

News from the FWG: 2008

By Christine Hanrahan



It has been one year since the last FWG update was written, in August, 2007. Much has happened in the duration, but because of space constraints, only highlights are given.

Backyard Garden News

The BYG continues to evolve and change as new ideas on how the garden should be shaped and planted arise. Isabelle Nicol continues as the BYG Coordinator, while Claudia Burns, a former BYG Manager, has returned (though not as manager) bringing her expert gardening skills and knowledge to the site. The nursery area has been reorganized (thanks to Nicole Gourret), complete with a flagstone path into the area. The Woodland Walk area is a favourite with visitors, and while it

looks as if it has evolved naturally, it is really the result of much hard work. A new sign now points the way to this area.

Notebooks have been provided for each BYG bed in which plans and plants are recorded by the volunteer(s) responsible. Plant lists for each bed continue to be developed, under the guidance of Claudia. Betty Campbell has mapped the BYG beds and marked the trees and shrubs. Chris Lauzon, our summer employee, has been recording wildlife usage of plants in the BYG.

Quite a few new volunteers came on board in 2008, but because not everyone can help out every week, we're always looking for more. A multitude of tasks are undertaken to keep the garden in such excellent condition. If you enjoy gardening and nature, why not consider donating a few hours per week to the BYG? Volunteers meet Friday mornings from spring through early fall. Contact the FWG at either 613-234-6767 or fletcher@ofnc.ca.

Signs

As noted, one of the new signs this year is for the Woodland Walk section of the BYG. Other new signs include those requesting people to stay out of the Ravine, and directional ("you are here") signs located at three points around the garden. We've also erected signs giving a brief explanation of each habitat. In the works are signs asking visitors to stay on paths and respect the site. Once the exact wording has been decided, these signs will be made and erected. As always, Charlie Clifford is our "Sign Man", overseeing each new sign from inception to final installation.

Events, Tours, Walks

Native Plant Sale

The plant sale, held annually on the first Saturday in June, is usually well attended, with many repeat customers, although in 2008 numbers and sales were down. As this is our major fundraiser for the year, we need to publicize it to a wider audience. Consequently, a small ad-hoc

committee has been formed to look at publicity. Another committee will coordinate the plant sale, relieving the burden placed on the one or two volunteers who have organized it in the past, particularly Sandra Garland.

Bird Events

The Great Backyard Bird Count, held across North America in mid-February, aims to get people out counting birds in their backyards. Definition of “Backyard” is fairly flexible, and for us it means that the entire 5 hectare site, as well as the Arboretum can be surveyed. David Hobden always organizes the FWG participation and compiles the results, which for 2008 were 15 species.

International Migratory Bird Day (IMBD) is held annually on the second Saturday in May. This event at FWG is now attracting a good number of participants. I’m very grateful to Peter Fuller for once again leading the birding walk around the garden during which 32 species were found. Prior to the walk, a short talk and a birding quiz got everyone in the mood. Prizes were bags of organic, bird-friendly coffee, donated by the Canadian Wildlife Federation. Because FWG has been holding an IMBD event for more than 10 years, we were recognized by Environment for the Americas, organizers of IMBD, as part of the **International Migratory Bird Day Ten Year Club**. This brought a certificate, a card, and a posting on their website.

Participation in Other Events

The FWG once again participated in the Wildlife Awareness Event at Billings Bridge mall, as part of National Wildlife Week, organized by the Ottawa Wildlife Festival (www.ncrwildlifefestival.org/). Many thanks to all the FWG volunteers who staffed the booth during the three days.

FWG also participated in an Earth Day event held at DND headquarters. Our display was set up and volunteers staffed the exhibit. By all accounts, interest in the garden was high. Thanks to David Hobden, Diane Lepage and Bonnie Mabee for helping with this.

Many friends and family members assembled at the FWG on April 26th to remember Eileen Evans and participate in the dedication of the pergola, generously funded in part by Eileen’s family. Many people shared fond memories of Eileen, remembering her as an avid hiker, a keen naturalist, a dedicated OFNC member, and of course, as a dog walker with her beloved Bentley by her side.

Walks

During Environment Week (first week in June), two walks were held at FWG for employees of AAFC and Health Canada. The Navan Women’s Institute requested a tour of the garden and this was held in mid-June. Two OFNC walks, a general nature walk, and a butterfly outing, were also held. Two groups of Pathfinders came to the garden, one had a guided tour, while the second group helped plant wildflowers. Several people from the Elgin Street Public School were given a tour of the BYG and provided with advice for creating a schoolyard garden. In May, Renate Sander Regier, a BYG volunteer, gave a tour to a group of students from St. Paul’s University, as part of their “Religious Education and Ecology: Right Relations” class.

