

## News from the FWG: Winter 2006-2007

*By Christine Hanrahan*



*FWG pond in winter*

Autumn can be a busy time in the garden, especially if the weather cooperates. Winter, however, is a time to relax and contemplate what we've accomplished in the previous year. It is also a time to think of the year to come, to make plans, to dream, and hope. But as winter edges towards spring, it also becomes time to get ready for the busy season ahead.

### **Backyard Garden News**

Jay Ladell has been the BYG Manager since spring, 2003, but now, with an increasingly busy work and family life, he

finds that he must step back from his role and let another take over. He developed a creative set of plans for the BYG, which have been mostly implemented. My personal favourites are the stone walls and the rock garden, both of which add tremendous character and interest to the garden. He also revitalized and revamped our plant sale, making it into a top quality event that people come to year after year. We'd like to thank Jay profusely for his dedication to the garden. Many thanks, Jay!

In the meantime, we're looking for someone with gardening experience, knowledge of native plants and the ability to work with a group of volunteers. If you think you would enjoy devoting one Friday morning a week during the spring, summer and fall to this effort, in the company of a congenial and very friendly group of people, give us a call at 613-234-6767 and leave a message. We're also always looking for more volunteers for the BYG. So, if you enjoy gardening in a wonderful natural setting, want to learn more about native plants and/or gardening for wildlife, and have time to spare, why not volunteer? Contact info as above.

### **Signs**

We're quite proud of our new map sign-bulletin board by the parking lot, and hope you've had a chance to stop by and check it out. Interesting items from the FWG blog as well as other notices are posted. Next up, we're planning to erect signs to identify the major habitats at the garden. They should be in place by this summer, thanks once again to the work of Charlie Clifford.

## Problems

During Winterlude, security in the Arboretum is stepped up, with police officers on ATVs patrolling the site. We are told this is primarily to prevent theft and vandalism from vehicles at this busy time of the season. We certainly have no quarrel with this worthwhile endeavour. However, we do not understand why they feel it necessary to ride through the habitats, along our narrow trails, and over the pond bridge at FWG. There are no parking lots in the middle of the garden. Neither the trails nor the bridge were built to withstand the onslaught of frequent ATV use. We voiced our complaints more than a few times, both in person and by email, but have been, at this point anyway, ignored.

Although it pains me to say it, we are also having problems with some of the dog owners at the garden. They seem to view the FWG as a wasteland where their dogs can chase wildlife and run wherever they want. I have spoken to some of these owners, and it is a small minority that refuse to listen. Telling these people that we set up the garden for wildlife, not dogs, does no good. It is a conundrum for us, since those of us most intimately connected as volunteers with the garden are dog owners ourselves. Fortunately, the good dog owners far outweigh the bad, and help us in many, many ways, but the few bad apples make for a huge problem. The saddest thing, for me anyway, is finding the animals killed by the dogs.



*Downy Woodpecker, BYG*

## Coming Events

**Saturday, May 12<sup>th</sup>. International Migratory Bird Day.** The FWG has been participating in this event since 1996. This year's theme is climate change and its impact on bird life. Join us at the FWG from 10 a.m. to 12 noon for a guided birding walk, free refreshments and information about birds and birding.

**Saturday, June 2<sup>nd</sup>. Annual Native Plant Sale. 9:30 a.m. 12:30 p.m.** Please join us once again at the FWG, for this popular sale. Where else can you find such a selection of native plants at such a good price! Donations of native plants warmly accepted. This is the major fundraising event for the FWG. Contact us at 613-234-6767.

**Walks at the FWG.** Keep your eyes on our bulletin boards for details of informal nature walks at the FWG led by various volunteers.

## Plants and Animals

The unusually warm weather throughout November, December and most of January, with very little snow cover until the latter part of January, led many to wonder how the wildlife would cope with such peculiar conditions. Around the garden, birds migrated through and winter visitors arrived as usual. However, this is not to say that the disturbingly warm weather won't have had an impact that we don't, as yet, know about.

### *Birds*

An unusually late White-crowned Sparrow was found in mid-December near the OFNC feeder at the garden. It was seen for only a few days. No winter finches or

Bohemian Waxwings have been reported at the garden thus far (mid-February). The only owl sighting was that of a Great Horned Owl, briefly seen in the Ash Woods. A Northern Shrike was observed fleetingly on February 2<sup>nd</sup>. Up to six American Robins could be seen in the Ravine, often drinking from the running water trickling under the bridge. Dark-eyed Juncos flit between the farm areas, the Arboretum and the FWG, but I've not seen more than 6 at any time this winter. A first year male American Kestrel was noted in January, and again in early February.

By the time this issue of the update arrives, spring will have arrived and many of the early migrants will be back in the garden again. Keep your eyes peeled for the 'firsts', the first Red-winged Blackbird, first Tree Swallow, first Eastern Phoebe ....

### ***Other Fauna***

In the fall, I began writing a series of articles about the common mammals found at the FWG. So far, Eastern Chipmunk, Eastern Grey Squirrel, Muskrat, Red Fox, and Red Squirrel have been completed and can be found on the FWG website complete with lots of photos at:

<http://www.ofnc.ca/fletcher/alphabet.php>.



