

## News from the FWG: 2011

*By Christine Hanrahan*

Each year at the Fletcher Wildlife Garden, we see new projects and new volunteers. Sometimes new folk initiate interesting projects, or assume responsibility for ones that have lapsed over time. During 2011, the two biggest events at the garden involved a new project and the rejuvenation of an initiative that had fallen somewhat dormant. These stories can be found under news for the Butterfly Meadow and under Invasive Species.



### **Backyard Garden News**

Probably the biggest change in the BYG this year has been the renovation of our nursery. A permanent structure replaces the posts, poles, trellises and fabric. Professional looking boxes, each holding many pots of young plants, covered with removable wire mesh tops for the winter, will help us organize the myriad plants that we anticipate growing in the future. The old garden shed has been removed, to make way for a new one. After several break-in attempts, the doors are no longer easily opened, or closed. It is time for a bigger, sturdier building.

There are always annual changes to the BYG, as plants are removed, moved, thinned, or new ones planted. With the advent of the Monarch Waystation project, we'll also be planting some common milkweeds in the BYG, along with the already existing swamp milkweeds. It is important to show how beautiful the common milkweed is, and how important to the iconic monarch butterfly.

Maintaining the BYG requires a lot of work, and we are always grateful for those who return year after year to volunteer. We still need more bodies, however! 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 fall. Contact the FWG at either 613-234-6767 or [fletcher@ofnc.ca](mailto:fletcher@ofnc.ca).

## **Events**

***Native Plant Sale.*** The plant sale is always held on the first Saturday in June. In 2011, June 4 seemed to be a popular day for many other events, so we had strong competition, and this affected attendance at the sale. Despite this, we raised a nice amount of money. That we did so, is all thanks to the crew of volunteers who make the plant sale 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. It is a lot of work, and perhaps sometimes we forget just how much work goes into this. Kudos to all those who were involved in this major FWG fundraiser. We'd be lost without these great folk.

### ***Wildlife Festival***

The Wildlife Awareness Event at Billings Bridge mall, part of National Wildlife Week, was held over one weekend in March. This annual event is organized by the Ottawa Wildlife Festival ([www.ncrwildlifefestival.org/](http://www.ncrwildlifefestival.org/)) and has occurred for 25 years. However, major changes to the Wildlife Festival mean a cancellation of Wildlife Awareness event for 2012, and very reduced activities overall.

### ***Corporate and other Volunteers***

On June 3, a group of Green Team volunteers from PricewaterhouseCoopers came to the FWG for the 5th year in a row. They divided their time between the Ravine and the Butterfly Meadow. In their one day at the garden, they do work that would take us many days to accomplish, so you can imagine how grateful we are!

Another team came from IBM on June 15 to work on the Fern Trail that is being established in the Ash Woods. Thanks to their help, big changes and big improvements were made to this project.

Still with the Fern Trail, Lis Allison has very kindly donated many ferns (as well as wildflowers) which she even planted for us.

## **Outreach**

In 2010, a company contacted the FWG to enquire whether we'd be willing to grow some native sedges and rushes for them that had to be moved due to construction. They also hoped that seeds could be collected from the plants for them. Long story short, FWG agreed, planted them in summer, collected the seed in fall of 2010, grew it on and in the fall of 2011, the company was able to pick up 6 flats of the sedges and rushes (considerably more than they gave us a year ago) and quite likely will be able to plant all the new ones back at the original site now that construction has finished. They were, I believe, more than pleased by this!

## **Habitats**

### ***Butterfly Meadow.***

The major extension of the Butterfly Meadow continued in 2011, under the leadership of Diane Lepage. A number of sections were rototilled, either in the spring or in the fall, in preparation for planting. This is not as simple as it sounds, for once the rototilling is done, volunteers must carefully sift the soil to try and remove as many of the invasive DSV (dog-strangling vine) roots

as possible before planting commences.

A grant from Fido/Evergreen in 2010, enabled FWG to buy a number of large plants for the newly minted Monarch Waystation, created just west of the Bill Holland Trail, and plants for other areas of the meadow. Common milkweeds were planted in the waystation alongside a large stand of swamp milkweed. The latter, throughout their blooming period, were alive with insects, including the occasional monarch butterfly (this year was not exactly stellar for monarchs up this way, but more on that later).

Nonetheless, work on the meadow involves much more than planting flowers. For one thing, there is the tree planting. Not something one thinks of immediately when envisaging butterfly gardening. For certain species, however, trees are important egg-laying sites. At the FWG, we are anxious to establish a small hackberry grove for the rare American snout butterfly, a species intimately associated with this tree, and which has been seen at the garden for several years (see below). There is one large hackberry tree to the east of the Butterfly Meadow, and in that vicinity the PricewaterhouseCoopers volunteers dug holes in preparation for the five hackberry saplings bought and donated by Peter Hall.

