

Well it seems that summer is here... all at once!

With the warmer weather we also have some loosening of social distancing restrictions resulting in the chance to venture farther afield.

Ontario Nature re-opened its Nature Reserves May 13<sup>th</sup>. That gave us the opportunity to do some much-needed work at the George G Newton Reserve.

Brent and Carol Bowyer, Murray Jamieson, Steve Pepper, Jim and Christine Roberts and Bob and Barb Simpson spent about 3 hours working followed by a socially distanced bagged lunch sitting on the grass, lawn chairs and tailgates.

With his trusty chainsaw, Murray cut many broken trees and limbs that were either blocking or overhanging the trail. Steve and Brent assisted with removal while Barb, Bob, Jim, Christine and Carol attacked the invasive species garlic mustard which is rampant in the reserve.

Due to restrictions regarding the size of gatherings, we were unable to extend an invitation to club members for this work party. Let's hope it's a different story next year. In the meantime, feel free to take a drive to the reserve and check it out.



*(left-right) Steve Pepper, Barb Simpson, Brent Bowyer, Bob Simpson, Murray Jamieson, Carol Bowyer and Jim Roberts doing their best to keep some distance for a photo*

## **Ontario Nature Great Lakes West Regional Spring Meeting**

Due to the pandemic shutdown, the in-person meeting was changed to a teleconference call Saturday, May 2nd.

Groups in attendance included HFFN; Waterloo Region Nature; Nature Guelph; Headwaters Nature; Owen Sound Field Naturalists; John Hassell and Lisa Richardson of Ontario Nature; Pete Kelly, Great Lakes West Regional Director and Ross Fraser of Cade Associates Insurance Brokers.

Ross gave an overview of the Ontario Nature insurance plan and answered questions. One liability issue HFFN might consider adopting is a waiver form for outings, incident report and outing leader checklist. The club might also consider creating an emergency procedure for working at the GG Newton Reserve.

Ontario Nature updates were presented by Lisa Richardson and include:

- Covid 19 response: Ontario Nature offices are closed; staff are working from home
- Advocacy continues but no events or field work
- All nature reserves are closed (since reopened)
- New Nature Network members: one in GTA, one in our group – Nith Valley Ecoboosters
- 2020 Annual Gathering was cancelled. 2021 conference to be held in Sudbury
- Youth Summit, Sept 25-27 may be cancelled
- Advocacy results: i) Spring Bear Hunt – reinstated; ii) Cormorant hunt – no decision yet; iii) Changes to Conservation Authorities Act – position paper has been submitted.

The next regional meeting will be Oct. 24, 2020 hosted by Nature Guelph.

Thank you for the sending your sightings and photos. Here are the latest:

*I'm just sharing an interesting video that we took at our bird bath a few days ago. The GO Pro was set up for a couple of hours and our son has edited it down to 5 minutes. So much activity! Fun to watch*

*The birds have been so busy at our feeders; it's hard to get anything done! ☺*

Janice Gibson

[https://youtu.be/TX-CuTMWw\\_s](https://youtu.be/TX-CuTMWw_s)



Rosalie Zettler reports: Sue and I saw a Scarlet Tanager May 23rd while walking at the south end of Bruce Beach.



From Pat Guay: Here is my bird sighting...and I didn't even need to go anywhere.



Murray Jamieson shared an amazing video:



An eagle's flight from the top of the world's tallest building to his handler below. An eagle was fitted with a camera and released from the top of the 2,715-foot Burj Khalifa tower in Dubai.

The eagle has no idea where the tiny speck of land was that his handler is standing on or what it looked like among all of the other islands and buildings and people. Somehow from that altitude, the eagle actually picks out and recognizes the trainer from all of the other objects, people, etc. You can see him looking, looking, looking for the trainer, completely invisible to a human eye and the camera, then fold his/her wings and then drops like a bullet straight to that trainer... very cool.

What surprised the experts is not only how efficiently the eagle spots his trainer from that altitude, but how smooth its flight is with no camera shake whatsoever, even when it goes into a power dive.

<https://www.youtube.com/embed/6g95E4VSfj0?rel=0>



Jeni Pepper sent the link to a very interesting article about bumblebees manipulating the plants they feed on.

<http://www.sci-news.com/biology/bumblebees-earlier-flowering-08462.html>



Vicki Johnson sent a selection of beautiful photos from her feeder.



And finally, from the CBC's weekly environmental newsletter, *What On Earth?*:

### It's time for a frank discussion about weeds



*It's that time of year when people get down and dirty in their yards, and that inevitably means contending with weeds. But there is a growing awareness that these sometimes prickly, sometimes unsightly plants may actually do more good than harm. Andre Mayer spoke to Dan Kraus, national conservation biologist at the Nature Conservancy of Canada, about weeds' bad reputation and their proven ecological benefits.*

#### **“Weed” has a negative connotation. What does the word even mean?**

Weed is a very subjective term. There is no scientific definition that says: this is a weed, this is not a weed. They're basically plants that are in a place where people don't want them. People consider dandelions to be a weed, but if you just change your mind about dandelions, and you don't mind them on your lawn, then they're no longer a weed.

Certainly, scientists will sometimes talk about weedy species, which tend to be plants that reproduce very quickly and tend to produce a lot of seed, or they can spread by underground roots. Some people consider weeds to be things that are non-native, but that's not always the case.