*Eastern Cottontail, FWG*



*Red Squirrel, FWG*

During the winter months, we see the signs of animal presence more often than the animals themselves. The exception, of course, is the very vocal and visible Red Squirrel! While I never see more than a few Cottontails around the garden at any one time, it often looks like we have an entire army of them feeding on the sumac. What with rabbits chewing the stems from the ground up and squirrels, both red and grey, chewing the branches, it seems a miracle that we have any sumacs left at all. Fortunately, these important wildlife shrubs are fast growing and fast spreading. The foxes, absent for over a year, are back at their main den site, or at least, two have been seen there sporadically since mid-January. Occasionally, we see their tracks at FWG. Other mammals found around the garden in winter are Meadow Voles, mice, Red Squirrels and Grey Squirrels. All of them common species, if not always commonly found. And yet, how much do



we really know about these animals we see, or see signs of, every day?

### **FWG Volunteers**

Over the past year I've been profiling our FWG volunteers. Most of them are happy to remain anonymous. However, even fellow volunteers don't always know much about the folk they work alongside. I think it is fitting that our volunteers are given a voice. This issue, we are looking at one of the hardest working people on the FWG Management Committee, **Charlie Clifford**.



**Charlie Clifford**

When I asked Charlie if he would mind being profiled for this update, he expressed surprise that I'd consider him, when, in his opinion, others have contributed more. The truth is, everyone contributes, each in their own unique way. And not least of all, Charlie, whose support is invaluable. Most significantly, he has become our 'Sign Man', the person behind all the new signs you see at the garden, because he believes that signs will *"enhance the value of the brochures and trail guides of the FWG."* A tremendous amount of time and energy goes into this work, including plotting out the style, design, size, and colour of the signs, investigating and comparing costs, searching out good buys on posts and lumber, buying the material, etc. At present, he is investigating habitat signs for the garden. Long before we had new signs, he refurbished the existing ones and kept them in good repair.

Charlie is also responsible for maintaining the Bill Holland Trail in spring and summer, mowing the path to make walking easy for visitors. As he does this he keeps an eye on the signs and the trail markers, repairing and replacing as needed. He also helps with a number of other tasks, including building plant tables for the plant sale.

It fascinates me how people find their way to the FWG, and why. In Charlie's case, the process began, as it has for others, with birds. In 1992 he joined the Monday Morning Birding Group (MMBG), which led to him joining the OFNC. In those days, the group was comprised of some familiar names including Annette Murray, still a regular Friday morning volunteer at the BYG. About a decade after joining the birding group, Charlie was invited by Frank Pope to join the OFNC Council. As he explains, Frank *"gave me a copy of the OFNC constitution to check over the various committees. He also gave me a copy of the Terms of Reference for the FWG dated Jan 1998. This may have been a nudge to help make up my mind but it wasn't needed since I found the FWG to be the most interesting of the lot and started to attend their management meetings."*

Charlie began attending Management Committee meetings in 2002 and says *"from the start I*

*was very impressed by the knowledge and skills of the Committee members. As a physicist, I had only a layman's understanding of plants, bugs and lichens and these people could rattle off both Latin names and formal details of life cycles!!* “Intrigued by what he was seeing and hearing, he mentioned this to Frank who then gave him a copy of a collection of reports called “Contributions To FWG Planning”. Charlie said he found it fascinating “*even when some of the proposals were at cross purposes with each other. I was hooked.*”

Charlie was no stranger to natural history when he joined the FWG. As he said, he was already a long time member of the MMBG, and his background “*included much camping as the family grew and a good number of eco-tours and hikes on nature trails in various countries since retirement.*” He realized, however, that at FWG his best contributions could be made on the support side. With an SUV he was able to “*help transport plants, get the lumber and help David build the bridge at the pond, pull some buckthorn and transport the new lawn mower etc.*”

I asked Charlie what he got out of working at the FWG, and he replied: “*Working at the FWG has had many rewards. These include the continued evolution of the BYG, the enthusiasm and hard work of so many people to fight invasives and to improve the different habitats - especially the Butterfly Meadow and the Pond, the start on better identification of the Bill Holland nature trail, the care of nesting bird sites, the patient explanations to people like me of particular items at the FWG and of course the pleasure of meeting the volunteers at coffee breaks.*” It is our pleasure to work with Charlie at the FWG.

### **Volunteer Opportunities**

After reading about Charlie’s work at the garden, perhaps you feel inspired to join us. We can always use help in removing invasive species, planting trees, working in the BYG, or with any number of other activities. Why not contact us? (Details at end of article). Regular volunteer groups meet on Friday morning (BYG), Wednesday evening (Butterfly Meadow) and Sunday morning (the rest of the FWG), spring through fall.

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

**Photos:** C. Hanrahan.

#### **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](mailto:dhobden@magma.ca)
- Sandy Garland: website and information about the FWG newsletter: [sgarland@magma.ca](mailto:sgarland@magma.ca)
- Christine Hanrahan: bird and wildlife observations: [vanessa@magma.ca](mailto:vanessa@magma.ca)

AAFC Security: 613-759-1985