

What's Growing On? The Fletcher Wildlife Garden Newsletter

www.ofnc.ca/fletcher.php

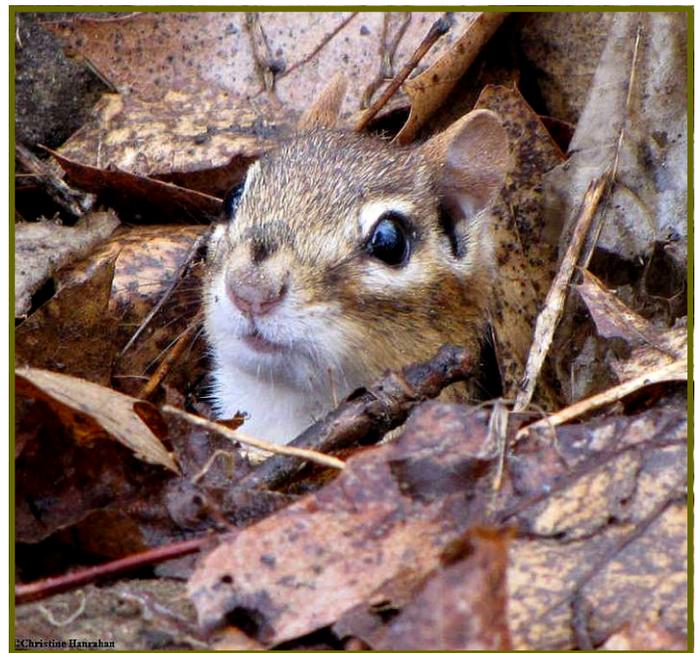
October 2011

Settling in for the Season

Winterizing while the flowers still bloom? We must be in Canada.

The winter storm windows are up with new ribbons to deter birds from colliding. This yearly ritual is a sure sign of changing seasons for us at FWG, and coincides with a slowdown in weeding of the Backyard Garden. We still have yellow Rudbeckia and the dark mauve New England Asters, which are loaded with bees.

Seed heads on other plants make for attractive architecture and food sources for birds. The odd butterfly waltzes through. Squirrels are busily knocking down the walnuts and chewing them up or "hiding" them in new locations. Watching their acrobatics along narrow branches is always exciting! The birds are thrilled that the feeder is back up.



Chipmunk in the leaves.

Impressive V-formations of geese pass by overhead, no doubt depositing useful nutrients on the land as they go. Our large pond hosts great duck get-togethers, and walkers are frequently treated to a show of multiple duck bums mooning them from afar. We've added leaf mulch to our Woodland Walk garden and are preparing to eventually cover our potted plants with an enormous pile. This year we are introducing specially-built plant boxes to prevent snacking by our furry visitors. They fail to understand that this is the only buffet off-limits to them in the entire Fletcher Wildlife Garden!

Other seasonal activities include placing our collected flower seeds in damp vermiculite-filled baggies. We do this to "trick" the seeds into thinking it is winter time, and then we can "trick" them into thinking it is spring when we start to pot the germinated seedlings in February. Hopefully, this year our refrigerator won't freeze our prizes repeatedly like last year!

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Getting your wildlife garden ready for winter

By Sandra Garland

Winter is cold and wind can make it even colder. The creatures we enjoy in our gardens in the summer need to find shelter to survive the winter months when no food or water is available to sustain them.



Chipmunk enjoying crab apples as a late autumn treat.

At the FWG, we leave seed pods on the plants as the seeds might be important winter food for birds and other creatures. (www.ofnc.ca/fletcher/howto/htdeadheading.php)

Don't cut plants to the ground. As standing vegetation gets covered with snow, quinzhee-style shelters form under it. I also really enjoy seeing the patterns different plants create when they are covered in a light blanket of snow.

There's no need to protect most native wildflowers, but woodland plants need plenty of organic matter. Fallen leaves are natural additions to woodland soil and make excellent mulch and fertilizer for most gardens. (www.ofnc.ca/fletcher/howto/htmulch.php)

Empty your compost bin. If you have a shady garden, add the compost to the fallen leaves you're putting on it. In a sunny yard, scatter compost loosely between the plants or toward the back of the beds to rake forward in spring. (www.ofnc.ca/fletcher/howto/htcompost.php)

Don't make any big changes in the late fall. Many creatures are already bedded down for the winter, sometimes in the leaf litter. Disturbances can mean the difference between life and death if they are already in their dormant state.

