



The Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club

2012 Conservation Award - Non-Member: Biodiversity Conservancy International and National Capital Commission

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This award goes to Biodiversity Conservancy International (BCI) for the "National Capital Greenbelt Sand Dune Conservation Project" at the Pinhey Sand Dune and its partner the National Capital Commission.

The initiative began with the realization that the Pinhey dune, located off Slack Road, between Woodroffe Avenue and Merivale Road, was going to disappear. This is a unique habitat of dry, open, inland sand deposits not directly associated with rivers or lakes. The specialized flora and fauna found in these areas include provincially and regionally rare species.

The dunes were formed on the edges of the early postglacial Champlain Sea approximately 8,000 years ago. Over the past 60 to 70 years in eastern Ontario, the dunes have declined to only one per cent of their natural coverage. Trees, invasive shrubs, urban sprawl and the cessation of fire were all contributing to the loss of this unique habitat.

Of particular interest and concern is the ghost tiger beetle - a 12-millimetre long insect the same colour as the fine-grained sand and whose only home in Ottawa is the dunes on Slack Road. The beetles are not the only insects in this extreme environment. There are also Ant Lions which dig pits to trap ants.

In 2011, Biodiversity Conservancy International, a local scientific non-governmental organization, took the lead. Pete Dang and Henri Goulet went to the Trillium foundation and got \$10,000 in June 2011 to restore and expand the dunes over the next two years. Next they approached Eva Katic at the National Capital Commission who quickly became an enthusiastic supporter.

The organizing committee consisted of Pete Dang, Project Director, Stephen Aitken, Project Coordinator, Henri Goulet, Biodiversity Assessment, Joanne Hakkaku, Community Engagement and Volunteer Coordinator, Nina Edson, Volunteer Recruitment, Andrew Mott, Field Operation, TD Trinh, Logistics and Team Coordinator and John Davidson, Communications.

By the late summer of 2012 considerable work had been done along with a major education effort. Working with many community volunteers they were successful in opening up an area of the dune by removing small trees and buckthorn shrubs by hand, using shovels and spades. The group worked with aerial images of the area over the last 75 years to track some of the damage, then removed plants, weeds and trees to reclaim some of the habitat.

As the restoration process continued in the fall of 2012, the NCC provided heavy equipment to cut trees and dig out stumps to remove encroaching vegetation. When they were finished an area of over four times the original sand area was opened.

One of the mandates of the initial funding was to establish a mechanism to conserve the restoration accomplished by the project. In October, 2012, BCI created Stewards of Sand Dunes (SOS-Dunes) as the permanent steward of the sand dune system in Ottawa.

Now that the dunes have been restored to some of their former glory, the BCI - SOS-Dunes acting as stewards, and the National Capital Commission as the property owners, will work together as caretakers to protect the habitat and to educate the public with signage about the ecology.

This is a wonderful example of community-based conservation which brought a diverse group of people together.

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