Volunteers



For the second year running, Price Waterhouse Cooper sent a party of volunteers, their “Green Team,” to spend an entire day helping out at FWG. Thanks to their participation we got a tremendous amount of work done. They erected new posts for bird houses, cut buckthorn, and laid gravel on the Bill Holland Trail. The latter is particularly useful as the trail becomes muddy and slippery in wet weather. Several volunteers were repeats from the 2007 participation. We truly

appreciate their work and enjoyed their enthusiasm. Price Waterhouse even made a generous financial donation as well.

Information Sheets, Brochures, Newsletter

Many of our information sheets and brochures both online and hard copy, have been revised and updated. We’ve also added a new webpage for “*Trees and Shrubs of the FWG*,” companion to “*Wildflowers of the FWG*.”

Our inventories continue to be updated as new species are added. All inventories, information sheets and brochures can be accessed via our website at www.ofnc.ca/fletcher.php. Click on “The Wildlife” and then explore the various topics such as “Butterflies of the FWG,” “Fungi of the FWG,” etc.

We have an electronic newsletter that comes out approximately 4 times a year. To be added to the mailing list, please email fletcher@ofnc.ca.

Grants

FWG was the recipient of two City of Ottawa grants in 2008. One was to purchase water monitoring equipment so that we can more accurately measure what is happening in our large Amphibian Pond. Chris, our summer employee, has conducted most of the monitoring and his final report will be available at the end of summer.

The second grant funded removal of large buckthorn trees from the Ravine. Tony Denton and Elizabeth Gammell spearheaded this, with Elizabeth the primary liaison between FWG and the City. This grant stipulated that all underground services (water, gas, etc.) had to be located and marked before work could begin. Elizabeth oversaw this component, while Tony marked the area of the Ravine in which work was to be done, and tagged those trees slated for removal. With the help of Iola Price, Tony and Elizabeth scheduled the work, which took place the second week of August. Although the ravine now looks bare in places, most of the big buckthorns are gone

and other species such as nearby stands of flowering raspberry and sumac will fill in the gaps, helped by planting of native trees and shrubs.

Habitats

Old Field. One half of the Old Field was mowed in October, 2007. Although this area too looked very bare at first, once spring came, it wasn't long before raspberry canes and goldenrod were flourishing again. Evening Primrose was abundant for the first time in the Old Field, and new plant species appeared, including Joe-pye Weed. Dog-strangling Vine (DSV) did not dominate the site as had been feared, and in fact there was a noticeable reduction of the species in the mowed area. This was no doubt largely due to the increasing spread of goldenrod and raspberry.

Butterfly Meadow. Work continues on the new addition to the Butterfly Meadow. Diane Lepage is spearheading this, with a group of dedicated volunteers who turn up every Wednesday evening no matter the weather. Although only half-completed, it already looks quite lush and will be quite something when finished. In the spring, the site was rototilled to get rid of DSV. Volunteers then spent a long time picking out the DSV roots and preparing the soil for planting. This appears to have paid off because, at the time of writing, there is little to no DSV in that particular area.

Summer Employee

Once again we received a Services Canada Student Grant enabling us to hire a student for the summer. Chris Lauzon started work in early June with a focus on monitoring the pond. He also devised several experiments with DSV which were ongoing over the summer. We don't have the results yet, but in the next update will report what came out of these studies. Chris' other main focus was documenting and photographing the fauna, primarily insects, found in the BYG. He noted whether they were pollinators, which species was feeding on what, etc. At the end of August he gave a powerpoint presentation on his findings using many of his excellent photos.

Plants and Animals

Birds

Four new species were added to the FWG bird list in the last year, starting with a Rough-legged hawk found by Marilyn Ward in November, 2007. Four Long-eared Owls were discovered by Marc Latremouille in April 2008, and this past spring I added two more warbler species, Blackpoll and Mourning Warbler. The Long-eared Owls were certainly one of the highlights of the year!

Interesting avian visitors included an "Oregon" Junco, found by Bev McBride in late 2007. This western form of the Dark-eyed Junco, was once considered a separate species. It certainly generated a lot of interest from both birders and photographers. An American Bittern stayed in the pond for a few days in early June. It was there with four Green Herons, so pity the poor frog population! However, the bittern moved on, and the Green Herons dispersed after a week or so. In fact, apart from a short period in May and again in mid-June, the herons were largely absent from the pond. For at least a week, two pairs of Green Herons could be seen in separate areas of the garden, behaving as if they were on territory. I don't know if both pairs nested in the garden, but one pair certainly did, in an Amur Maple tree. The nest that I found had three downy young in early July (the only time I actually checked it). Nearby was another stick nest which may or may not have been used (Green Herons will sometimes nest close to each other, though more often are solitary). However, at the same time the downy young were found in the nest, a well-

fledged juvenile Green Heron was found at the pond and observed over the course of a week. As far as I know, the herons have been largely absent from FWG since then. They must have found better feeding grounds. Last year, five juveniles and two adults put on quite a show in the pond for several weeks before dispersing.

