

The Quinte Naturalist

The Quinte Field Naturalists Association is affiliated with Ontario Nature, a non-profit organization sponsoring nature education, conservation and research.

September

A Review of Some Happenings last Summer

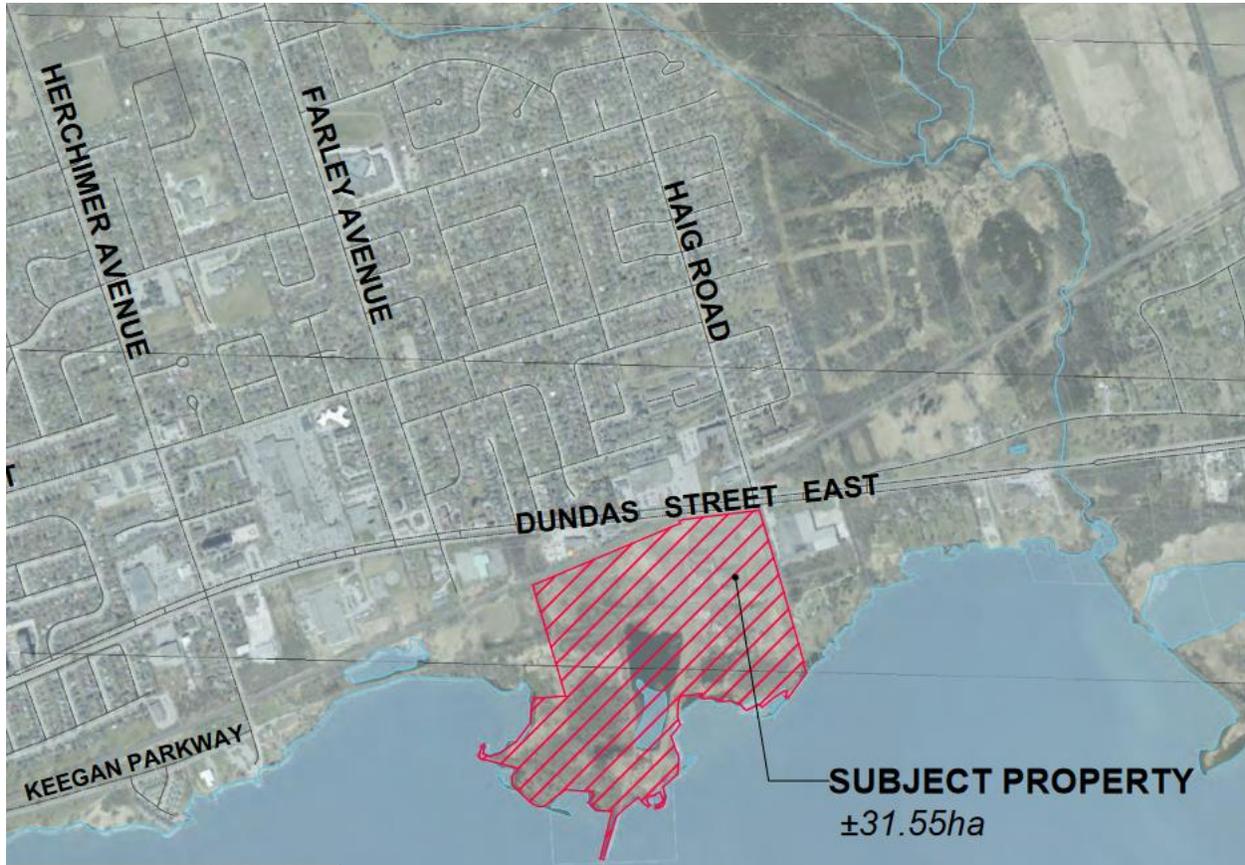


Photo by Keith Gregoire

Recently Belleville Council made a ground-breaking decision which sets a precedent for providing our residents a place to learn about and enjoy nature. This decision can also provide homes for hundreds of species such as this eastern cottontail and other mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, insects and plants. Developed appropriately the property can be a semi-natural functioning ecosystem right within the city.

See story on page 2.

A WIN FOR NATURE AND BELLEVILLE



From Belleville Planning Advisory agenda April 04/22

The fate of the heavily polluted Bakelite site has been decided. Ever since the plant closed in 1989 the property has been an east end eyesore. Nature was slowly reclaiming it. It attracted dog walkers, naturalists and the homeless to its trails and rubble. While it had some positive features it also had significant negatives. It was heavily polluted and dangerous. The question of the fate of this property has hung over the city for more than 30 years.

