very best in his new position. Helene Van Houten is also an enthusiastic nature lover whom I have come to know as a friend. She is keen in whatever she does and will be a definite asset to our executive. I wish her all the best as well. The club is in good hands with our executive members and volunteers. I will be staying on as Past President.

Have a great summer and hopefully I will see you in the fall at the General Meetings.

## Club News

### Getting to Know Our New President



*Rick (left) on a periwinkle pull Photo by Janet Thompson*

*Editor's Note: We asked incoming President Rick Berry to tell us a bit about his background.*

Being a meteorologist, my focus for 33 years working with Canada's meteorological service was and remains on what's going on outside. After retiring in 2002, I was a dedicated hiker for many years but that has morphed into an abiding interest in the natural world I was walking through. While volunteering as a guided walk leader at the Koffler Scientific Reserve some years ago, I met several members of the then York Simcoe Naturalists. Their enthusiasm led me to an exploratory visit to one of our general meetings and I decided to join the club. I've been on the Executive now for about six years and I'm so impressed with the dedication of our Executive and the club members. As a guided walk leader at Rouge National Urban Park and volunteer with the Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust, my experiences with introducing people to our natural environment and what it takes to conserve it continue to grow.

### Membership Report

*By Janet Thompson*

As of May 12, 2020, we had 37 annually paid memberships in 2019-2020 (20 single, 17 family) plus 3 life memberships for a total of 40 memberships or 57 people. These totals include 6 new memberships. Over the year we had 20 guests at our monthly meetings.

For new members, those who joined in the period February to May 2020 will have their memberships extended to the 2020-2021 year.

For continuing members, membership fees are now due as of June 1. The fees remain the same since 2018, at

\$40 for a single membership and \$45 for a family membership. This covers 10 speaker presentations a year – a bargain at \$4 per meeting.

We need more members to keep going in the long term. The 37 annually paid memberships represent \$1,565 in income. The executive has determined that we need about 46 annually paid memberships to break even on regular expenses such as the speaker program, insurance and hall rental.

Thank you to members who contribute extra funds by buying raffle tickets and making donations. But we can't keep relying on you! Please invite your friends to join, even though they may not be able to attend all the meetings. Say hello to guests at the meetings and encourage them to join as well.

### Youth Summit Fund

*By Sheila Gick*

Thanks to all the generous members who have donated to our Ontario Nature Youth Summit fund. The fund allows us to send a local high school student to the Summit weekend conference held in September every year, usually in Orillia. This will be our fifth year of sponsoring a student.

Ontario Nature has just told us it will make an announcement in June of how it plans to deliver this year's event due to the gathering restrictions of COVID-19. It will still be holding something, and there will be a new sponsorship structure. Stay tuned for details.

### Nature Walks

*By Doug Jagger*

For this issue of the newsletter, my report is relatively brief in light of cancellation of walks due to COVID-19 restrictions. However, there was a walk on Mar. 14 at the **Goldie Feldman Nature Reserve**. It was an overcast morning with a temperature at the freezing point. The eight people on the walk enjoyed the trail and terrain. We spent some time looking at trees, both individually and as part of the emergent forest, the Sensitive Fern in its winter form and other plants. There were few birds around.

The club will renew the nature walk program once restrictions permit larger groups. A June walk is questionable at this time. However, there are many, if not most, trails open in our area. So take some time on your own or with your social bubble to enjoy the bounty around us. Stop to listen to a bird song, watch a butterfly flit from place to place, admire the beauty of a flower, and savour all your own special moments.

## Cawthra Mulock Nature Reserve

### Stewardship Report

By Rick Berry

Visitors to the Reserve will notice some changes. The parking lot has been moved up to an area near the gatehouse, an accessible trail has been installed that starts from the parking lot, the west-side entrance has been removed due to wetland rehabilitation, and we now have a beaver dam and pond.

The pond that now exists is very, very significant – probably larger than the pond that existed back in the 1960s when there was a concrete dam where the beaver dam now sits. The impact of the pond/dam on wildlife in the area is discussed in the next article. Most people seeing it will probably say “Totally awesome!” Ontario Nature, the Reserve owner, recognizes the benefits of a natural feature such as this, but staff are keeping a watchful eye to make sure the bridge beside the dam does not become a safety hazard.