In addition to tree planting, another task involved clearing paths. Well, in this case, one very wide path that serves as both a buffer between a dense thicket of wild raspberry and the planted areas of the meadow, and also as a means of accessing the Monarch Waystation behind the bench. Once again, the PWC volunteers were tremendously helpful with this arduous task. However, the work on this path carried on into August. As Diane noted, *“It required a considerable amount of work, turning the soil, sifting, covering it with pool liner, and covering everything with wood chips.”*

Diane has big plans for 2012, including work on the very exciting Monarch Waystation Project (below). Volunteers are always appreciated. The work party meets at 6 p.m. every Wednesday evening from approximately late spring through to early fall, but check the FWG website as the commencement of the 2012 work season is dependent on weather conditions in spring.



### ***Monarch Butterfly Waystation Project***

In 2011, Fido/Evergreen ran a “Share Your Care” contest which asked people to vote, via Facebook, for the project of their choice from a select list. The FWG was up for the “largest Monarch Waystation in Canada,” a bit of a daunting proposal. People could vote for the same project every day, day after day until the contest closed. Peter got the word out via a network of monarch butterfly enthusiasts, many of whom voted daily for our project. In the end, we came in

at second place, which is pretty darn exciting. This meant that we would receive funding to implement the waystation project.

Once the excitement over winning settled down, we formed a small committee to oversee the project. Peter came up with the brilliant idea of calling the entire FWG a Monarch Waystation, and not just the small site mentioned above, which makes sense if we are planning to be “the biggest”. Bearing that in mind, we developed some preliminary plans and ideas, most of which will begin in 2012. In the meantime, Diane found a nursery that would grow scores of milkweed seeds for us, for even with the new FWG nursery, we just don’t have room. We anticipate 2012 will be a very busy year for this project, and updates will be provided via our newsletter. We’re also planning for some “planting bees” next spring, so please consider coming out to these. Notices will be posted on the bulletin board by the Interpretive Centre, and on the FWG’s website: [www.ofnc.ca/fletcher.php](http://www.ofnc.ca/fletcher.php)

We don’t want the project to be just about planting milkweed and other plants. Peter very sensibly noted that we should be plugged into the “North American Monarch Conservation Plan”. We want to become part of a larger network, share and learn with and from others. We also want to provide education locally about monarch butterflies, and stress that by providing for monarchs we are also creating habitat for countless other butterflies and pollinating insects such as hover flies and bees. There are exciting times ahead, so stay tuned.

We have several galleries on our Pbase photographic site, devoted to monarchs and milkweeds. If you are so inclined, please check these out at: [www.pbase.com/fwg/monarch\\_waystation](http://www.pbase.com/fwg/monarch_waystation)

## Invasive Species



In the introduction, I alluded to new volunteers rejuvenating old projects. In 2011, Barry Cottam, who first met DSV in late summer of 2010 (and said it was hate at first sight), spent the winter teaching himself about the species, and devising ways and means to tackle the problem at the garden. In the spring

he initiated “The Invasive Species Group”, TISG. Although he was interested in tackling all

invasives at the garden, it soon became apparent that DSV was going to occupy everyone's energy. Volunteers met every Tuesday morning from late spring through fall. A core group of 6, plus one laggard who didn't manage to make every Tuesday (that would be me) met regularly and the work they did was truly astonishing. In addition to the regular Tuesday workdays, Barry notes that *"We 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."*

Barry explains that the 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."* While the main focus was on cutting back DSV in sunny areas where growth is greatest and seed production higher, the emphasis turned to bagging seed pods once they started forming, to try and contain at least some of the spread. Barry notes that *"we can estimate several rough 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."*

Those of us more jaded by the many years spent working on DSV, knew, the plants would begin growing back almost right away, but Barry's enthusiasm spurred us on and at the end of the summer, it was apparent that hard work had made a difference for this season. The real acid test will come next year and the following years, when we assess the results of this year's work. Barry will be reviewing and tweaking the strategy for 2012. He could certainly use your help, so if you are so disposed, please check the FWG website for the 2012 TISG start date and come on out!

One volunteer, Glenda, set up a fantastic TISG blog which, with input from Barry and photos by Glenda, provides a much information about the work undertaken. It is well worth checking out at: [tiscatfwg.blogspot.com/](http://tiscatfwg.blogspot.com/) And of course, many kudos to Barry for spearheading and coordinating this project, and to the volunteers for their hard work.

## **Plants and Animals**

### ***Birds***

The nice new kestrel box remained unused by kestrels, and perhaps we have seen the end of this species nesting at the garden where it was once such a regular. However, green herons were quite noticeable around the pond before, during and after breeding season, with at least three juveniles present, and that was encouraging after their recent absence. Our regular breeding species (yellow warblers, black-capped chickadees, cardinals, etc.) nested in much the same number as in recent years, and the number of breeding tree swallows in 2011 was the same as in 2010, and this counts as a positive thing. A female mallard with one young was in the pond for over a week in early July, but one day they were both gone, and the duckling, too young to fly, may have been eaten by a snapping turtle or some other creature. Speaking of nesting, during the DSV work, we came across at least four song sparrow nests made amongst and attached to, old

DSV vines. The nests were also made using DSV fibres as well as grass, and placed on or close to, the ground.