The last chapter of the story began in January, 2011. Rentx, a local development company, purchased the property. After a long and expensive remediation and planning process they approached the city with a request to rezone much of the land from environmental protection to residential to allow some 600 housing units. For QFN and many residents such a large development right along the bayfront was unacceptable. Recognizing the validity of many of the concerns the city continued negotiations with Rentx.

Finally, at a special meeting on the afternoon of Monday, July 25 Belleville council made a very significant decision which was a win for nature and the city. They purchased 8.4 acres which Quinte Conservation had declared to be suitable for development. As part of the arrangement the city also accepted and became responsible for the sections of the property which were ecologically significant and thus not developable.



Areas 1 and 2 remain with Osprey Shores for housing. Area 3 is the area purchased by the city. The darker area in Area three is the pond which many people were concerned would be lost. The rest of the site is the land donated as an ecogift.



This killdeer nested on the shores of the pond. Find the egg partially hidden by a leaf in the foreground. (Photo by Rick Beaudon). On the right an indigo bunting surveys his kingdom from the top of an eastern red cedar (Photo by Keith Gregoire). These are just two of the dozens of bird species you can find on the property on an early June morning.



In early spring look for coltsfoot on the property. Photo by John Lowry

This historic decision required significant efforts and compromises by all concerned parties. Council, with the enthusiastic leadership of Mayor Mitch Panciuk and Councillor Chris Malette, who is also chair of the Green Task Force, agreed to spend \$3.15 million on property which was designated for development. Mayor Panciuk, Ward 1 Councillors Tyler Allsopp, Carol Feeney, Sean Kelly, Chris Malette, Kelly McCaw, Garnet Thompson and Ward 2 Councillor Bill Sandison all supported the purchase. Ward 2 Councillor Paul Carr cast the lone dissenting vote. He agreed that the plan was significant but was concerned about the cost and the possibility that remediation had not solved all problems.

The developers of the residential area also deserve credit. Osprey Shores developers Bernie Ouellette, Jerry DiRocco and Ian Brady accepted less than the assessed value of the 8.4 acre sale thus foregoing the profits of residences which could have been built

on the property. We are very fortunate that they were local developers who were committed to this community and could recognize what could be done to benefit the city and nature.

Of course, kudos go to residents who spoke out to explain why this was such a unique property that should be preserved. QFN members John Lowry, Lori Borthwick, and Cathy Lake and others were actively expressing our views both publicly and privately. Elizabeth Churcher summed up our feelings particularly eloquently in an address to the council at the July 25 council meeting.



Painted turtles have been declared to be “at risk” in southern Ontario. This one suns itself on a reminder that there is considerable undesirable rubble still to be removed from the site. Photo by Andrea Kingsley.

What next? Decisions about the future of the property will be the responsibility of a new council after the elections on Oct. 24. There should be public input as part of the planning process. We need to be thinking about what we would like to see. In the next newsletter I will discuss some of my ideas. I would also like to hear yours.

Elizabeth's Presentation to Belleville City Council: July 25th, 2022

Mayor Panciuk and Councillors,

Quinte Field Naturalists would like to express support for the acquisition of the 8.4 acres situated between the two eco-gifts that the City of Belleville has received from developers Bernie Oulette, Jerry DiRocco and Ian Brady. As an organization committed to the conservation of natural spaces in the Quinte Region, we view the expenditure of the 3.1 million dollars to purchase the property as a very wise use of money. Over time, the benefits derived from buying the land will far exceed the money spent in its acquisition. Let me explain:

- 1) The purchase of the land supports biodiversity. The two eco-gifts and the land between them create a contiguous corridor of natural habitats which can support a wide variety of plants and animals. In the area, 164 species of birds have been identified. Wetlands provide valuable habitat for turtles. We know that all 8 species of turtles in Ontario are at risk and need the space to live and reproduce. Without the purchase of the 8.4 acres, the natural surroundings would be fragmented, a condition which is detrimental to biodiversity. Animals require significant space to establish their territories and to move from one area to another to source food, to avoid competition and to reproduce. The maintenance of biodiversity is essential for life on earth. Each species is part of a giant web, and each species has a role to play in maintaining a balanced system.



Common Yellowthroat - Photo by Rick Beaudon

- 2) The acquisition of the 8.4 acres creates a buffer zone between residences and the Bay of Quinte, minimizing the risk for pollutants such as lawn fertilizers to run off into the water.
- 3) The natural environment provides many vital ecological functions which are of great value, both monetarily and in terms of the quality of life.
 - a) Plants growing in the wetland habitat cleanse the water & filter out pollutants, thus serving as a natural water purifier and helping to guarantee ample fresh, clean water in the area.
 - b) Shrubs, trees and herbaceous plants protect shorelines from erosion and mitigate flood damage.

