

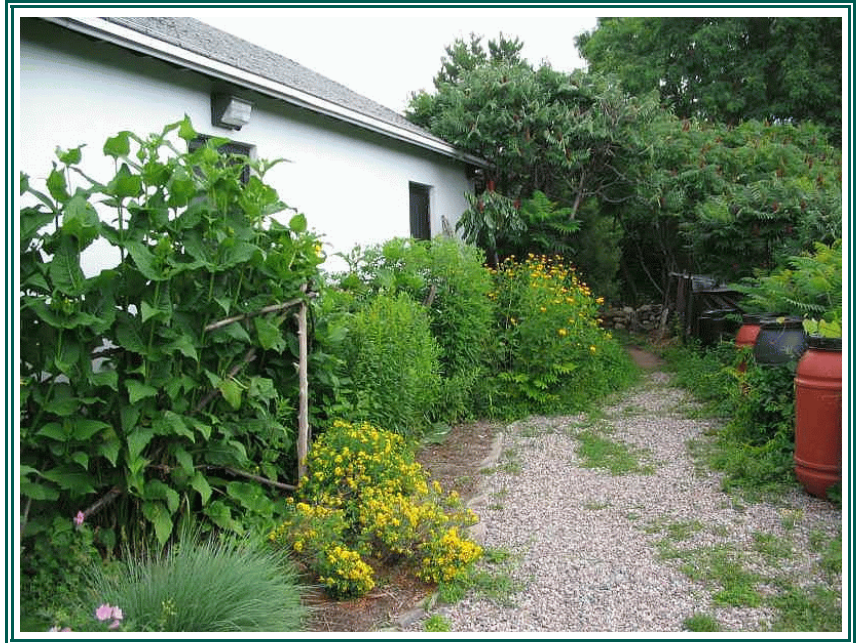
News from the FWG: Summer 2006

By Christine Hanrahan

There were fewer prolonged periods of intense heat in the summer of 2006, but it was still a scorcher. Unlike the previous summer, however, this one saw lots of rain and high winds with some spectacular thunderstorms. The heat and the moisture provided excellent growing conditions and everything at the garden (and elsewhere too) came up earlier and in abundance.

Backyard Garden News

With all the changes from last year - new beds, reconfiguration of existing beds, moving plants from one spot to another, some of us were worried that the BYG would be less luxuriant than previously. However, we need not have worried. Helped along by the ministrations of BYG volunteers (out in force every Friday morning despite the heat), and aided by the weather, the garden looked beautiful. By the time of writing (early August) it was lush and bountiful and the plants looked bigger than ever. Even the nibblings by rabbits (some might say 'attacks') on plants such as Swamp Milkweed couldn't detract from the beauty. Most of the plants in the BYG have now been labeled making it easier for visitors to know what they are looking at.



South side of Interpretive Centre

A lot of time and energy went into repairing the BYG pond which was leaking badly. There are still some problems to iron out but it looks much better now that it is filled with water again. David Hobden even reports that a Green Frog has moved back!

Work in the BYG takes place on Friday mornings from spring through fall. If you enjoy gardening with convivial company, want to learn more about native plants and/or gardening for wildlife, and have time to spare, why not volunteer? Contact Jay at jay_ladell@yahoo.com or leave a message at 613-234-6767.

Plant Sale

Despite gray overcast skies and the threat of rain, our annual plant sale was another roaring success, yielding enough funds to carry on with needed work in the garden. Many thanks to all the volunteers who carefully grew and tended plants for the sale, the folk who turned up to help out on the day itself and to Sandy Garland and Jay Ladell for overseeing the event, and of course

to the people who came and bought our plants! The FWG Native Plant Sale is always the first Saturday in June, so you can mark your 2007 calendars now.

Managing the Garden

Invasive species

Pale Swallowwort AKA Dog-strangling Vine or DSV is the species that causes us most grief. Over the years we have mowed, pulled, cut, scythed, and smothered the plants, but still they continue to grow. Much time has been spent discussing the issue and I believe that we have to acknowledge that we cannot eradicate the plant from the garden without drastic action (the Agent Orange approach, or fire) which of course, we will not and cannot undertake. The most we can hope for is to control the spread of DSV. And the best way to do that is to curtail seed production.

