

News from the FWG: 2010

By Christine Hanrahan



Chipmunk

The year 2010, was a very special one at the Fletcher Wildlife Garden, for it marked our 20th anniversary! Appropriately enough, 2010 was also the United Nations designated International Year for Biodiversity, and what after all, is the FWG about, but promoting and creating biodiversity. We felt that the two events meshed well!

Backyard Garden News

The big American elm by the BYG pond, which began dying off last year, was almost dead by this summer and so we felt that for safety reasons it should be cut down. While we typically leave standing dead trees, this was in an area that gets a lot of visitors. We also took down a couple of black locusts that were shading the rockery which is planted with sun-loving plants.

The BYG changes from year to year, as some plants thrive, others die, some are taken out because they are not doing well, others are planted. A garden is a constantly changing entity which is why it is so interesting to revisit over the different seasons and over the years.

However, as any of the BYG volunteers can tell you, it takes a lot of work to maintain the BYG. If you like gardening, like nature, enjoy working with congenial companions, and have Friday mornings free, we'd like to hear from you! Volunteers meet from spring through early fall. Contact the FWG at either 613-234-6767 or fletcher@ofnc.ca.

FWG 20th Anniversary Celebrations

In June, 1990, the OFNC, and representatives of many other organizations, gathered at the site of the FWG to celebrate the official opening of the garden. Twenty years on, the garden has been transformed. It is a place of thriving vegetation and home to a myriad of wildlife. All of this is due to the hard work of so many volunteers in those now far-off days, and to the vision of Peter and Judy Hall and Jeff Harrison, the co-founders, and heart and soul of the garden. And so, on Saturday, June 19th, 2010, dozens of people, many of them old friends from nearly 2 decades ago, gathered at the FWG for a very special celebration. A wonderful, heart-warming time was had by all who attended and many memories were evoked and reminiscences shared, on a sunny afternoon at the garden. For more about the party, please see Hanrahan 2010.

Walks and Events

Walks

The Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections and the Canadian Botanical Association, had a joint meeting in Ottawa in June. They asked for a tour of the FWG, and about a dozen people (from various parts of Europe and North America) participated, after which they made a donation to the garden. In July, a group of women from the University Women's Club, in town for a conference, had a tour of the garden. A local senior's group from the Fisher Park Community Association was given a tour in July when the garden was at its peak. And before school let out, a grade 3-4 class from a nearby school was also guided around the garden.

Events

Native Plant Sale. The plant sale was another success. Always held on the first Saturday in June, this is now becoming an established event for local gardeners. We raised about \$3200 which helped defray costs of the dam and bridge at the Amphibian Pond (more on this below). Many thanks as always to the crew of volunteers who make this happen. They not only grow plants from seed for the sale, but work on publicity and promotion before the event and set-up on the day of. A lot of work, but well worth it.

Bird Events

The Great Backyard Bird Count was held between the 12th - 15th February. Our "backyard" covers the FWG and the Arboretum. Bird numbers were relatively low this time and we had a grand total of 12 species. This count, organized by Cornell University and held across North America on these dates, is something we have taken part in for some years now, under the auspices of David Hobden.

Wildlife Festival

We took part in the Wildlife Awareness Event at Billings Bridge mall, as part of National Wildlife Week, organized by the Ottawa Wildlife Festival (www.ncrwildlifefestival.org/). In 2009 the event was held on one day only, but in 2010 it ran for the weekend (Saturday and Sunday). A number of people stopped by our booth and expressed an interest in the garden, both as visitors and as potential volunteers.

Corporate Volunteers

Approximately 14 Green Team volunteers from Price Waterhouse Cooper (PWC) came to the FWG for the fourth year in a row. A number of them helped Diane in the Butterfly Meadow which meant that a tremendous amount of work got done in a short period!

In August, 20 people from the Export Development Corporation volunteered their time at the garden, again assisting Diane in the Butterfly Meadow, as well as helping with other activities.

DSV Days

In 2009, we developed a plan for removing DSV from key areas. We thought it would be useful to invite the public to help us with this and dedicated two days in September to this end. About 20 people took part each time and all were enthusiastic about helping to control the spread of this invasive weed.

Outreach

We continue to offer advice, when asked, to both groups and individuals wishing to create wildlife friendly gardens, or find out more about invasive species. In 2010, we donated swamp milkweed to the Children's Garden at Leggett Park on Main Street. A contact person from the Royal Ottawa Health Care Group, requested information about planting a butterfly garden on the hospital grounds. And a native plant garden being initiated near the Nesbitt Building at Carleton University was given advice on local native plants. A community group from Ottawa East doing trail improvements along the Rideau River, borrowed our weed wrenches a couple of times.

Student Projects

Although we did not have any students working on DSV for the first time in several years, there were two student projects at the garden. One focused on the mating habits of American Toads in our Amphibian Pond and took place, necessarily, over a very short period of time.

The second project looked at the behavioural mimicry of syrphids, and continued through the summer, with visits made every few weeks.