### ***Insects***

Most exciting was the observation of two American snout butterflies at the FWG. They were first found there in August 2008 (Hanrahan, 2009), and again in 2010, and now, 2011. Interestingly at least two individuals were seen together or close together, each of these years, so it raises the question: are they breeding at the FWG? As noted earlier, there is a large hackberry tree at the garden, plus five more newly planted ones, with which we hope to encourage the species, as the hackberry is their larval food source. While an abundant butterfly south of Canada, it is very rare up this way.



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Other than the excitement of the snout, butterflies were relatively scarce, not just at the FWG, but all over. An exception was the black swallowtail, whose larvae were very common at the garden, particularly in the Butterfly Meadow, almost all being found on wild parsnip. We eventually saw a few monarch butterflies, and found about 4 of their caterpillars, all in late summer. Still on Lepidoptera, Diane added many more moth species to our ongoing moth inventory, as well as a substantial number of moth photographs to our PBase photographic galleries ([www.pbase.com/fwg/moths\\_of\\_the\\_fwg](http://www.pbase.com/fwg/moths_of_the_fwg)).

An interesting dragonfly appeared in early June, a Swift River Cruiser, identified for me by Chris and Bob. In fact, early summer was pretty good for dragonflies at the garden, and most other places in the region. So while butterflies were down, odonates seemed to be up!

As always, we added more species to our insect inventory, including flies, wasps, and some pretty Chrysomelid beetles. All common species, but just not found by us previously. Possibly the most intriguing was the feather-legged fly (*Trichopoda pennipes*), a Tachinid, first found by Diane in the BYG, and a new addition to our list. It is not that it is rare or even uncommon, but that it is just such a neat looking critter.

### ***Mammals***

It is now mid-November as I write, and thus far no beaver has shown up at our pond. For the two previous winters (2009/2010 and 2010/2011) a young beaver appeared at the garden and settled in for the winter. The first one gathered quite a food raft and quickly built a dam which helped to deepen our pond (something we were happy about). He left in spring, 2010 ([www.ofnc.ca/fletcher/our\\_animals/beaver/beaver\\_e.php](http://www.ofnc.ca/fletcher/our_animals/beaver/beaver_e.php)). One or two more beaver stopped by late in spring, but then nothing until early winter came around again. The beaver of last winter was much more active than the other one, and ventured further afield, gathering poplar and

maples. He also kept a hole open in the ice for a good part of the winter and we could see his well-trod trail under the bridge and into the ravine. But once spring came, he left. As happened the previous winter, some one, or several some ones, broke the dam all winter long, despite our signs asking that things be left intact. Very, very frustrating and completely uncalled for. At any rate, we are very relieved that we do not have a resident beaver for the winter (yet anyway!).



Conditions in the pond are exceptionally poor for these animals, and food is scarce. I checked the pond yesterday (November 16) and the water level is so low that mud flats are exposed on both sides of the pond. A beaver dam would have helped to keep the water in!

Muskrats are very active in early July, and spent considerable time swimming around the pond gathering food and dragging it back to their bank burrow. Quite often, I saw them pulling towing bundles of flowering rush, the roots of which they eat.

### ***Reptiles and amphibians***

Surprisingly, the red-eared slider, a non-native species, which often can't survive the cold winters, appeared again in the summer of 2011. Or perhaps it was a different one, dropped off by someone fed up with caring for a pet turtle. Who knows. We saw no Blanding's turtle in 2011, and only one of the painted turtles (the large one). While cleaning out nest boxes in autumn, we came across the eggs of a snapping turtle that had been dug up, above the pond. Early in the year, a large snapper was in the pond, perhaps the same one that we saw last year and the year before that.

Wood frogs are never present in great numbers at FWG, but this year we barely heard them, just a few calls over a day or two. American toads and gray treefrogs, on the other hand, were active and loud! Green frogs seem to hang on year after year, despite being caught by crows, mallards, and all the green herons.

Lists of birds, insects, mammals, reptiles and amphibians, and wildflowers, are on our website and updated regularly. Just visit this url: [www.ofnc.ca/fletcher/alphabet.php](http://www.ofnc.ca/fletcher/alphabet.php), and scroll down the list of wildlife-related subjects to find these lists, and much more.

## Photo Galleries

Our photo galleries on the PBase site are now in their fourth year which seems hard to believe (we started them in August 2008). We have had over 640,000 visits - and counting. The number of galleries has jumped to 122 (from 68 at this time last year), with nearly 3,500 images. Many of these galleries are our monthly FWG Blogs, probably the most popular part of our PBase site. Photographic contributions are from many people, and they show the FWG and its creatures through many different eyes. Please take the time to browse our galleries at:



[www.pbase.com/fwg](http://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 a.m. to 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), Tuesday morning (Invasive Species), and Wednesday evening (Butterfly Meadow), spring through fall.

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

**Photos:** Christine Hanrahan, except where noted.

## References

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