We always seek to balance the biodiversity of the garden with the need to cut large areas of DSV. Cutting always leads to the loss of something besides the DSV and also has an impact on wildlife. When two sections of the FWG were mowed this summer, Meadow Voles and American Toads were seen scrambling to get away. We don't like the negative impact this has on other forms of life either, such as larvae of butterflies and moths which depend on grasses, countless other organisms that live in these areas, and so on. It is the perennial conundrum we face: whatever we do, or don't do, is bound to impact something negatively.

Of course, we're always looking for signs that something may be affecting the plants, so yellowing of leaves, indications of insect damage, give us momentary hope that something (at last!) may be attacking the DSV. This year, I noticed that both Canada Goldenrod and Grass-leaved Goldenrod were growing exceptionally well, spreading into areas they had not occupied

before. At the same time I noticed that DSV was not growing up amongst the goldenrods as it does in the midst of most other plant species. In the Old Field habitat I noticed that in an area I'd attempted to clear of a thick DSV growth in 2005, half of the site in 2006 sported a dense stand of Canada Goldenrod in place of DSV. Research yielded a number of papers that discussed the allelopathic



Extensive goldenrod stands in Old Field, July 2006

effect of Goldenrod on many plant species. DSV was not specifically mentioned and I don't know for sure that allelopathy is causing the dearth of DSV around Goldenrod stands, but it will be interesting to see what, if anything, happens in subsequent years. I was also encouraged to see that a stand of Flowering Raspberry on the eastern edge of the Old Field has, just this year, started spreading significantly into a particularly thick growth of DSV.



Goldenrod, Old Field, September 2006

In the meantime, we continue to try and halt seed production in DSV. Kudos to the Sunday Morning work group who have done a phenomenal job in this regard.

Butterfly Meadow

Every Wednesday evening in the summer volunteers gathered at FWG to help Diane (project leader) and Sandy continue creating the new section of the Butterfly Meadow, just west of the existing one. The plants, put into the ground in late spring, are thriving and careful tending ensures the site remains DSV free. A generous grant from Home Depot given specifically for the Butterfly Meadow, has enabled the FWG to purchase plants and equipment for this site. Plans for the meadow include rocks for butterflies to bask on, a stone wall and perhaps a split rail fence.

Pond

Mid-summer is always the time for Flowering Rush removal from the pond. Each year for several years Sandy and Diane with occasional help from others, have waded into the water and removed enormous quantities of this invasive plant. Another plant that has spread rapidly since a small patch was discovered in Fall 2005, is Swamp Loosestrife or Decodon, a native species. Most of this will be removed, although a small population will be left. Frog's-bit is yet another invasive that is thriving in our pond and it too is being removed.

Outside Help

A group of Stewardship Rangers spent three days at FWG helping to control DSV and planting new shrubs. They also had a hands-on lesson from Tony Denton on identification and control of Buckthorn.

Signs

Some of you may already have seen the new sign by the parking lot. This has been a long time coming and is largely due to the persistence, determination and dedication of Charlie Clifford. He has handled the project from the beginning and, with the help of Al Beaulieu, David Hobden and Tony Denton, repaired and rejuvenated the entire structure. You can see the crew at work in the accompanying photo. In time, we will have a new map of the garden in place, as well as



Working on the new sign. July 2006

space for posting notices, information sheets and other items.

Miscellaneous

Summer Employee

Our summer employee this year, Jenna Rozema, proved to be an enthusiastic worker. It was sometimes hard to keep up with her since she completed every task almost before we could turn around. She came up with lots of creative ideas and suggestions such as 'This Week at FWG' on the outside bulletin board featuring photos and information about interesting observations around the garden. Wednesday mornings during the summer found her working with a small group from a Carleton University summer camp, introducing the kids to neat things in the natural world and showing the adults in the group what a great place the FWG is!