Our Reserve has also not escaped the effects of the COVID-19 epidemic. The Reserve was closed to the public through a period in April and May. It has now been re-opened with restrictions for social distancing. The spring wildflowers are out and there are birds in abundance; once again we can enjoy this wonderful enclave of nature.

### New Beaver Dam at Cawthra Mulock

By Aileen Barclay

*Editor's Note: Aileen is a Program Manager for the Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust, which has its office in the gatehouse at the entrance to the Reserve. She has just joined our club as a member. Welcome Aileen!*

*Aileen has been monitoring the Reserve once a week this spring and sharing her sightings with us. We asked her to describe the impact of the new beaver dam.*

The concrete dam at Cawthra Mulock was removed in 2008 with help from a funding program to improve water quality. With the new beaver dam there, some people were curious whether that too should be removed to improve water quality?

The dam removal programs offered by conservation organizations were specifically for man-made, online dams (ones that were situated on a watercourse to create an “online” pond). The water flow through with these dams is “top-draw”, so the heated top layer of water is what goes over the top of the dam and into the stream, causing increases in water temperatures and an associated reduction in dissolved oxygen. This type of flow will also change how sediment is moved through the watercourse, causing it to settle at the bottom and not distribute

through the watercourse as Mother Nature intended. It gets built up in the pond area, creating poor quality substrate and increased sediment oxygen uptake, so even less dissolved oxygen is available.



Beaver dam, May 6

Photo by Aileen Barclay

The beavers are better “natural” engineers than we are when it comes to dams. Their dams have more of a bottom-draw flow through, so the cooler, lower-level and well-oxygenated water is what flows into the stream. This also prevents the stagnation and settlement of sediment at the bottom of the pond as seen in the man-made, top-draw dams. The result is that beaver dams do not have the same negative impacts as man-made ones, those which the funding programs were geared towards.

Now that the Reserve is open again, you will see the amazing changes that the beaver has made and the incredible habitat that has been created. It truly is a natural work of art! There are currently two beavers, possibly with young in their house, and at least four muskrats. In addition, there were two river otters that were hanging out in the beaver pond for a few days! When I started in this business over 20 years ago, I did some research on reintroducing river otters into the Rouge Watershed, as they were thought to be extirpated from the area, so I was beyond excited to see them at Cawthra Mulock!



Beaver, Apr. 6

Photo by Aileen Barclay

The area over the water is filled with swallows foraging for insects, at least four different species (Tree, Barn, Cliff and Northern Rough-wing). With the cold weather we had at the beginning of May, the insectivores that had already migrated up were limited in food sources, which is extremely detrimental for them, often fatal. The beaver dam provided a buffer for the cold temperatures and provided a much-needed source of insects, so the areas around and over the pond were filled with swallows, warblers and flycatchers, all foraging for food, as there was little for them to feed on elsewhere in the cold. Tree Swallows are still using the nest boxes, even though the boxes are now over the water.



*Tree Swallows, May 2*

*Photo by Aileen Barclay*



*Least Flycatcher with insect, May 6*

*Photo by Aileen Barclay*



*Muskrat, May 6*

*Photo by Aileen Barclay*

That brings the beaver pond inhabitant total to:

- 1 Mink
- 2 Beavers
- 2 River Otters
- 4 Muskrats
- 4 Wood Ducks
- 6 Tree Swallows (3 pairs on nests)
- Over 20 other swallows foraging on a regular basis, including 8 Barn Swallows which are a Species at Risk, plus Northern Rough-winged Swallow and the occasional Cliff Swallow
- 4 Canada Geese (2 pairs on nests)
- 3 Mallards (all male so assuming females nearby on nests)
- 2 Eastern Towhees (nest with young)
- 1 Virginia Opossum
- Palm, Yellow, Yellow-Rumped, Pine and Black and White Warblers (the “early” arriving warblers, more have arrived since)
- Several pairs of Song Sparrows in nest, at least one with young
- 3 White-tailed Deer that hang out there on occasion.

It is truly an amazing transformation of nature to watch as an entirely new habitat is formed. I hope you can all see it soon!



