



Thickson's Woods Land Trust

Summer 2017 Newsletter 52

Early Memories of Nature

How old were you when you first got hooked on nature? For Mike King it was holding a toad at age three. In future newsletters we'd like to feature reminiscences about your introductions to the natural world.

Who was the person who got you involved? While out exploring with his grandfather, Don Mitchell, four-year-old Oliver used what he calls his "super spy eyes" to spot a Blandings Turtle shell hidden on a rocky point near their cottage.

Here's your chance to share your memories with the rest of the Thickson's Woods family. Your account can be as long or as short as you like.

Send your stories to us at nature@thicksonswoods.com or mail them to Thickson's Woods Land Trust at Box 541 Whitby, Ontario L1N 5V3.

We're really excited to share in your memories. It will encourage us even more to take every opportunity to introduce young people we encounter to the wonders of nature.



American Toad (Mike McEvoy)

Birds, Beavers & Butterflies Nature Festival, Saturday, September 16

If you've been coming to the festival each year, you might think you've seen it all before, but favourite shows like "Speaking of Wildlife" and "Creepy Critters" always have new actors. And, of course, "Max", our neighbourhood super magician, has new tricks up his sleeves to confound the audience, even though we still haven't figured out how he was able to pull off the sleight-of-hand he's amazed us with in years past.

If you haven't been to the festival recently, you'll be surprised to see how different the meadow looks, as milkweed and asters expand, and vegetation and wildlife change. If you're really lucky, you might even catch sight of the Whitetail Deer doe and her two fawns that are spending the summer in the meadow.

Because of all the rain, this year's jewelweed is more than head high. So ask the leader on your nature walk to show you how the plant got its name.

This year the Matt Holder Environmental Research Fund and Thickson's Woods Land Trust are teaming up to present an expanded version of "It's A Small World." Weather permitting, we hope to show you some of the moths and other insects that call the reserve home. Follow the signs along the path south through the woods to the white tent.

Check out the flyer at the end of this newsletter to learn more about exciting happenings at this year's festival.



INVASIVE SPECIES REMOVAL DAY

Saturday December 1st.

By December early frosts have killed off the more tender vegetation that grew in such profusion during the very wet spring of 2017. Garlic Mustard stays green all winter. This gives it a head start on spring ephemerals and other native plants it chokes out and kills if not controlled. Join us in removing this threat to Thicketson's Woods Nature Reserve so the biodiversity that makes the woods so special can continue to flourish. For it's not just native plants that are threatened. It's also the insects, birds and mammals that depend, directly and indirectly, on them for survival. Without the variety of plants growing here, the Matt Holder Research Fund would never have found more than one thousand different kinds of moths, nor six of the eight Ontario bat species. And migrating birds wouldn't be able to find food to refuel on their grueling journeys to and from their nesting grounds.

So join us on Saturday December 1st. Follow the Waterfront Trail east from Thicketson Road. Turn right and follow the path south through the woods to the south side, where we'll collect tools and plan our attack. Dress for the weather. It might be cool, but there won't be any biting insects to annoy. And with all the cones on cedars, spruce and pines, there may be winter finches to greet you. What better place to start your winter bird list?



Garlic Mustard (Dennis Barry)

IN MEMORIAM

Recent donations have been made in memory of these special people:

Dorothy "Dot" Hooker

We join their families and friends in mourning their passing, and acknowledge their unique contribution to the rich web of life on planet earth. On our website we recognize all past donations made in memory of friends and loved ones.

Marsh Marigold (Mike McEvoy)

Tried and True

by Margaret Carney

I went for a long walk the other day, visiting some very dear friends. Life gets so busy that whole months, seasons—years!—can flash by without me taking the time to drop in, say hello and see how they're doing. A sunny afternoon in late August seemed a perfect time to make up for that—tour Thickson's Woods and catch up with a lot of trees, young and old, that I know and love.

The ancient ironwood standing at the entrance to the woods. Two big butternuts in the "old meadow" that have managed to resist the butternut blight sweeping in. The single tall, straight, forest-grown apple tree, lush with new growth even though the top died back two years ago. Like the century-old ones in the meadow, relics of a settler's orchard, may it keep growing arms that reach for the sun, and producing buds that burst, blossom and scatter petals on all who pass for years to come!