Finally, enjoy your garden in winter. Try to plant a few things with sturdy stems that will retain some height even after a snowfall: Joe-Pye Weed is a good example. Add winter colour by planting a few red-osier dogwoods; their red stems against the snow look very festive. And try to have at least a few cedars or other evergreen trees in your yard to shelter chickadees, finches, and other birds that stay here all winter.

Bird feeder in winter with conifer, cedars and dry standing matter in the background.



©Christine Hanrahan

Let's Get Handy! Building Roosting Boxes

When those days get shorter and cooler we're not the only ones who like to huddle up and stay warm. Our feathered and furry friends are in complete accord!

In 2010, the Blackburn Hamlet cub pack offered to make bird boxes or feeders for us. We asked if they would consider building roosting boxes instead as we wanted to know whether these much larger containers would be used over the winter, presumably by birds seeking shelter from the weather. A roosting box differs from a bird house in both intent and design. It is a place to take shelter during a storm, or take a warm break during the foraging day during winter. The access hole is placed near the base rather than the top such that warm air stays inside, and the roosting box also lacks ventilation holes to minimize heat loss due to blowing wind. At the end of October 2010, the cubs and their leaders installed seven beautiful roosting boxes at various sites around the FWG. All were attached high up on trees.



Well, the boxes were a hit — but with red squirrels and an enterprising grey. The roosting boxes are larger than nesting boxes, so the squirrels thought we'd installed the most brilliant, spacious winter retreats just for them. No more acrobatic squeezing into small spaces! Because we are a wildlife garden, we don't mind that the squirrels are colonizing the boxes as we haven't sufficient large trees with appropriate nesting cavities.

If you want to build and decorate your own roosting box, we've put the plans on our website: www.ofnc.ca/fletcher/projects/Roosting-boxes/WinterRoostBoxPlans.pdf. Why not create a winter haven?

WANTED: Items FWG Could Use!

Our lawnmower needs to be put out to pasture. We'll be needing a new one for cutting lots of grass for trails next spring! If you have any suggestions or a super discount, please let us know!

We can always use 3.5 or 4-inch square pots without any cracks. Anything larger or smaller doesn't fit our trays, nor does anything circular. We also like large round pots, the kind that come with shrubs or very big perennials. Just drop them off by the nursery!

Boo! Honouring our Furry Flying Friends!



Bats in bat box.

October brings two smashing holidays along with fall colours: Thanksgiving and Halloween. In honour of the latter, we are going to talk about the oft-maligned mosquito muncher — the bat. We are currently celebrating the year of the bat (2011-2012) as declared by the United Nations.

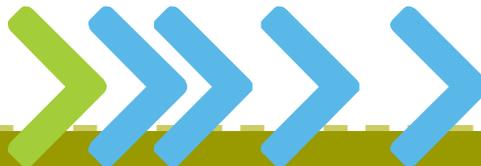
Bats provide fantastic insect control: a single little brown bat can eat up to 1000 mosquito-sized insects in a single hour, while a pregnant or lactating female bat typically eats the equivalent of her entire body weight in insects each night!

Like other pollinators, bats are facing habitat loss and disease — in this instance the dreaded White-nose Syndrome (the fungus *Geomyces destructans*). Found on the faces and wings of infected bats, White-nose Syndrome causes bats to awaken more often during hibernation and use up the stored fat reserves that are needed to get them through the winter. Infected bats often emerge too soon from hibernation and can be seen flying around in midwinter. These bats usually freeze or starve to death. The fungus has been found in bats located in Ontario, Quebec, and New Brunswick, and mortality rates can be 100% in infected hibernation caves.

The 6 August 2010 issue of *Science* contained a study saying that, at current rates of infection and mortality, the most common bat — the little brown bat (*Myotis lucifugus*) — could become extinct in eastern North America within 20 years. Bat Conservation International (www.batcon.org) suggests the following actions concerned citizens can take:

- ✂ Encourage provincial and federal legislators to allocate funding towards the effort to understand and fight White-nose Syndrome.
- ✂ Report unusual late-winter bat behaviour (bats flying during the daytime, for example) or unexplained bat deaths to your provincial wildlife agency or local wildlife groups.
- ✂ Adhere to cave advisories and closures to help prevent the transmission of White-nose Syndrome. Don't go in!
- ✂ Educate your friends and families about the benefits of bats and the White-nose Syndrome crisis.

