

What's Growing On? The Fletcher Wildlife Garden Newsletter

www.ofnc.ca/fletcher.php

November 2011

Hibernation time!

The frosts are upon us, and now we're just waiting for snow.



©Diane Lepage

High Bush Cranberry with frosted berries!

Friday group. You'll be amazed at what has been accomplished, and hopefully decide to join in for whatever you can next year!

One of our winter projects is a mild considering of our main website, and what we would like on it or how we would like to present the information differently - if at all. You can help us by providing any ideas or current feedback on the existing website to [us!](#)

The year wouldn't be complete without a GIANT thank you to all the volunteers, regular and occasional, who put in the hours that make FWG such a great place to be. Probably, many of the visitors to FWG assume that Agriculture Canada provides them this nature park for their dog's enjoyment and think that here are their tax dollars doing good work! The reality is that FWG is the result of a dedicated group of like-minded individuals who value making wildlife habitat within the city. We also say thank you to all our supporters who help when and where they can!

Thank you for a fantastic 2011, and hoping to see you again for a fun, furry and forbaceous 2012!

We've had a wonderful and busy year at FWG, and are settling down to recharge for all the projects we have planned for the next! This issue of the newsletter will be the last until February, since our activities wind down at the garden and we don't have as much to report. The animals, however, will still be providing lots of interest, so we highly suggest you keep visiting our [blog](#) and if you have your own photos you would like to share why not visit France Thibodeau's online photoshare project [the-FWG](#).

Inside this edition, we have reports from the Butterfly Meadow Wednesday group, the Invasive Species Tuesday group and our BYG

Contact Us!

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Group Volunteering 2012



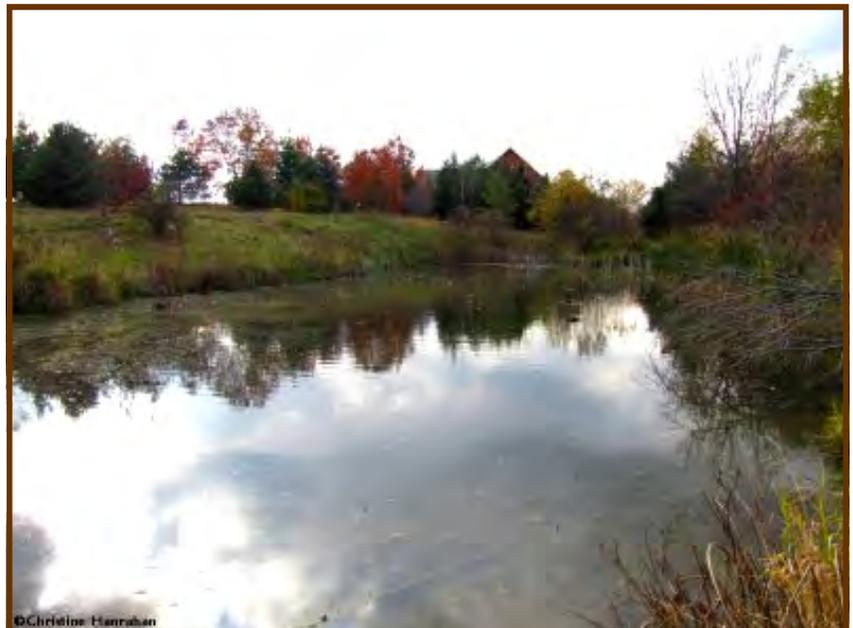
This year we benefitted from the injection of extra effort from group volunteers. Some were corporate volunteers, whose companies have an annual volunteer-day program. Others were tourists who like to perform community works. We had event volunteers who were able to attend one of our weekend bees, or who attended a week-day session to help out. No matter the amount or reasoning, we appreciated every bit of extra help. Person-hours are like gold, as so much of our work is just trying to keep up with weeding and site management.