Talks, Walks and Media

Several tours of the FWG were given to small groups of people this summer, and the committee was also contacted to provide assistance or give talks at several venues including the Ottawa Folk Festival in late August. The rejuvenation of the Butterfly Meadow was mentioned in an Ottawa Citizen story on Butterflies and Butterfly Gardening, and CJOH TV did a short segment on the FWG which was aired on their News at Noon show in mid-July.

Monarch Teachers Network

On 10 August, a large group of teachers involved with educating students about the Monarch Butterfly, spent an afternoon at FWG.

Plants and Animals

Birds

Summer is a quieter time for birds at the FWG. The excitement of migration is over, and the serious business of raising a family takes over. Green Herons, always one of the star avian attractions at the FWG, were present almost daily from early May onwards. Although they didn't nest in the garden, they apparently did so near Hartwell Locks since they were usually spotted flying in that direction after feeding at the pond. One day in early July they arrived at the pond with three youngsters in tow! For about 9 days all five were easily observed as they hung out at the pond putting a dent in the frog population. The green frogs continued calling, heedless of their fate as the herons picked off one after another. Eventually the frogs shut up and the herons vanished. For awhile two were seen in the company of an adult Black-crowned Night Heron near

the Rideau Canal.

American Kestrels also deserted us and nested elsewhere. However, like the herons, they brought their youngster to feed at the FWG and for about 10 days in July the family could be seen around the red barn.

Red-winged Blackbirds were fewer in number this year with perhaps 5 active nests, due to lack of nesting sites occasioned by removal of dead cattails in fall 2005. I watched females several times carry nesting material to the pond and unable to find a nest site, drop the material and fly off. Also fewer in number this year were Tree Swallows. In early July I did a quick check of about 12 boxes near the pond and found that many had either no nest or a partly built nest. Unusually, 5 pairs of swallows were late nesters, still sitting on eggs or feeding young in the box in early August, long after other swallows had nested and left the garden. I usually clean the boxes in the fall and will have a full report for the next update. By the time of writing, mid-August, there were still a few tree swallows around, joined occasionally by several Barn Swallows.

We have just updated our FWG Bird List which now stands at 131 species. Copies are available from the Interpretive Centre.

Other Fauna

It has been a remarkable year for butterflies in the region, and no less so at FWG. For the first time in several years we saw good numbers of Common Ringlets and Least Skippers, as well as Silvery Blues. Clouded Sulphurs, however, continue to be seen infrequently. Monarch butterflies are probably the stars of the butterfly world in any year, but particularly in 2006 when they were easily the most common species found. They arrived in early June and their numbers built until at least a dozen, sometimes far more, could be seen on any given day at FWG. They were observed laying eggs on both milkweed and its close relative, Pale Swallowwort. Quite a large number of Monarch caterpillars were also found. Eastern Tailed Blues



Female Black Swallowtail

generated some excitement amongst butterfly watchers at the garden. The first one for 2006 at FWG was found by Diane Lepage in mid-June near the Butterfly Meadow. A few weeks later I found one in the New Woods and after that we saw them often. On 7th August Diane saw 4 in the Butterfly Meadow. A female Black Swallowtail with a stunning brilliant blue band on the tail was found in late July. It is highly unusual to see such an extreme band of colour on the female. More typical but no less striking was a second female Black Swallowtail that hung around for a day or so before vanishing. Males of the species were very common at the garden through to the time of writing (mid-August). Other species found included Hobomok Skipper, Long-dash Skipper, Peck's Skipper, European Skipper, Dun Skipper, Banded Hairstreak, Striped Hairstreak, Great Spangled Fritillary, Northern Crescent, and Little Wood Satyr, White Admiral, Viceroy, and Milbert's Tortoiseshell.