Filming at the Garden

We received several requests from film crews to use the garden for various purposes. We said yes to the first one that asked, Wild Kratts, who were filming an educational segment on nature for kids, but declined further requests due to the disturbance factor.

Scouts

A local scout troop, 1st Blackburn Hamlet Scouts, made 7 beautiful and very impressive bird roosting boxes for us. They had contacted us early in the year to see if we had any suggestions for ways in which they might help out, and roosting boxes were definitely high on our list. They even



Bird roosting box

installed them for us. One was taken over a couple of days later by a red squirrel, who very industriously constructed his nest inside.

Problems

The spring and fall of 2010 were both remarkably problem free, which came as something of a relief after the horrendous spring we had in 2009, with countless large fires and parties in the Ash Woods. One fire was set in the party spot from last year, early on in spring, but a load of sheep manure dumped on the site seemed to put an end to anymore such shenanigans.

We did, however, have a problem of a different nature. A young man set up camp under a stand of conifers just south of the Ravine. The first sign of his presence was an old blanket left under the trees. But as time went by, he created quite an encampment with sleeping bag, towels, rolls of toilet paper, stacks of canned food, clothing hung up on the trees, and even a latrine under one of the Norway spruce. A length of pink flagging tape marked the entrance to his camp. We reported him to Security and to the Police but it seemed at first that nothing could be done about moving him on, and we were given various reasons why. Finally, we decided that some of us would go and remove his belongings when he was away, hoping that would induce him to leave. Before this could happen, Security finally dealt with the issue, only to have him return several times. Eventually, about 5 or 6 weeks after he first set up camp, he left, for good we think, unless he managed to find a spot in a sheltered and unreachable part of the Ravine!

Habitats

Butterfly Meadow.

A significant amount of work was done on the Butterfly Meadow in 2010 with dozens of flowers planted and large areas cleared of DSV and raspberry canes. Best of all, a large water tank was finally installed adjacent to the site, and regularly filled with water by AAFC. You can imagine how much easier this makes watering the new plants, not only at the meadow, but at other



The Amphibian Pond bridge, almost ready to use

locations away from the centre. In the past, the water had to be hauled in buckets by cart, to the site! An increase in regular volunteers, as well as help from corporate volunteers over two different days, enabled Diane to carry out many of her plans for the site.

Amphibian Pond

The greatest amount of work in 2010 was done at the Amphibian Pond. The erosion of the trail by several years of heavy spring run-off, and the loss of many of the large rocks from the original dam (they fell down the slope

into the ravine), meant that a very unstable situation was created. We also worried that the small bridge would also fall into the ravine and cause injury should someone be on it at the time. Therefore, we blocked off access to the bridge while we looked for a contractor who could do the repair work. Eventually we went with Drummond, the company that built the original dam back in 1991. A much larger spillway was constructed and the dam appears to be good for another 20 years.

The next problem was the bridge. Initially we thought we could just reinstall the old one, but that clearly was not going to work. For one thing, AAFC told us we needed hand rails for safety reasons. They also said it would be preferable if our bridge conformed to the design they used in the Arboretum, meaning the bridge across the stream to the little island, not the Japanese style bridge near the Canal installed by the NCC. John Walmsley very generously agreed to design the bridge for us, for free! The next step involved approval by AAFC and then the actual construction could begin. At the time of writing the bridge is nearly complete, with only a few issues needing to be sorted out. By the time you read this, the new bridge should be very usable!

Plants and Animals

Birds

The new kestrel nest box was not inducement enough, and once again this species was absent. For the first time in many years, green herons were largely absent in 2010, apart from a brief period of almost daily observations, but their visits were otherwise sporadic. Nor did we have any nesting house wrens in 2010. After the two successful nests in 2009, I really thought we might see them nesting again, but it was not to be. We did, however, see a brown thrasher on and off throughout the summer, although there was no indication of nesting and we didn't see any fledged young around. An eastern towhee was a nice visitor in the spring, and is only one of a handful of times we've seen this species at FWG.

While most of the usual nesting birds successfully raised young, tree swallow numbers at the FWG continued to decline. In 2010 we found only 6 successful nests. We know that all swallow species are declining, but I think that a primary reason for such a dismal showing at FWG is that our habitat continues to change and for swallows it is for the worse (although attractive to other species). We need to move many of the nest boxes to more open situations, although such areas are increasingly rare there. Over the winter we'll have to figure out just what can be done to make the site more attractive to tree swallows. On the other hand, barn swallows were more commonly observed in 2010 than in any of the previous 10 years! They might be nesting around the Hartwell Locks buildings, though I've not looked. I do know they are not nesting on the red barn by the FWG. Awhile after they arrived back, I checked around the barn and it appeared that a nest was attempted but had been knocked down. Since I cannot say for sure, I will leave it at that!

Two beautiful little male green-winged teals appeared at the pond in September but after a few days one left. The other remained at the pond until about 3rd week in October, resplendent at last in his fresh plumage!