If you are part of a group, want to get a group of friends together or are aware of a

corporate volunteering program looking for new locations, please think about joining us. The work won't be glamorous or guaranteed fun, but it will make a great difference to our goals and take us further in our activities. Next year we'll have soil preparation and planting in the Butterfly Meadow, weeding bees and possibly tree planting initiatives. Weeding starts in the spring with garlic mustard - easy to pull and great for younger people. Dog-strangling vine will once again be on the menu to attack mid summer.

We are establishing a fern area in our woods, and of course, DSV is everywhere.

If you are interested in helping or know of a group that would be, please [contact us](#) to see what you can do. When we get help with weed control, it helps us use our experienced volunteer resources on other projects and catch up!



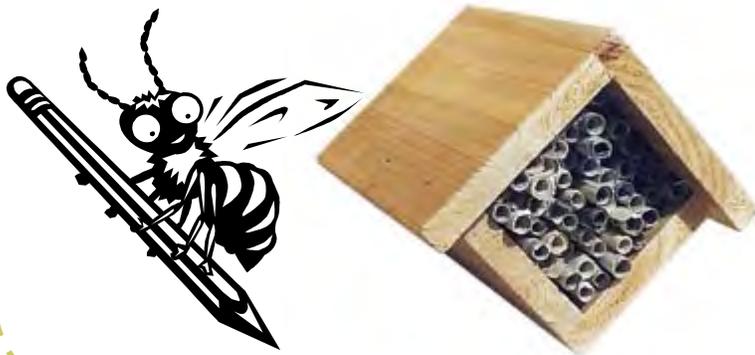
The Amphibian Pond from the foot bridge.

Let's Get Handy! Building Bee Boxes

Bees need a helping hand. We've heard about the bee colony collapse disorder and varroa mites, which are decimating honey bee colonies. Some studies say we could rely on our native wild bees to do our pollination work, but they may not be sufficient in activity for agricultural crops. Wild bees can be solitary nesters who dig holes in the ground, in trees or live in brush piles. Some are colony bees, and prefer cavities in which to establish nests. No matter the bee, we owe them a debt of gratitude for all the wonderful work they perform providing us with food, flowers and new plants to enjoy!

At FWG we leave brush piles, and try not to disturb [ground nesting areas](#). Diane put up this bee box, made by Bruce Burns. It is now waiting for next spring and bees to discover it. The last box we put up, a few summers ago, was almost immediately used by some leaf-cutting bees (Megachilids).

Other bee box designs and instructions are available at [Canadian Gardening](#) or [ON Nature Magazine](#).



WANTED: Items FWG Could Use!

Our lawnmower needs to be put out to pasture. We'll be needing a new one to mow the lawn in our BYG and along trails! If you have any suggestions or a super discount, please let us know!

Report 2011: Tuesday Invasive Species Group



By Barry Cottam, TISG Coordinator

The Tuesday Invasive Species Group (TISG) has wound up its first season, which ran "officially" from May 3 to October 18, although we are continuing as energy and weather permit beyond that date. The group was started and coordinated by Barry Cottam, an active volunteer at the Fletcher Wildlife Garden and member of the Management Committee. He had never heard of Dog-strangling Vine (DSV, *Vincetoxicum rossicum*) before he began volunteering at FWG in early August 2010. This being a case of hate at first sight, Barry quickly

became an advocate for dealing with this ubiquitous vine and so, after much discussion and research, the TISG was born.

As its name indicates, the group met each Tuesday morning, from 9 a.m. to noon. The "IS" designation notwithstanding, the group's efforts focused primarily on DSV. The TISG had a steady core of half a dozen volunteers, with others occasionally contributing from time to time. We also hosted four very successful work bees in July, August and September that averaged 18-20 people each. As well, a Michigan family visiting Ottawa offered their help as a means of offsetting their carbon footprint; six enthusiastic people gave us a couple hours of hard work, shortened by a severe rain shower that dampened everything but their outlook. These extra activities focused on two difficult areas, the Butterfly Meadow and the Bill Holland Trail from the Interpretation Centre to the bridge, where hand-pulling was the only possible approach. One of our volunteers, Glenda Lalonde, took before and after photographs each week and created a weekly blog, based on our work log; it is available at tisgatfwg.blogspot.com. We also now have a large map of the FWG, thanks to the AAFC, on which we can plot our work.