I'm compiling a list of insects other than butterflies and moths from FWG, and have focussed on looking for, photographing and identifying these fascinating creatures, helped by Jenna, our summer employee who is equally fascinated by insects. Eastern Forktail damselflies were common at the garden, along with scores of Bluet species, Slender Spreadwings, Twelve-spotted Skimmers and Widow Skimmers. Canada Darners began to appear all around the garden in July. Mid-summer brought on a bounty of insects including Pennsylvania Leatherwings, Ambush Bugs, Large Red Milkweed Beetles, Milkweed Bugs, Japanese Beetles by the hundreds, various plant bugs (Miridae), scores of lady beetles including the introduced 7-spotted and Asian Lady Beetles, the native Spotted Lady Beetle, and the minute *Brachiacantha ursina*. Cicadas began calling several weeks earlier than their usual 'start-up date' of early August.



Hummingbird Moth

Moths were also abundant. Hummingbird Moths (Hummingbird Clearwings) were more common than I've seen before at FWG. Later on, when the Evening Primrose bloomed I managed to find one Primrose Moth, a small, strikingly pink moth with a white head. One night, Diane Lepage and I set up a sheet with a black light to look for moths. That exercise added substantially to the FWG moth list. Diane is very knowledgeable about moths and a tremendous resource for information about these insects. For a list of moths as well as a list of other insects found at the FWG please visit the website at <http://www.ofnc.ca/fletcher.php>

Frogs continue to do well in our pond and we saw and heard good numbers of the regular breeding species: Wood Frogs, American Toads, Green Frogs, and Gray Treefrogs. The



Gretchen Denton

Blanding's Turtle found in the spring had either left or was lying low (as this species is wont to do once summer arrives) because it was not seen again, but a Painted Turtle was noted occasionally throughout the summer months.

FWG Volunteers

Over the years we've seen many volunteers come and go, their reasons for participating and their reasons for leaving as varied as the individuals. We are really lucky, however, to have a core group of volunteers who have stayed with the project for many years. In the last issue you met two such people, and here you will meet three more.

Gretchen and Tony Denton have been volunteering at the FWG for at least 8 years. Initially it was Tony who volunteered at the FWG soon after retiring, inspired as he says "*by a spring birding tour of the gardens led by Jeff Harrison.*" He found the work and the company congenial and "*after three Fridays I suggested to Gretchen that she might enjoy coming also, and she did.*"

Gretchen is a familiar name and face, being the first point of contact for volunteers at the FWG, and is a regular part of the BYG group. Tony is the lead on our Buckthorn control as well as a generally very handy person who helps out with, as he says *“all the tool maintenance, building and repair jobs”*. In other words, these two are an integral part of the FWG team and hugely appreciated by all of us.

As with most FWG volunteers, an interest in nature was a big part of their decision to volunteer at the garden. Tony says that *“nature had always been a background interest until retiring, when we took up birding, I hiked with the Rideau Trail Club and later started other nature related activities.”* Gretchen agrees, noting *“we both also love listening for the birds as we work and seeing the occasional unexpected ones.”* Indeed, Gretchen added a new bird to our bird list this spring with the sighting of an Eastern Towhee in the BYG.

Tony found that the garden *“offered an interesting area which could be enjoyed with good company ... in a relaxed atmosphere”* and particularly appreciated the lack of pressure on volunteers. Not being *“particularly interested in gardening”* Tony offered help with repair jobs and tool maintenance as noted above. However, he soon began helping Dale Crook with buckthorn removal, quickly taking over the project entirely when Dale became too ill to continue. *“In the following years I became the only regular buckthorn puller, often alone, but sometimes with regular and occasional helpers. It has become a great pleasure to be out in the isolated areas of the FWG at all seasons of the year and to experience the wildlife, often in areas where people do not usually go.”* Tony has been tackling this invasive species for over 5 years now and has made an impressive dent in the buckthorn population. The tenacity of this species almost rivals that of Pale Swallowwort so there is still enough work to keep him busy for some time to come. Visitors often stop to ask what he is doing and Tony is always willing to take a break and explain. He emphasizes the importance of recognizing *“these weed trees which are overwhelming our woodlands, creating a monoculture which limits the diversity of bird, mammal and plant species.”* He has used his hands-on knowledge of buckthorn control to help others, such as community groups, in tackling this problem.