- c) Plants store carbon dioxide as carbon in their tissues. By performing as key carbon sinks, they help to mitigate climate change and global warming.
 - d) Plants give off oxygen as a by-product of photosynthesis, thus enriching the air we breathe.
- 4) A contiguous corridor of natural space offers opportunities in recreation and education. A trail system can support activities such as walking, biking, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, birding, nature studies and nature photography. A growing number of people interested in the natural world enjoy visiting locations that have rich, protected natural areas: consequently, these destinations support tourism, citizen science and research.

In summary, the expenditure of 3.1 million dollars to purchase 8.4 acres of land has far-reaching benefits for the citizens of the Quinte area and for all species of life dwelling in the region both now and for many years to come. Quinte Field Naturalists strongly supports and applauds the City of Belleville’s leadership in their proactive proposal to purchase land that has such great value.



Wood Duck (above) – Photo by Tom Wheatley

Yellow Warbler (below) – Photo by Andrea Kingsley



CLUB NEWS

You will note that this newsletter lacks information about many activities such as the plantings at the Tweed post office and other ongoing projects. As the newsletter grew longer and the time grew shorter something had to give. Rest assured that there will be another newsletter with more information before our in-person meeting.



That's the big news. For more than 2 years we have had no in-person meetings. We will all get together on **Monday, Oct. 17 in the Centennial Secondary School cafeteria on Palmer Rd. at 7:00 pm, doors open at 6:30 pm.**

Masks are recommended but not mandatory. We have asked the custodians to leave the tables and benches. You do not have to step over the bench you can just slide in. The arrangement makes social distancing easy. The venue is easily accessed from the student parking lot on Harder Drive.

We already have a speaker. You may remember Robert Ormston as the student who spoke to us a few years ago about the devastation among bees as a result of the use of agricultural neonicotinoids. He now works for Quinte Conservation and will bring us up to date on some local nature news.



We lost a stalwart member last summer. On August 24th Olive Root passed away in her 96th year. Many of you will not have known Olive as for the last few years she was unable to attend meetings. I remember Olive as a strong advocate for nature and the QFN. She joined QFN in 1975 and her willingness to speak her mind often inspired the rest of us to tackle what needed to be done. She was also generous, loyal and hardworking. She took on many of the less glamorous tasks to keep the club active. It was Olive who made sure the local paper contained a notice of our meetings, monitored our finances and for several years made all arrangements for our speakers. I remember Olive hosting our gatherings in her home on Albert St. at the end of the Christmas Bird Count. It was typical of Olive. Every detail in her living room was perfect for the season. Even after she was less able to be active she kept in touch, often phoning to discuss club business or mailing newspaper clippings that she found interesting. She was unique and we will miss her.

THE IN-BETWEEN TIME

By George Thomson and Elizabeth Churcher

Reprinted with permission from the Tweed News, Sept. 30, 2020

It's September 19th. We woke up early this morning to an altered scene. Our first glance out the bedroom window confirmed that Jack Frost had stopped by for a short visit last night. Over the past few weeks, we have been witnessing daily changes in our natural world, much more gradual than the darkened leaves that biting temperatures left behind on tender plants a few hours ago. The life around us is transforming! Some birds that we haven't seen much throughout the summer months are visiting the feeders more frequently. Chipmunks are disappearing into their holes, carrying food in their jowls: Woodchucks are spending countless hours mowing the tender green grasses. They must know that the availability of fresh produce will soon come to an end! We anticipate each day, looking forward to both subtle and dramatic changes.

In the plant world, most species become conspicuous when they enter the flowering phase of their life cycle. Of course, throughout the Spring and Summer, many kinds of plants already have flowered. The plants showing their colours now are the 'short-day' plants. They produce blossoms in abbreviated photoperiods, that is, as the hours of daylight diminish. Flowering hormones stimulate the flower buds and bring about blooming as the photoperiod lessens. The magic of Autumn takes the stage! Our meadows and woodlands become patchworks of blues, purples, mauves, whites and yellows as asters and goldenrods put on their floral display.



One of my favourite wildflowers is New England aster. Joe Bartok posted this photo from Tweed along with the relevant details on iNaturalist.

The big, woody plants, the shrubs and the trees, even though they have been prominent all year, because of their size and their profuse production & maintenance of leaves, also begin to shift in their appearance and their role in the ecosystem. The deciduous species will begin to drop their leaves in the time to come. But, before this happens, there will be a magnificent colour show put on by many of them, as their foliage turns from green to various shades of reds, oranges,

golds and rich browns. Already, there are hints of October's brilliant show dotting the landscape. We are enjoying every moment as the natural world unfolds, enriching each day.