Our main approaches to dealing with DSV were cutting larger, monocultural areas with scythes and clipping / pulling plants in close quarters, such as patches of Goldenrod, wild raspberries and the many bushes and shrubs covered by the swiftly climbing vine. Building on a review of past efforts, the key to our system was removal of as much material as possible, depletion of the seed bank being our major goal. Our strategy focused on movable targets: areas where new growth was fastest, then plants coming into flower, then plants forming pods, then pods getting ready to release their seeds.

Such rearguard actions meant the Zen of DSV removal became more important than success in absolute terms. We can estimate several rough



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measurements of our efforts, however. Over 225 industrial-size garbage bags of DSV were removed by AAFC for disposal, a number that does not include piles of loose cuttings forked into AAFC wagons and more cuttings used early on for mulch. We cleared perhaps 70% of the areas covered by DSV, including almost 100% of large open areas. Plants are, as expected, growing back, but without the time to produce and release seeds.

As well, the group cohered over the summer, with volunteers putting in extra hours on other days, being willing to continue until weather forces a stoppage, persisting week after week despite the back-breaking nature of the effort.

We set theory aside this year in favour of sheer hard labour. In that sense, this first year is a huge experiment, the results of which will not be clear until next spring. But we have learned some lessons - including not to use DSV as mulch, recent research having shown its allelopathic effects - that will contribute to a renewed strategy for 2012.

So many well-earned thanks to the volunteers of the TISG. Persistence is key, however, so please come out next year and help us renew our efforts!

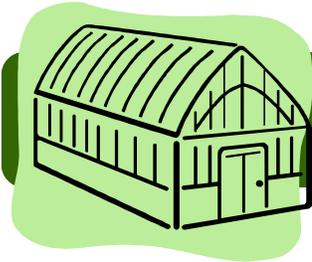
¹ - An ode to the virtues of using scythes in projects such as this can be found at end of the following page, www.scytheconnection.com/adp/biodiv/index.html



Before . . .



. . . After



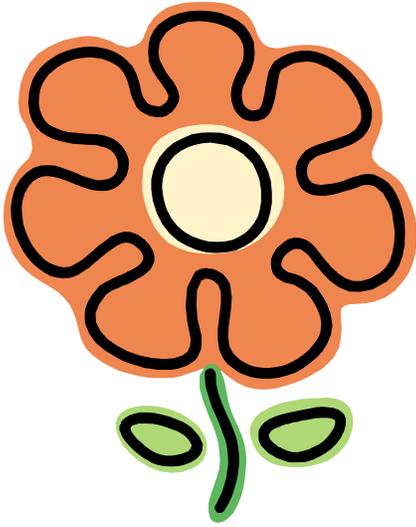
The New Nursery in Photos

We're building a better, stronger nursery and it's awesome! Concrete footings, increased height for our taller volunteers and our super new plant boxes to stop snacking critters!



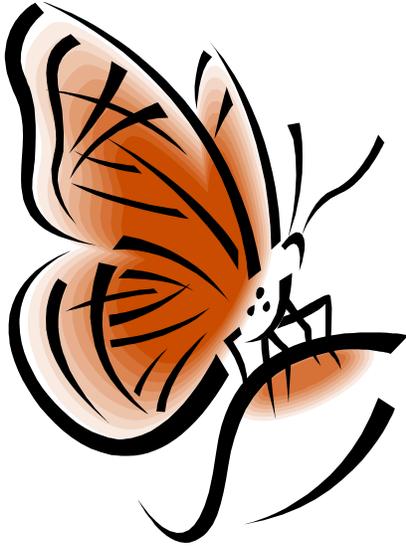
Volunteers levelled the ground, placed our plant boxes and re-laid the paving stone walkways. Then came moving all the plants back up into the upper nursery and placing them in their new winter homes. You can see the white labels on the closed boxes in the photos to the right. These will be covered with leaf mulch for their final tuck in before the snows. Our next building activity is replacing our wooden shed which is on the rickety side. Our new one will be larger and more secure for all our tools. No more jumping over wheelbarrows just to get a shovel!