Other Fauna

Insects

We added some interesting new insect species to our inventory. Of note was a colony of klamath weed beetles, a species introduced to control St. John's wort, often known as klamath weed. Although relatively common around the region, it was the first time I'd seen them at FWG. In May a very intriguing hover fly was found. *Chalcosyrphus curvaria* is a large orange and black wasp mimic. Not uncommon, but a new species for the FWG. We also found a number of the bumblebee mimic syrphids which really do look astonishingly like bumblebees. We added more leafhopper and treehopper species, and a number of other bugs and beetles, and 4 more Odonate species. The most interesting observation for me was that of the large black peleciniid wasp (*Pelecinius polyturator*). But even more exciting was the very large and beautiful Ichneumonid wasp, *Megarhyssa macrurus*, found by Peter and Judy Hall near the Ash Woods. Sadly, I did not see it.

We saw a good number of butterflies over the summer including many red admirals in what turned out to be a stellar year for this migratory species. Some stopped long enough to lay eggs on the stinging nettle in the Butterfly Meadow. Monarchs were once again few and far between, although as summer wore on, we could sometimes see 2 or 3 per day. But the big news was the sighting, not once, but three different times, of an American snout butterfly at the garden. This very rare species was first found at FWG in 2008 (Hanrahan 2009). Further observations in 2010 and the probability that there were two of them, gives rise to speculation about a small colony. Keep your eyes peeled for this species next summer. Many more moths were added to our ongoing inventory, thanks to the work of Diane Lepage.

Mammals

Our famous beaver survived the winter and was busy in early spring as the pond melted. However, he didn't stick around too long once the ice left. It didn't help that certain people kept breaking the dam. This not only made life difficult for the beaver, but for us, because with the opening of the dam, water flowed across the path creating far worse erosion than any from spring runoff. Initially the beaver tried to repair the damage, and we helped by piling up the branches flung aside by the vandals (I use that word deliberately). However, we have had visits from several other beaver over the spring and fall, most recently in late October when a young red oak on the far side of the pond was gnawed but not taken down. Bridge work didn't initially deter the beaver, it seems, but then the poor animals must be feeling desperate to find a home with winter's approach and suitable habitats vanishing rapidly.

Muskrats appear to be well settled into the pond now, as they have been for the last 3 or 4 years. They are proving to be a good ally in the battle against the invasive flowering rush. A rather large population appeared in the western end of the pond. I noticed its appearance, watched it grow, and then watched as it vanished, eaten by the muskrat, or rather, the roots were eaten. I wonder if muskrat are being praised for their biocontrol efforts! They should be.

Reptiles and amphibians

In last year's update, I noted that a red-eared slider turtle (not native to this area) had turned up in the pond, almost certainly dumped there by someone who could no longer care for it. I wondered

if it would survive the winter. Well, it did, and spent the warm months in the pond along with two snapping turtles, one large Blanding's and two painted turtles. Now we will see if it, and indeed, if all of the turtles, appear again next year.

We have lists of birds, insects (with separate lists for butterflies, moths and odonates), mammals, reptiles and amphibians, and wildflowers, on our website. Just visit this url: www.ofnc.ca/fletcher/alphabet.php, and scroll down the list of wildlife-related subjects to find the lists, and much more.

Photo Galleries

Our photo galleries and FWG Blog on the Pbase galleries, are thriving. As of this writing we've had over 350,000 visits, and over 1,000 comments. We have 68 galleries (many of them are our monthly blogs) and nearly 3,000 images online. Many people contribute their photos from the FWG and occasionally from the adjacent Arboretum. We therefore have a tremendous wealth of intriguing images to show you, for each person sees and photographs different things. Check out our galleries at: www.pbase.com/fwg and let us know what you think!

Volunteer Opportunities

If you would like to volunteer at the FWG, why not drop by any Friday morning spring through fall, 9:00 a.m. to 12 noon, and see what it is all about. You can talk to the volunteers, explore the garden and get a feel for what we do. You can also discuss other volunteer opportunities at the garden while you are there. There is invasive species control, tree planting, or any number of other activities. Regular volunteer groups meet on Friday morning (BYG) and Wednesday evening (Butterfly Meadow), spring through fall.

The FWG is run by a Management Committee and we'd be very happy to see new members. You are welcome to drop by one of our regular meetings (always the 4th Wednesday of each month, at 7:30 p.m. at FWG) and see what the committee does.

Acknowledgments: As always, thanks to all the volunteers who make FWG happen!

Photos: Christine Hanrahan

References: Hanrahan, Christine. 2009. American Snout Butterfly at the Fletcher Wildlife Garden. T&L (43)3:117-119.

Hanrahan, Christine. 2010. Celebrating 20 years of the Fletcher Wildlife Garden: How did we get from there to here? T&L(44)4: 161-165.

FWG Details and Contact Information

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.

- FWG phone number: 613-234-6767
- Sandy Garland: website, information about the FWG and Newsletter: fletcher@ofnc.ca
- Christine Hanrahan: bird and wildlife observations: vanessa@magma.ca
AAFC Security: 613-759-1985