#### **Is our conception of weeds influenced by our love of lawns?**

The whole idea of the perfect, monocultured, uniform lawn is manufactured. It's like the fashion industry. That thought has been put into our mind. But when you look at other things, like art, nobody likes just a blank painting with nothing on it. If you find a natural forest with wildflowers, it's much more interesting than a monoculture of planted pine trees in rows. As humans, we are attracted to diversity, but for some reason that hasn't been applied to our lawns – but I think it is changing. It's important that it changes, because in most urban areas, lawns [collectively] are the largest area of green space, and how we manage those ecosystems can have an impact on urban biodiversity.

#### **What are the most common weeds?**

It varies a lot across regions. In terms of people's lawns, the dandelion is the classic one. I would not consider the dandelion to be highly invasive. If you go into a natural area, you might find a few dandelions along a trail, but they're not like [garlic mustard](#) or [dog-strangling vine](#), which are rampantly moving through natural areas. [Dandelions] are a plant that's non-native, that probably adds to the diversity of our lawns and really does no harm.

Historically, some of these plants had some kind of human connection – some medicinal use or food use, and that's why we brought them over [from another country].

#### **Which are the most beneficial weeds to animals?**

Anything that flowers provides the greatest benefit for pollinators and will attract birds, which will include non-native plants like dandelions, but it's also not uncommon to find things like wild strawberries or native violets in our lawns.

Milkweed is a native plant that you can grow in your backyard that was historically seen as a weed that has huge ecological benefit to pollinators, particularly monarch butterflies. It's the only plant that the caterpillars of a monarch butterfly will eat. If we don't have milkweed, we don't have monarch butterflies.

**What advice do you have for people about being responsible about weeds?**

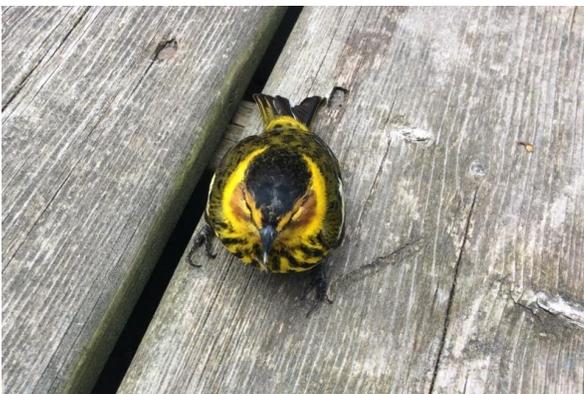
The rule on our lawn is if it hurts to step on it with bare feet, it goes. We don't allow things like thistle, which if kids step on it, it hurts. Everything else is fair game.

Learn what the plants are. There are great apps that you can get on your phone now. I use one called [iNaturalist](#) — you can take a picture and very quickly find out what that plant is. Sometimes just knowing the story of the plant and where it's from, if it's native, is going to help you to appreciate it a little more.

The main thing is that we need to change our esthetic of lawns, see it less as a crop that we're supposed to see as a monoculture and more of a mini-ecosystem and you're the keeper, the steward of that ecosystem. The more diverse that ecosystem is, the better it's going to be for wildlife, and the more rainwater it's likely to absorb and put into the ground, as opposed to rushing off your lawn and into storm sewers.

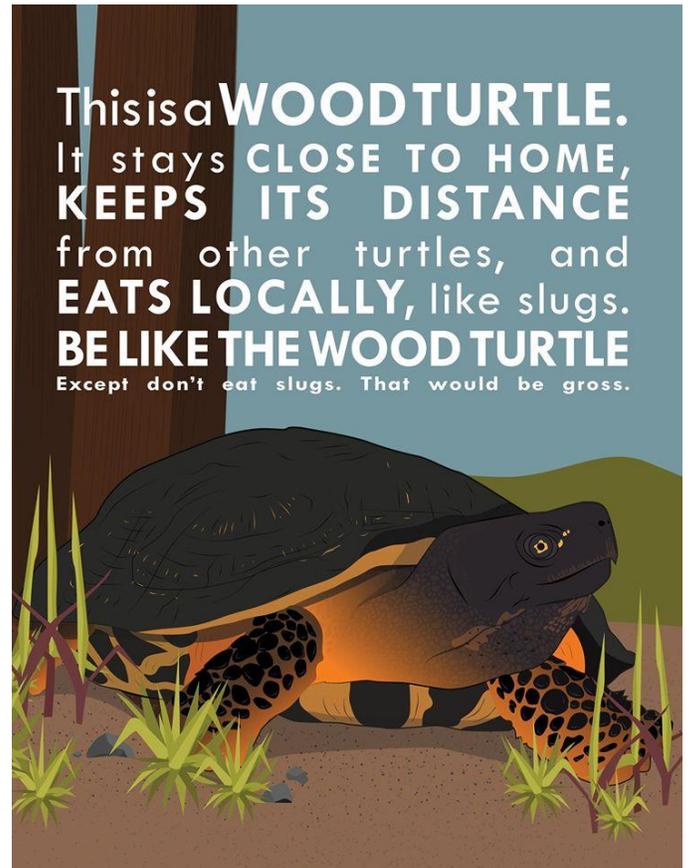


I almost forgot this cute little guy whose picture was captured and forwarded by Dianne Simpson.



And in case there's any doubt in your mind... our June meeting is cancelled but the speaker is rebooked for a

later date. Let's continue to enjoy nature while staying safe. I leave you with this advice:



Christine