Report 2011: Wednesday Evening Group

By Diane Lepage, Butterfly Meadow Habitat Manager



The 2011 season started on April 13. The goals for the summer were weeding, planting, removing invasive plants and completing a path around the outside of the west section of the meadow. Unfortunately, bad weather with its frequent forecasts of rain, high humidity and heat kept volunteers away many Wednesdays.

Volunteers and I spent the first 2 weeks pulling Dog-Strangling Vine (DSV) out of trees and putting newspapers on the ground around the trunks to try and minimize re-growth.

Three volunteers came on a Saturday to till three sections in the Butterfly Meadow. One area was in the new section where we will be creating a Monarch Waystation, one was a section that was started in 2010 and the third was a bigger section at the north end of the original Butterfly Meadow, where the purpose was to remove

DSV and other invasive plants and replace them with flowers that attract monarch butterflies. I purchased a number of plants from Ritchies with money received last fall from Fido/Evergreen.

In May, we ordered soil and gravel from Greely Sand and Gravel, and had it placed near the Butterfly Meadow. We also received two loads of wood chips from Upper Canopy, which we needed to cover the newspapers around trees and to put on the created around the west section of the meadow.

On 3 June, a PriceWaterhouse Coopers Green Team (9 people) spent the afternoon (3 hours) of their volunteer day working in the Butterfly Meadow. They helped continue the path, turned soil, sifted, weeded and made five holes for new hackberry trees that Peter Hall bought and donated for the Butterfly Meadow.

The path around the west section was finally completed in August. It required a considerable amount of work: turning the soil, sifting, covering it with pool liner and covering everything with wood chips.

Tremayne, our summer employee for 2011, organized two work bees for the Butterfly Meadow. They took place on two Sundays in July from 9 am to 1 pm. What joy to have as many as 27 people on 10 July and 20 people on 17 July to focus on the Butterfly Meadow! The bees were considered very successful as DSV was removed (by pulling) from most planted parts of the meadow.

During the last three weeks of the season, we concentrated on the area near the split rail fence. Invasive plants and goldenrod were hiding the fence and a signpost. Volunteers pulled out all the vegetation in front of the fence, sifted the soil and then covered it with a pool liner and wood chips. One volunteer cut goldenrods in the north part of the meadow behind the fence with a scythe to get it ready for rototilling.

Pierre Huppé from Agriculture Canada agreed to rototill three areas of the meadow in October. One area was to enlarge the future Monarch Waystation, one area inside the split rail fence and a small area opposite the waystation.

In total, volunteers put in 297.5 hours of hard labour this summer to make the Butterfly Meadow a better place for wildlife and a more pleasant place to visit.

Plans for 2012

Next year will be very special for me, as the FWG won second place in the Evergreen/FIDO Share Your Care contest and the prize will be used to create a large Monarch Waystation. I have approached local nurseries to ask for help in growing plants for us, and I hope we will be able to come to some arrangement with them.

In May, the Wednesday volunteers will be preparing the area by sifting soil and removing as many DSV roots as possible. In early June, I would like to have a work bee on a Saturday for planting.

The rest of the summer will be spent sifting soil in the other two rototilled areas. As we have done in previous years, we will turn the soil, sift it, remove the roots, and then plant flowers. Weeding out invasive species will again take a lot of our energy and time.

Let's hope that the weather will cooperate and we'll have plenty of volunteers to make this a productive season!



Volunteers Jonathan, Peggy, Lynn

Wildlife in Winter at the FWG

By Christine Hanrahan



When the temperature falls and the cold north wind blows, we dig out winter parkas, gloves, scarves and hats to help see us through the coldest time of year. But what do the birds, bugs and animals do when winter arrives?