Bat boxes are built nesting boxes for bats. The Toronto Zoo says that because female bats require a warm, safe shelter for giving birth in May, bat boxes should be installed in March or early April. You could also build and install your bat box in late summer or fall for early occupancy the following spring.



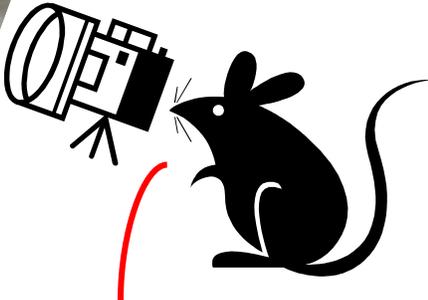
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In and Around



Sandra Garland happily receives the cheque for our 2nd place prize in the FIDO-Evergreen Share Your Care contest. Thank you so much again to everyone who took the time to vote! We're busily collecting seed, and because we'll be planting so many flowers next season, we're getting some help growing them from a local nursery, Budd Gardens. The scale is too much for us as volunteers, especially on top of preparing for 2012's Native Plant Sale!

Names from the left: Marie-France Dufour, Nadim Helou, Josh Farnell, Sandra Garland, Alex Tong, Sheri Carberry



Say Cheese!!



A very happy group of cubs and parents after a tour of the FWG, led by Dave Moore. This group has been to the garden several times and clearly enjoy visiting!

Photo by D Moore

(Continued from page 4)

Boxes should be installed on a south-facing surface for warmth, and should be at least four to seven metres up. Posts, buildings or trees are ideal, even the back of stadium lights! Boxes should not be located in dense woods or trees as bats need space to fly in and out. Bats will poop, so don't place your box over your favourite bench! Good instructions for building your own bat box are available at Ducks Unlimited (www.ducks.ca/resource/general/wetland/pdf/batbox.pdf). We have more information on our website at ofnc.ca/fletcher/howto/htbats_e.php. Install your own bat box and enjoy mosquito-free barbecuing next year!

Milkweeds for Monarchs

By Sandra Garland

Monarchs need milkweeds. Their caterpillars can't survive on any other plant. More and more people are growing various milkweed plants in their gardens in an effort to counteract some of the trends that are limiting these plants elsewhere. However...

Is it legal? Common Milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*) is on the list of banned species in Ontario's *Weed Control Act*. But, the act goes on to say that it's okay to grow these plants as long as they don't spread into agricultural or horticultural areas. So, unless you border a farm or nursery, go ahead and plant them. Ottawa bylaw officers will respond to complaints about overgrown or unsightly yards. But if you treat your milkweeds like any other plant in your garden, they're unlikely to be noticed.

