

## 2020 Honorary Member: Jeffery E. Harrison

*This award is presented in recognition of outstanding contributions by a member or non-member to Canadian natural history or to the successful operation of the Club. Usually, people awarded an honorary membership have made extensive contributions over many years.*



*FWG Backyard Garden before (photographer unknown) and after (photo C. Hanrahan) its transformation.*

The Fletcher Wildlife Garden (FWG) is without doubt the public face of the OFNC. Many people first discover the Club through visits to the garden. Jeff Harrison was intimately connected with the garden from its early days and even though no longer living in Ottawa, still maintains a keen interest in the site and is always ready to answer queries about the genesis of the garden or provide ideas.

The FWG was initially envisaged as a way for the OFNC to celebrate “Wildlife 87”, an initiative of the Canadian Wildlife Service with the goal of emphasizing the conservation of wildlife and its habitat. Peter Hall conceived the idea of a wildlife garden and together with several other OFNC members, chose the location on the Central Experimental Farm. At that point, Jeff who was on the OFNC Council (now Board) and soon to become OFNC President, became chief promoter of the FWG. His enthusiasm for the project was contagious and profound. Working with members of the OFNC sub-committee responsible for the FWG, he threw himself into developing plans and guidelines for the garden, the ideas coming fast and furious. He enlisted numerous volunteers to help the project get underway and then to carry it forward. Once he became chair of the FWG he kept enthusiasm high and inspired volunteers. He also focussed on developing various habitats for local wildlife in the garden, such as the Backyard Garden, with the aim of showing landowners how to manage sites for wildlife. His endless devotion to the project helped transform the site into the well-loved, well-visited site of today, a place for OFNC committees to meet, and where the Club can conduct its business.

Jeff has long been passionate about nature as evidenced by the column, *The Urban Naturalist*, he and his wife Victoria Dickenson wrote throughout the 1990's for the *Ottawa Citizen*. For their work promoting nature and the environment, they were awarded a City of

Ottawa Whitton Award for Environment in 1996. He has also written extensively about the natural history of the Avalon Peninsula in Newfoundland, an area he knows well, having summered there for many years. For the last 20 years Jeff has been involved in researching and writing the history of ornithology in Canada, with a particular emphasis on Charles Fothergill, a Toronto politician who wrote many articles on the birds of southern Ontario between about 1820-1840.

Originally from Toronto where he became an avid birder, Jeff developed wanderlust as a young man and travelled the world for five years, including a lengthy stay in Australia. The travel bug continued for some time as he then went on to lead nature tours to many exotic parts of the world, although his specialty was the birds and nature of Belize.

In 1997, Jeff came up with the grand idea of holding a birding competition similar to ones south of the border which would “*raise money for environmental projects and raise awareness of the great diversity and richness of wildlife habitats in eastern Ontario and western Quebec.*” He called it The Taverner Cup (after Percy Taverner, the early Canadian ornithologist) and convinced the OFNC to make it a Club activity. Jeff found a number of sponsors and volunteers for the event, promoted it enthusiastically, attracted numerous participants, and MC’d the event for each of the 8 years the competition ran.

Jeff Harrison was OFNC President during 1989 and 1990. He also participated in local Christmas Bird Counts and wrote articles for the OFNC publication *Trail & Landscape*.

Jeff’s interest in nature encompasses many areas. He was the founder and coordinator of the Newfoundland and Labrador Wilderness Society, Past Vice President Bird Protection Quebec, Past member of the Board of Directors of the Ontario Field Ornithologists, Secretary for the Toronto Ornithological Club, and was the OFNC representative on the Board of Ontario Nature for several years.

For all these reasons it gives us great pleasure and privilege to award Jeff Harrison Honorary Membership in the Ottawa Field-Naturalists’ Club.

*By Christine Hanrahan with Peter Hall*