Not surprisingly, there is no one size fits all. We know that many birds head south in autumn. And monarch butterflies are Mexico-bound for the cold months. *Anax junius*, the common green darner, likewise turns southward in the fall. But for those creatures who stay put, the means of winter survival are many. Here's a brief synopsis of how some of the creatures we see at the FWG get through the winter.

Some animals dig in, literally, and wait out the season until spring arrives. Groundhogs, true hibernators, sleep the winter away underground. Chipmunks, on the other hand, go into a state of torpor from which they awake periodically to feed in a separate underground larder. Neither red nor grey squirrels hibernate, but remain as active in winter as any other season, except for the coldest of days when they retreat to

their winter nests. Mice construct



nests, often in our birdboxes and stay awake and cosy all winter long. Meadow voles stay active in their sub-nivean world, gathering seeds from various plants or chewing on tree bark when things get really tough.



Muskrats, regulars in our pond for many years, do not hibernate, nor do they stockpile food as beavers do, but rather carry on feeding below the water's surface on roots of aquatic plants. They stay warm in either bank burrows or lodges made of cattails.

The resting period that many insects undergo in winter is called diapause and is similar to hibernation in animals. Not all insects spend the winter in the same way, and not all insects survive the winter. Male bumblebees and

indeed, most male Hymenoptera, die off after the first few hard frosts, leaving only inseminated females or young queens, to carry on the following year. The females will hibernate under a log, in a log, in a hole in the ground, or any other dark, warm space that seems to afford protection.

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Vole tracks.

Butterflies are our best-known insects, and most of us know that some species overwinter as adults, hiding beneath the bark of trees or in other warm crevices. It seems improbable that they should survive such harsh weather, but they do. These are the ones we see on early warm spring days, the mourning cloaks, commas and milbert tortoiseshells, for example. Other species, however, spend the winter as chrysalids, as larvae or even as eggs. The whole business of butterfly overwintering is complex and survival depends on many things. But survive they somehow do!

Dragonflies and damselflies are aquatic in their larval stage, and thus they spend the winter underwater. Adults here die, except for the few species that migrate.

Still other insects will form large aggregations and seek out a warm, sheltered spot. Asian ladybeetles are well known for entering homes in big numbers at the onset of cold weather. Some species of leafhoppers huddle together under the leaf litter in forests and edges, waiting out the cold. Other insects survive as larva in protective shelters known as galls. Still others die as winter approaches, leaving behind eggs or larvae to wait out the cold.



Turtles enter a state of torpor, burying themselves in the mud for the winter, an extraordinary feat for a reptile that needs oxygen. Frogs overwinter in various ways. American toads bury themselves in the soil. Wood frogs and tree frogs can tolerate freezing through a complex process. Wood frogs, to be simplistic, can produce a sort of antifreeze in their bodies. They may spend the winter under leaf litter, bark or in places still unknown. Our only other frog at the FWG, the green frog, survives the winter as both adult and tadpole, under debris and mud at the bottom of the pond.



Birds that don't migrate south need lots of food and shelter to survive. Many birds form feeding flocks in winter, a strategy that helps them to locate food more efficiently and also offers protection from predators such as hawks. Some species will huddle together in nest boxes, cavities or under the shelter of conifer branches.

This barely touches the tip of the iceberg, so to speak, and the winter ways of wildlife are many, varied, complex and fascinating.

Report 2011: Backyard Garden

By Isabelle Nicol, BYG Coordinator



*Hummingbird having a nectar nip.
(F Thibodeau)*

The Backyard Garden had another successful season full of colour! With the help of our hard-working Friday morning volunteers, the ongoing work of weeding, transplanting, potting, collecting seeds, and generally maintaining the garden went very well. No major changes were made this year, but some plants were moved to fill in gaps, and new attempts were made to fill the area under a large juniper tree — until we noticed bees tunnelling in the soil and left the space to them. We're still busy with the occasional weed clean out, mulching forest beds, and identifying what to transplant in the spring. The plant labels have been stored for winter.