Gretchen too has learned a tremendous amount about invasive species and like Tony, has taken this knowledge and helped others to respond to the threat of problem species. As she says, *“I found myself using this knowledge in my own neighbourhood, when I recognized garlic mustard and swallowwort (and of course the buckthorn that my husband constantly remarks on), and where I have tried to spread the word.”* But there is more to the garden than invasives, and for Gretchen the peaceful aspects exert a strong appeal. *“I like the space at the FWG, the relative quiet, being surrounded by plants*



Tony Denton

and trees. I like having the leisure to stay in one spot, looking closely at the plants with time to learn them, and digging in the dirt (I like digging in the dirt), and feeling that everybody else is enjoying doing the same.”

In the early days Gretchen remembers long-time volunteer Robina Bennett pointing out two weeds and telling her to start by digging them! *“So I learned those, and I asked about the plants around them, and Robina (and everyone else) was very glad to inform me. It was Robina, later, who decided I could take over the job of phoning volunteers, as she was ready to retire from that. So I got to know the volunteers better, and they continued to be nice people. I can’t say it’s always a thrill to keep lists, but it is easier now by email.”*

As an added bonus to volunteering at FWG, Gretchen notes that when she and Tony wanted to convert some grass into flowerbeds *“the FWG volunteers helped us”* and *“gave us hundreds of suggestions.”* Summing up her experience with FWG, Gretchen says *“soothing surroundings, nice people, lots of ideas.”* Could you ask for anything more?

Somewhere around the time **Marilyn Ward** took over answering the OFNC’s phone (yes, she is



Marilyn Ward

the voice of the OFNC) she also made her first visit to FWG. Like Tony and Gretchen, she was introduced to the garden through birdwatching when she heard that it was a good place to see birds. Regular visits turned into a desire to be part of the project and before long Marilyn had become an integral part of the FWG volunteer crew. She said it felt good to volunteer for something that was completely different from answering the phone. At first Marilyn concentrated on work inside the Interpretive Centre, filing articles and reports, tidying up, organizing the clutter, but eventually she also began working in the garden, helping out where needed. It wasn’t long before Marilyn became a necessary and important part of the FWG. She is the ‘Coffee Lady’, the one who stops work to go inside and make coffee, for the all-important coffee break that gives the BYG group a chance to catch up with each other, chat, exchange stories, etc.

Once a week, usually on a Wednesday morning, Marilyn comes to the FWG to pick up the recyclables, take out the garbage, check on supplies and buy whatever is needed (coffee, cookies, cleaning products, etc.), and in general keep the centre tidy and functioning. For all her work at FWG (and for answering the OFNC phone for years), Marilyn was given the OFNC’s Member of the Year Award for 2004.

When asked what she likes best about volunteering at FWG, Marilyn answered that she enjoys meeting new people and appreciates the camaraderie that exists amongst the volunteers. She feels she has learned a tremendous amount about plants, she loves to watch the garden grow and evolve, and she particularly likes hearing and seeing all the birds. She also enjoys meeting all the dogs that visit the garden too, and for the regular canine visitors Marilyn is well known for always having a biscuit or two on hand!

Volunteer Opportunities

If you would like to help us remove invasive species, plant trees, work in the BYG, or with any number of other activities, please contact the FWG (details at end of article).

The Friday morning (BYG), Wednesday evening (Butterfly Meadow) and Sunday morning (the rest of the FWG) work crews will carry on work through the fall.

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

All photos by Christine Hanrahan except as noted.

Errata: A photograph in the Spring 2006 update was mis-labeled. It should have read "*The two amigos (Painted Turtle and Blanding's Turtle)*".

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: <http://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
 - David Hobden, Chair, FWG Management Committee: dhobden@magma.ca
 - Jay Ladell, BYG Manager: jay_ladell@yahoo.com
 - Sandy Garland: website and information about the FWG: sgarland@magma.ca
 - Christine Hanrahan: bird and wildlife observations: vanessa@magma.ca
- AAFC Security: 613-759-1985