*Yellow Warbler, May 16*

*Photo by David Eaton*

## Conservation News

By Sylvia Bowman

### A Just Recovery and Better Than Normal Future

During this current public health crisis we should not forget the other one — the climate crisis. Many environmental groups have pointed out that this may be an opportunity to do things differently in the future. The slowdown in economic activity has caused a reduction in greenhouse gases of about 17%. While this slowdown has caused severe economic hardship for many, it does highlight how humanity's activity is impacting the planet. Ahead of emergency international meetings this spring to plan a coordinated global response to the COVID-19 pandemic, a group of scientists and economists called for a “just recovery”. Some of the points they suggest are:

- prioritizing climate change and protecting nature, including renewable energy and reforestation;
- helping the most vulnerable, including debt relief for developing countries and raising income for the lowest earners; and
- shifting the economy toward sustainability, including eliminating fossil fuel subsidies and introducing a real price on carbon.

### Zoonotic Diseases

One of the things that has also come to the fore during the pandemic is the effect of zoonotic diseases. These are diseases of animals that jump to humans. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), 75% of new or emerging infectious diseases over the past decade originated from animals and principally from wildlife (e.g. SARS, MERS, Ebola, and now COVID-19). And unless things change, the WHO suggests we can expect future pandemics that are potentially even more dangerous.

People and animals all carry viruses. Because each virus has evolved to a specific host species, it's not easy for a virus to jump to another species. When this does happen, it's by chance, and it usually requires a large amount of contact with the virus. It's believed the COVID-19 virus started in a wet market in Wuhan, China. These types of markets have a higher risk of viruses jumping from animals to humans because of poor hygiene and very close contact. Scientists are still working to identify the species and intermediate hosts that transmitted COVID-19 to humans. The virus might have started with a host species like a bat and jumped to other species before jumping to humans. Whether it started with bats, snakes, pangolins or another species, it can all be traced back to how we treat animals.

Habitat fragmentation and degradation is another contributing factor for the spread of zoonotic diseases. In

a richly diverse ecosystem, potential disease-causing pathogens are spread out over many species, some of which are asymptomatic and poor disease spreaders. This produces a lower level of pathogen prevalence across the ecosystem. When biodiversity is degraded, disease spread to humans can increase from animals such as rodents which are better adapted to survive and become relatively more dominant.

The introduction of livestock herds in the buffer zones between human settlements and remaining ecosystems has also caused problems. According to a 2016 report by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), “livestock often serve as an epidemiological bridge between wildlife and human infections. This is especially the case for intensively reared livestock which are often genetically similar within a herd or flock and therefore lack the genetic diversity that provides resilience”.

Scientists are advocating for a “One Health” global approach, one in which we recognize that the health of people and biodiversity are interconnected. Ultimately, respect toward planet Earth and the species that inhabit it will go a long way toward protecting us from zoonotic disease.

### The Opportunists

It is perhaps inevitable that some would try to exploit the pandemic situation for their own benefit. Alberta and Ontario appear to be buying into “disaster capitalism” — the exploitation of national crises to establish controversial and questionable policies. One of the tenets of disaster capitalism is never to let a good crisis go to waste. What better time to push through regressive policy than when citizens are too distracted to engage, develop an adequate response, and resist effectively.

At the end of March, the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) issued a directive outlining situations where laws requiring the monitoring and reporting of environmental pollution laws would not be enforced. Sadly, this idea is now spreading like a contagion. The governments of Alberta and Ontario have now made their own moves.

Alberta's order goes further and simply suspends the reporting otherwise required by under the province's primary environmental statute, the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act, as well as the Water Act (excepting drinking water facilities) and the Public Lands Act. What's worse is that Alberta's waiver applies to air pollution that harms human lungs — and lung disease significantly raises the odds of dying of COVID-

19. Alberta has also waived requirements of the immediate reporting of some exceedances of ambient air quality standards.

In Ontario, the Ford government has used the COVID-19 pandemic to pass a regulation that effectively suspends public consultation under Ontario's Environmental Bill of Rights (EBR). This means that the Ontario government does not need to consult the public on laws, regulations, policies or projects, no matter how "environmentally significant" they may be. It will likely remove public rights to appeal at least some proposed projects and permits. Further, the government will not require its ministries to consider their own "Statements of Environmental Values" when making decisions that might significantly affect the environment.