We enjoyed many visitors, including families and photography enthusiasts. Some people were just passing through, while others were especially interested in seeing our many native plants. In the spring and early summer, a botanical art class spent several sessions sketching and painting, and there were birders and butterflies a-plenty. The BYG was busiest the day

of the Plant Sale, as people took advantage of the opportunity to see what their baby plants might one day become!

Our usual denizens, the chipmunks and red squirrels, remained well fed and a thrill for bipedal visitors to watch. The bird feeder and bath hosted various feathered friends and provided many a photo opportunity. Even toads and frogs obliged by sunning themselves on pond rocks for excited children! We found one tiny tree frog keeping his bum cool in the collected water of Cup Plant leaves, as well as the occasional sipping bee taking advantage of the drink. One evening, a mink visited the pond, no doubt chasing the frogs and tadpoles. Insect visitors included bees, wasps and butterflies although there seemed to be fewer butterflies this year, with only a few Monarchs seen. Those that did appear were followed by enraptured volunteers.

One major change was replacement of the old garden shed. Also, the upper nursery was rebuilt and wonderful plant boxes were installed to protect the plants that are overwintering out of doors.

Besides keeping DSV at bay, we discovered a new "enemy" — a spaghetti-like vampire vine, twining around our lupines. Dodder (*Cuscuta* sp.) is a plant in the morning glory family. It lacks leaves and green colouring, getting its energy by fastening itself to other plants. Fortunately, we were able to remove it, but we had to pull out the plants in which it was entangled. Some species of *Cuscuta* are native to Ontario, sadly proving that not all native plants are great.

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Dodder in the Lupins - not quite a doddle to remove.

New plants this year include a Butterfly Bush, kindly donated by Jean Stalker, and we look forward to its sprays of fragrant flowers that seem to be magnets for butterflies. In the past, Butterfly Bushes in the Backyard Garden have died off after only a year or so. Let's hope this one likes the new location in the Butterfly Bed!

At this time of year, we're waiting for the loads of leaves that David Stewart usually brings us to cover the nursery for winter. And we're already preparing for our 2012 Plant Sale (first weekend in June, mark your calendars!) In the spring, we'll again have lots of potting to do,

then comes the weeding and replanting, and mulching and composting as the gardening cycle continues. We look forward to seeing if the bulbs we planted this fall show up where we put them or if our creative squirrels change things around!

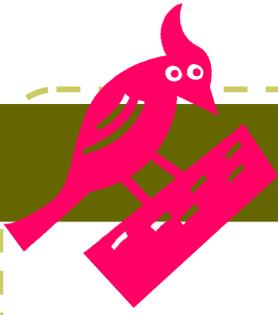
For more information on Dodder visit these great resources from Ontario and BC provincial agriculture departments: [OMAFRA](#) and [BC AGF](#)

Music soothes the savage beast . . . Or does it?

One of the most pleasant things about volunteering at FWG is the Friday morning coffee chats, where we can come together and share thoughts. Recently, a conversation among a few people was picked up with interest by the whole table. With winter around the corner, critters are looking for cosy digs in which to hole up. While we love watching squirrels frolic or racoons lazing, we don't particularly want them inside our homes!

The key is prevention. What we discussed that day was using music to create an obnoxious sound environment. One member had good luck with CBC1 blaring away in the mouth of a groundhog hole next to a foundation. Skunks have been successfully driven off by rock music. Another volunteer blasted something "unpleasant" in the attic during the period where bats seek nesting zones. We discussed what it may have been, and while the actual genre was forgotten, the general consensus was baroque would not work as it was far too pleasant!





Amazing Bird Brains!

Ever feel like you have a woodpecker drilling through your head? At such moments, you probably don't spare a thought to think how is it that woodpeckers themselves don't get massive headaches from constantly pecking! Researchers in China used slow capture cameras, x-ray scans and computer simulations to determine why woodpeckers don't damage themselves during their activities.