A few large-toothed aspens on the north ridge have fallen in recent years, and some fair-sized yellow birch. Their branches make great brush piles for birds and bunnies to hide in, and the logs, covered with moss and fungi, add character to the forest floor. I was glad for the cool shade the survivors cast, and for that of the leafy sugar maples and mountain maples scattered throughout the woods. High overhead, in the canopy, cedar waxwings were feeding on the fruits of a dominant black cherry tree, and I was grateful to find new growth on stubs of some black cherries snapped off by the 2014 ice storm. Mother Nature always comes through!

Like most visitors, I treasure every single white pine in the woods, and was dismayed this summer to find the biggest one along the path west of the sightings box losing needles—the pine we always have school kids wrap their arms around to measure its girth. That makes three of the patriarchs to die in the last few years, beyond those taken out by storms. I was comforted to see lush green needles against the sky from many vantage points as I walked on around the circuit, visiting trees. And to find acorns under every tall red oak—trees that in another century or two may grow to be as big and magnificent as the huge one cut down in a neighbour's yard, still mourned and remembered.

Goldfinches were busily checking out the great crop of cones in the white spruce hedge lining the Waterfront Trail—trees I helped plant thirty years ago. I visited the 30 baby white pines put in by an enthusiastic crew of Whitby Sunrise Rotarians recently, and was delighted they're doing so well. Local deer have nibbled some, but their roots are well established and they'll soon shoot upward. As have so many of the rare cucumber magnolia trees, Richard Woolger's legacy. "Mitch's trees"—both hackberries, another Carolinian species—have survived two winters now and are looking good. I went hunting for black walnut saplings Karin Fawthrop put in three years ago, and couldn't find them in the waist-high grass and goldenrod. But the Kentucky coffee tree donated by Erica Thimm at the nature festival last year was there. It was eaten off by deer not long after we planted it, so I was amazed to find a season's growth of delicate twigs and leaves crowning its chewed slim stem. Again, hooray for Mother Nature.



Cedar Waxwings (Greg Macleod)

Biodiversity in Thickson's Woods News from the Matt Holder Environmental Research Fund

by Phill Holder

What a challenging spring for studying wildlife. Wet and cool weather is not ideal for conducting research, especially for the researchers. Spring birding was not great, as there were no big fallouts of warblers we normally get on our surveys.

We held a butterfly walk on July 22. Even though showers interrupted the day, we had a lot of fun and got photographs of Jenna making a new friend with a Monarch Butterfly that rested on her nose. While we were there a White-tailed Deer paid us a visit, to the delight of everyone.

Moths were in short supply through March, April and May, but picked up a little in June and got even better in July. At first we thought we would not get to the 1000 species goal this year, but that quickly changed in July, when we decided to place 12 traps out one night. We call eight traps a "Full Monty." Twelve traps is an Ultra Monty. It certainly worked. We recorded 383 species that night (a record at Thickson's) and added 28 species to our list. So we are so close to 1000. At the time of writing, our list is 989 – only 11 to go. The Champagne is on ice.

What a fantastic total in 3 years. It is tremendous fun, and great teamwork is required to set up and record these fantastic diverse moths. Every time we set up we are filled with anticipation and we are never disappointed. We have added new Ontario species, a new Canadian species and many rarities, like the Goldenrod Flower Moth, which was number 989 on the list.



Jenna Siu making friends with a Monarch (*Mike McEvoy*)



Curious White-tailed Deer popped in for a visit at the butterfly walk (*Mike McEvoy*)



Goldenrod Flower Moth (*Phill Holder*)

More careful looks at bumblebees in the meadow turned up two additions to the list, Eastern Common and Twin Spotted.

Small mammal trapping started late, with White-footed Mice outnumbering all other species. One mouse refused to let go of a sunflower seed it was holding, even when it was taken out of the trap, measured and weighed. When released, it sat next to our feet to eat the seed, so we gave it more until it decided to slowly saunter off.