Ontario's regulation, like Alberta's order, does not tailor its application to the impacts of COVID-19. It also comes on the heels of other sweeping changes to Ontario's environmental laws, made before the COVID-19 outbreak, that have substantially reduced environmental protection, transparency and accountability in the province. Ontario's order is particularly egregious as there are already provisions in the EBR that would allow the province to forgo consultation in an emergency on a case-by-case basis.

No one would dispute that the COVID-19 crisis creates challenges for governments and industries across Canada and, as such, require flexibility. However, there is no benefit — only considerable risk — to waiving environmental reporting outright and ending public consultations on proposals and projects that aren't affected by COVID-19.

One example of this is the recent use of zoning orders by the province. As Ontario Nature said recently in a letter to Ontario Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing Steve Clark:

... a zoning order undermines public participation by circumventing the planning process. A zoning order allows the Minister to directly zone land. Unlike a zoning by-law, the Minister does not have to give advance notice or consult with the public prior to issuing a zoning order. Furthermore, a zoning order is not subject to appeal to the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal ("LPAT"). Given the lack of opportunity for public participation, it is not surprising that zoning orders have rarely been used in areas which have zoning by-laws in effect. We understand that the County of Simcoe has requested a zoning order for a proposed waste facility, which is to be established within the Freele County Forest. This controversial matter was appealed to LPAT and local citizens have expended significant time, resources and money in

preparation for the hearing. Under these circumstances it would be highly inappropriate to issue a zoning order. The issuance of a zoning order, when LPAT is seized with a matter, would fundamentally undermine public confidence with Ontario's land-use planning regime.

Our Club signed on to this Ontario Nature letter on May 28.

### **Threat to Ontario's Forests**

As noted in the Winter 2020 issue of *The Heron*, Ontario has proposed through their Forest Sector Strategy to double logging in the province.

On Feb. 6, Ecojustice filed a lawsuit on behalf of Earthroots and Friends of Temagami. When they discovered that the Temagami Forestry Management Plan for the next decade does not address climate-related impacts, the groups requested that an environmental assessment take place, but the minister unlawfully denied this request in May 2019.

Ontario is required to consider climate change before exempting forestry from environmental assessment. When this condition is not met, the environment ministry is legally required to kick-start the individual environmental assessment process. This is a systemic problem across the province where climate-related impacts are left out of the picture for Ontario's forests despite the legal requirement for them to be included.

In Ontario, forestry management plans benefit from a class-based exemption from environmental assessment, provided the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry addresses a list of mandatory conditions, including efforts toward climate change mitigation and carbon management. The Ministry falsely claimed to be developing methodologies for carbon management for Temagami's Forestry Management Plan — efforts that were underway were suspended in June 2018 and cancelled altogether two months before the region's management plan was approved.

Temagami forest is an internationally recognized ecological site. The region contains nearly 50% of all remaining old-growth pine forests, with trees that are 15 stories high and more than 300 years old. The science shows that harvesting old-growth forests, like those found in Temagami, disrupts ecosystems and results in the release of substantial amounts of carbon. The soils, wetlands and trees of boreal forests, like those found in Temagami, can either act as a carbon source or a carbon sink depending on what's happening in them. Standing forests, including old growth, continue to sequester significant amounts of carbon in their wood, bark and foliage, as well as the huge living and non-living biomass of the forest soil. Logging, and the associated roads and

disturbances that come along with it, causes the release of large carbon emissions. To help ensure we have thriving, healthy forests, climate change must be factored into plans for what activities are permitted.

### Ten-Year Review of the Lake Simcoe Protection Plan

The Lake Simcoe Protection Plan was to have been reviewed by the province in 2019. However, to date Ontario has not indicated how or when the review will take place.

The Rescue Lake Simcoe Coalition, of which our club is a member, has since 2019 undertaken an initiative called Protect Our Plan to educate the public and enlist the support of municipal governments in the watershed about the importance of the Plan to the health of Lake Simcoe. There have already been seven delegations to municipal councils regarding the Lake Simcoe Protection Plan and they are getting municipal support for the Plan. This activity will continue in the other municipalities in the watershed. On May 20 I did a virtual presentation to the East Gwillimbury Council.