Each time the head hits a tree, it is moving at a rate of six metres a second and the force of deceleration with each peck is 1000 times that of gravity! Several factors are responsible for the woodpecker's abilities. First, the upper and lower parts of the beak are different lengths, which reduces the amount of force transmitted from the tip of the beak to the head. Second, some bones protecting the brain have properties similar to sponges, which also helps redistribute force. Third, unlike in human skulls, the space between the brain and skull of woodpeckers is much smaller. This translates into *Hairy woodpecker (L) and Downy woodpecker (R), females* less space for the brain to shake. Finally, the woodpecker's hyoid bone also wraps around the entire skull, acting like a "safety belt" to reduce impact shocks. Researchers hope to use their findings to develop better safety headgear.

The scientific article is available free as open access online: Wang L, Cheung JT-M, Pu F, Li D, Zhang M and Y Fan. 2011. Why Do Woodpeckers Resist Head Impact Injury: A Biomechanical Investigation. *PLoS ONE* 6(10): www.plosone.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0026490



Northern Flicker



Pileated woodpecker, male

Activity: Mowing the Old Field!



Recently tilled land in the Butterfly Meadow, awaiting action in the spring!

Ritchie Feed & Seed kindly donated some unsold stock of native plants to us, which we will plant in the spring. Thank you!

Photo: D Lepage

Nature Notes: In Bloom

This brightly coloured, but rather unusual bracket fungus (*Phlebia* sp) is often found on birch trees.



Nature Notes: Bug of the Month



This was one of scores of opened goldenrod galls found in the cut portion of the Old Field. It is remarkable how neatly the gall has been chewed in half, and the little goldenrod gall fly grub extracted from its shelter in the middle. These galls are hard, not easily cut with a sharp knife, so it is all the more interesting that squirrels and mice can chew them open so perfectly, like this one. So, although this is not a photo of an insect, there was one here!

Nature Notes: Critter of the Month



Adjacent to the FWG is a field of sorghum that is attracting big flocks of Dark-eyed Juncos. Sorghum is an important food crop around the world and a frequent addition to bird feed (millet). Juncos love millet, so this flock must have been in heaven!

Knowledge Note: Sourcing

Where does whatever you need come from? Source is important in most aspects of life, and especially so for native gardening. Local seed, grown at local nurseries, is always better adapted to the area - if it survived an Ottawa Valley winter there, it will in your back yard as well! Where plants come from is also important if you are given donations, as you need to know the plant isn't infected - or is even the plant you are told it is! Even at FWG, we have made mistakes in the past with plant donations that were a cultivar and not a native type.



Likewise, question what you find sold in nurseries. Many plants that can escape into the wild are still sold as ornamentals. Many groundcovers can become invasive pests outside the urban centre, and some trees - such as Norway Maples - should never be planted in the countryside. Local mulch is also important, as you can track its health more effectively. Just as city compost should not be used in your vegetable garden, neither should you use leaf mulch from other areas unless you know what it contains. The last thing you want are seeds from invasive species getting mixed into your garden. DSV grows around the leaf mulch we maintain at the FWG. As a result, we **ONLY** use this mulch in areas where we can easily pull up any new DSV vines discovered.

Wood mulch and topsoil are also a concern. Fungi and insect pests can travel in wood mulch - remember why moving firewood outside designated zones is a bad idea? Humans are key pathways for disease and pests to access and enter new regions. Topsoil is not all created equal, and is not created quickly. Where is your topsoil coming from? That new subdivision that scraped a farmer's field to the barren subsoil and sold "excess" to make more profit? Most times, you **DON'T** need topsoil - a good compost amendment can do wonders. Where do your garden stones come from, or sphagnum moss? Everything comes from somewhere!

Bird feed also needs to be sourced properly, as you don't want all sorts of unknown additives. Read the labels, and consult guides to determine what you should be putting out for the birds you wish to feed. You do make the difference!