For the second year in a row, American Kestrels did not nest at FWG. Indeed, they were largely absent from the garden, even in early spring which is generally when they are most active and visible at FWG.

The other star attraction at FWG turned out to be the very common Mallard! During the winter, part of the pond remained open and Mallards (and a few Black Ducks) congregated there. It began in November with perhaps 15 to 20 ducks, and by January the open area of the pond was, quite literally, full of ducks - I stopped counting after 150! The pond became known as the Duck Pond to visitors who took to bringing bags of bread and cracked corn to feed them. The ducks were happy, and the visitors, including a lot of photographers, were also happy.

A female Mallard brought her three downy young to the pond in mid-July and for one day, the little guys were whirling around like wind-up toys and having a grand time. Sadly, they were gone by the next day, no doubt food for one predator or another. The female stayed on alone for a few more days before eventually leaving.

Other Fauna

In 2007, I wrote "it has been a fantastic year for Monarch butterflies." The story was quite different in 2008, when any Monarch sighting was cause for comment. Only one or two were seen at FWG and definitely not every day. The story was much the same in other parts of the region. On the other hand, European Skippers were present in good numbers, and up to 50 could be seen with little trouble during a visit. One or two Silver-spotted Skippers were seen quite regularly, and both Striped and Banded Hairstreak were present for a few weeks. Eastern Tailed Blues were only sporadic this year, and in contrast to last year, Red Admirals were virtually absent. Nor did I find any Delaware Skippers this year (or hear of anyone else finding them) at FWG.



However, the big excitement, for me anyway, was the sighting of two American Snout butterflies on 1 August, representing only the second record for the Ottawa Region. I saw what looked like a couple of brown moths flying by and was sufficiently curious to try and get a better look. When I

did, I was flabbergasted to see that unmistakable “snout” (photo above). Both butterflies spent at least 45 minutes in a Glossy Buckthorn shrub.



Other interesting insects also turned up during 2008 at the garden, and it proved to be a great year for adding new species to the FWG insect list. Among the most interesting were Brown Mantidfly, Dogwood Calligrapher Beetle, Forked Fungus Beetle, and best of all, Phantom Crane fly found and photographed by Chris Lauzon (photo left). It is not easy to get photos of these beautiful and elusive insects, and Chris' photos are very good indeed. It was also a fantastic year for Odonates at the garden and I managed to add eight new species to our list: Ebony Jewelwing, Powdered Dancer, Emerald Spreadwing, Amber-winged Spreadwing, Prince Baskettail, Black-shouldered Spinyleg,

Common Pondhawk, and Band-winged Meadowhawk. Common Green Darners, Lance-tipped Darners, Canada Darners, Autumn Meadowhawks, White-faced Meadowhawks and Eastern Forktails were very common. I'm grateful to Chris Lewis and Bob Bracken, authors of the recently revised Checklist of Ottawa Odonates, for help with and confirmation of, odonate ID.

A pair of Muskrats was found in the pond on 20 May, engaged in courtship. Whether they successfully bred, I don't know. It did occur to me that the pond was getting rather crowded what with Muskrats, toads, frogs, herons, ducks, Red-winged Blackbirds and turtles. A very large Painted Turtle was seen early on in the season, staking claim to a raised patch of vegetation in the pond. Sometime later, I saw a Snapping Turtle floating under the surface of the water in the deeper end of the pond, and then in August, a smaller Painted Turtle appeared near the bridge for a few days.

Over in the BYG, a tiny painted turtle turned up one day in the little pond (photo right) and remained until mid-August when one of the volunteers found it dead. That was a blow, because we'd all become very attached to this little creature and had watched it get bigger, bask on the rocks, swim across the water, and watch the world. I think we all worried about its survival, but when it actually died it was a sad day.



Invasive Species

Invasive species continued to occupy us. As noted above, a lot of work was done in removing Glossy and Common Buckthorn this summer. DSV was also removed from a number of locations using a scythe or by pulling and cutting. However, in many areas where DSV had been dominant in the past, I found that numerous other species were growing amongst or over DSV. As Goldenrod spreads, the DSV is displaced. Also doing a good job of this are Purple Flowering Raspberry and Red Raspberry. Even Cow Vetch seemed to be dominating DSV this past summer, climbing all over it and in many areas weighing it down, rather than the reverse happening.

We've been discussing Amur Maples and Tartarian Honeysuckle for removal, as both are fast-spreading and invasive. A few years ago, one of our volunteers tackled a swath of Amur Maple saplings, clearing a large area. That site is now full of Amur Maples again. Along with those species, we are looking at Canada Thistle because it is spreading dramatically in the garden.

The FWG is located off Prince of Wales Drive on the Central Experimental Farm. For more information please visit the website at: www.ofnc.ca/fletcher.php. Brochures about the garden are available from the Centre on Friday mornings from spring through fall, Sunday afternoons in the summer, or during the week June through August when we have a summer employee.

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