Going forward, the campaign will be a defensive, not an aspirational, campaign. The Coalition has little faith that the province will strengthen the Lake Simcoe Protection Plan, so they are advocating now for the province to keep the policies and targets of the existing Plan unchanged and to do an “administrative” review of the Plan instead. The Coalition has lawn signs about Protect Our Plan available through their website, <https://rescuelakesimcoe.org>.

### Changes to the Conservation Authorities Act

In February the Ontario Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks consulted stakeholder groups via survey on the mandate of conservation authorities. This followed public sessions where developers and others had been urging the government to remove conservation authorities from the planning process, and to limit their mandate and scope. Ontario Nature and other conservation groups have urged strong support for the critical role of conservation authorities in:

- land use planning and permitting to protect biodiversity and enhance climate resilience;
- monitoring programs and research that underpin flood mitigation, source water protection, climate action, biodiversity conservation and ecological restoration;
- delivering community projects in partnership with municipalities and local organizations; and
- delivering watershed-scale approaches to monitoring, decision-making, stewardship, outreach and education.

Our club signed on to a letter on this issue developed by Ontario Nature, Environmental Defence and the Canadian Environmental Law Association.

### Earth Day

April 22 was the 50th anniversary of Earth Day, so I will end with some Good News stories.

### End of Teck Resources Frontier Tar Sands Mine Proposal

On Feb. 23, Teck Resources surprised everyone when it announced it was pulling its application for the Frontier tar sands mine — one of the largest, most contentious tar sands projects ever proposed. In a letter to federal Environment Minister Jonathan Wilkinson, Teck’s CEO wrote: “... global capital markets are changing rapidly and investors and customers are increasingly looking for jurisdictions to have a framework in place that reconciles resource development and climate change, in order to produce the cleanest possible products ... In that context, it is now evident that there is no constructive path forward for the [Frontier] project.”

### End of Taseko Mines Tsilhqot’in Mine Proposal

On May 14, the Supreme Court of Canada denied Taseko Mines the right to appeal the federal government’s rejection of a proposed copper-gold mine in Tsilhqot’in territory in British Columbia. A federal assessment panel found in 2013 that the mine project would have several significant environmental effects, including “effects on water quality and fish and fish habitat in Fish Lake, on current use of lands and resources for traditional purposes by certain Aboriginal groups, and on their cultural heritage”. The end of this long legal battle is a win for the Tsilhqot’in Nation, one that will keep their territory safe from a project that has repeatedly been found to pose a serious threat to the environment.



Nest box in beaver pond at Cawthra Mulock, May 13

Photo by Rick Berry

Answers to quiz on p. 8 (no peeking beforehand): 1. Yellow-rumped Warbler; 2. American Redstart; 3. Black and White Warbler; 4. Red-crowned Kinglet.

**Field Notes**

**Spring Warbler Quiz**

*Photos by David Eaton*

These warblers were observed in Markham on May 12-13. Can you identify them? Answers on p. 7.



No. 1



No. 2



No. 3



No. 4

**Field Birds at Cawthra Mulock**

*Photos by David Eaton*

Bluebirds observed in the meadow on Apr. 2.



**Your Executive for 2020-21**

Elected Positions

President .....	<b>Rick Berry</b>
Vice President.....	<b>Helene van Houten</b>
Treasurer.....	<b>Linda Gilkes</b>
Recording Secretary .....	<b>Sylvia Bowman</b>
Membership Secretary .....	<b>Janet Thompson</b>
Past President.....	<b>Jeanne Bénéteau</b>

Appointed Volunteer Positions

Outings Director .....	<b>Doug Jagger</b>
Internet Director .....	<b>Jay Gutteridge</b>
Refreshments .....	<b>Flo Sparling</b>
Club Rep., ON Youth Summit.....	<b>Sheila Gick</b>
Club Rep., ON Nature Network .....	Sylvia Bowman
Conservation Director.....	Sylvia Bowman
Speakers.....	Sylvia Bowman
Stewardship Coordinator .....	Rick Berry
Archives.....	Linda Gilkes
Newsletter Editor.....	Janet Thompson