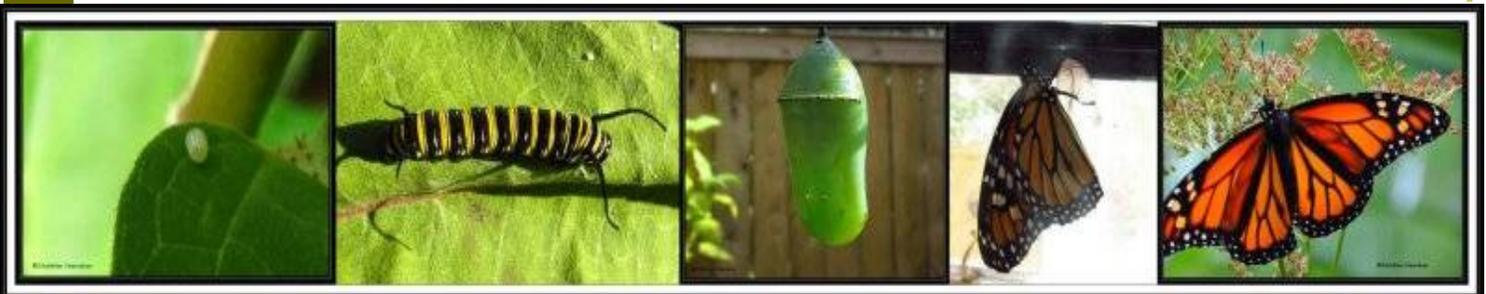


Common Milkweed Flower

Yes, they do spread by roots that run along under the ground and send up new plants. If you want to confine milkweeds to a small area of your yard, plant them in large pots whose bottoms have been cut out and replaced with screening. Sink the pots into the ground about half way. Your milkweed plants will stay put, but because their roots are in contact with the ground, they can grow more-or-less naturally.

Grow fresh milkweed leaves for monarch caterpillars, especially late in the season, by cutting the plants back to about half their height after the flowers have died. Your neighbours may appreciate not receiving milkweed seeds parachuting onto their land. And the caterpillars destined to become the adults that fly to Mexico will appreciate the great meal of young leaves you'll be providing.

Caution: When you cut back your milkweed plants, leave the cuttings where they fall for a couple of days. That will give any caterpillars that happen to be on the discarded leaves time to find a new home on the remaining plants.



Lifecycle of the Monarch: From egg to winged beauty! C. Hanrahan

Caches

What's this? Evidence of paranormal activity at the FWG? What are these unnatural collections?!

Nature's critters are busily stockpiling for the cold weather, as well as stuffing their furry faces!

DONCHA GO A-TOUCHIN' MAH FOOD NOW, Y'HEAR??? I CAN GIVE A MIGHTY MEAN SCOLDING!



Butternuts



Cones



Walnut and Apple



Vole digging up seeds

Activity: Mowing the Old Field!



Mowing is an important part of maintaining a grassland habitat, especially when burning isn't an option. Mowing cuts down young trees starting to form, distributes seed and creates a positive stress on grassland plants to "jumpstart" the system again for next year! Mowing is only required every couple of years. In the Old Field habitat, we see just how large an area we actually have! A bit like cleaning out the fridge.

Nature Notes: In Bloom

You may have to get up close to fully appreciate the flowers on a Witch Hazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*)! We have one at the FWG and, each October, Christine checks it for flowers to try to get a half-decent shot of them. According to her, "I'm still trying!" They are funny, wispy things, hard to photograph. A native shrub that flowers in the fall, in our climate, is worth planting. Maybe you could even try to make Witch Hazel distillate for those bumps and bruises!



Nature Notes: Bug of the Month



When opened a bird box to clean and check it, she found this mass of tubular-shaped bee moth cocoons and little yellow larvae, one per tube. The door to the bird house had been cemented shut with these strong sticky fibres, and it took some time to pry open. The door itself was grooved with long channels, corresponding to the cocoons. Most likely, these are *Aphomia sociella*, so named because their larvae often develop in bee's nests, but they are also be found in rodent nests — this box had previously housed a family of mice!

Nature Notes: Critter of the Month



Chipmunk with a crunchy grasshopper snack. Extra protein!



Knowledge Note: Focal Points

Any good garden designer will tell you that the landscape is an experience in visual space. As you move through a garden, your eye will be directed this way and that depending on your fancy — although much of the time you won't realize you are being subtly led to look in those directions! Focal points, such as a particular plant or object, naturally draw the eye through judicious placement and their visual appeal.

A focal point can be seasonal or all year round. Imagine a lovely red Burning Bush in autumn or the brilliant Redbud in spring, an interesting sculpture or even your birdfeeder. To best use focal points, select a few directions in your garden where you frequently look, such as the view from your kitchen window. If taller, place a bright plant or object in the background off to one side and build your view toward yourself. Distance focal points are almost always most effective if larger. For example, choose a Witch Hazel shrub, which flowers prettily after most plants lose their leaves. Around it place some Red Dogwood for its winter branch colour.



Two focal points here - the blue Colorado Spruce and the bird fountain. How long would you have considered the textural juxtaposition but chromatic unification of the Chives and Wild Thyme in the foreground without the eye-drawing presence of the bird bath?

The focal point is the unifying location in your "scene," but it needn't stick out. Rather, the best focal points are those that catch your eye and draw you to see more of the landscape than you might have originally intended to do!