Presently, the age-old connection between plants and animals is still very vibrant, very much alive. The asters, goldenrods and other flowering species are providing nectar and pollen to visiting insects. Admittedly, we are experiencing a touch of melancholy as we stroll about our gardens observing the interactions: soon a harder frost will drain the life from the plants. But there is no time for us to waste, lamenting what we cannot control: the life before us offers many opportunities to learn more. We are spending precious moments watching various flies, like the syrphid or flower flies and a number of hymenopterans such as the Dark and European Paper Wasps, the Yellowjackets, the Bald-faced Hornets and the potter wasps. Many bees industriously are gathering pollen during the short time they have left before the cold weather terminates their activity & their adult life. Leaf-cutter bees, sweat bees and bumble bees still are working hard! The Honeybee is an exception, though, as many of its worker bees will live through the Winter with their queen.

We are noting carefully all of our observations of many insects, realizing that each day may bring the closure to their visits for this season. Our evening walks are quieter now: the cricket song is lessening as the nights grow cooler. The mellow song of the Snowy Tree Cricket, for example, is slowing and becoming less exuberant. Big Band-winged Grasshoppers continue to fly in the sunshine and the Monarch Butterflies are thrilling us as they travel through our area on their way to their wintering places in Mexico. Today, we encountered a really large female European Praying Mantis, gravid with eggs. She will deposit them in a corky egg sac for the Winter, her final commitment to life. Loyal and steadfast to the end! Seeing her was a reminder to us that most insects will pass the Winter as eggs, larvae, pupae or nymphs. Only a few, like the Mourning Cloak Butterfly and the Honeybee, will survive the harsh temperatures in the adult stage.



Even if you have never seen a snowy tree cricket you have probably heard it. Its song is often dubbed into TV shows or movies to indicate a quiet evening.

Reptiles and amphibians, too, are thinking about the adjustments that they must make to get through the Winter. Our resident American Toad, who seems to centre a lot of her insect-eating activity in the herb garden will one day dig down through the loose soil and prepare to endure the rigours of colder temperatures beneath the frost line. Similarly, the big Eastern Garter Snake that we watched go under the deck the other day will seek shelter below ground.

Mammals that we observe around us frequently in the warmer months appear to know that their time of food gathering is limited. Grey Squirrels and Eastern Chipmunks are storing seeds and nuts for the upcoming cold months and the Woodchucks (pictured) are putting on lots of calorie rich body fat on these pleasant days of late September to prepare for their long hibernation. We still see them diligently grazing on grasses!

Not a day goes by that we are without the entertainment provided by our feathered friends but, at this time of year, the avian domain is shifting, too. The birds like Crows, blackbirds and Turkey Vultures are gathering in flocks and getting ready to start south.

Recently, we have seen Eastern Bluebirds flying over our fields. Will they stay with us for the Winter? We really can't be certain but we do know that some Bluebirds and Robins are spending the entire year in our area now. Many other birds already have left us to fly south and we are recording sightings of some that are passing through our area from further north. Just yesterday, we had the pleasure of observing a Great Crested Flycatcher perched in the maple tree outside our kitchen window. "He must be on his way to Central America," George commented. The birds that will spend the cold months with us, such as the Blue Jays, nuthatches and Black-capped Chickadees, are becoming more frequent visitors and will be joined later by guests from farther north, like the finches.



The eastern bluebirds that do stay over the winter will rely on berries like those of the red cedar for sustenance. Photo by Benjamin Hack near Crooked Lake, Michigan. Posted on iNaturalist.

The 'In-Between Time' is dynamic and constantly fluctuating. Touches of melancholy are tempered by feelings of hope in Nature's ever-changing cycle. The 'In-Between Time' is just a part of this great cycle. It is a period of endings and of beginnings, a time of death and new life, a time to seal the past and prepare for the future, a time to pause and reflect. In her wisdom Mother Nature has attended to all of the details necessary to sustain life. Our role is to learn, to appreciate, to value, to conserve.



Elizabeth and George's Woodchucks

The Quinte Field Naturalists Association, an affiliate of Ontario Nature, is a non-profit organization sponsoring nature education, conservation and research. It was founded in 1949 and incorporated in 1990 and encompasses the counties of Hastings and Prince Edward. The Quinte Field Naturalists Association is legally entitled to hold real estate and accept benefits.

General meetings are not held currently.

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Please send submissions to sharronjohnblaney@gmail.com