Our very own bat expert, Toby Thorne, led a fantastic bat walk on July 22 and there were bats everywhere we went. The detectors were going crazy and we were even able to pick up the acoustic “buzz” as a bat honed in on an unsuspecting insect.

The third year of bat research in Thickson’s Woods Nature Reserve expanded to include catching bats with mist nets. We were very pleased to find that the resident bats are very healthy. We caught many young, indicating good breeding success. One of the Big Brown Bats in the hand was photographed after Toby and Fiona took all the measurements.



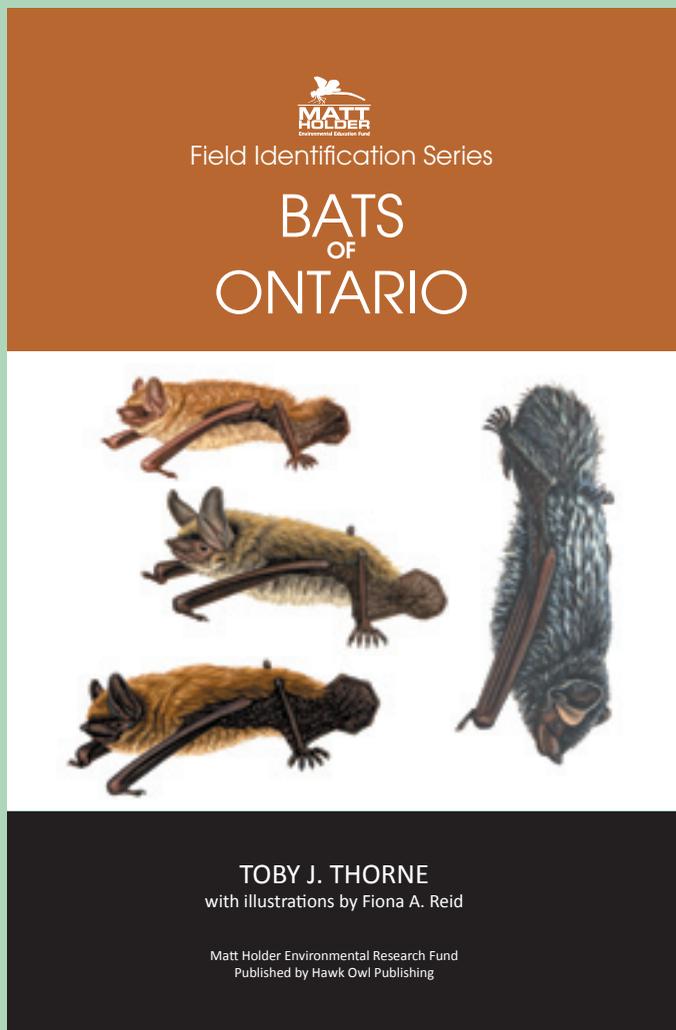
Big Brown Bat (Mike McEvoy)



White-footed Mouse with sunflower seed (Phill Holder)

I hadn't been to the Toronto Sportsman's Show for at least 20 years when Kelly, my daughter, suggested we go on the Saturday morning. It has changed so much, I was not too impressed, until I passed by a binocular display. Birders not talking birds are talking optics, and here was a brand I was not familiar with—Kite. Obviously I picked up a pair and did the usual “test” we all do. I was immediately impressed, even in the poor conditions of the display hall. I decided that these optics were worthy of more attention and contacted TWLT Board member Brian Steele, who is an optic expert and was our optic reviewer when Margaret Bain and I published *Birders Journal* magazine. His review is well worth reading in the latest Aquila e-newsletter at www.mattholderfund.com/newsletter.

Toby has written a book on Ontario Bats which I was proud to publish under the Matt Holder Field Identification Series. This book has acoustic identification spectrograms which make it unique, and it's up to date with all the latest bat detector technology. Fiona Reid did the brilliant species artwork, life size to make identification a lot easier. It has been selling really well all over Ontario, Canada, the US and even the UK. If you would like a copy, please go to our website: www.mattholderfund.com/shop. Price is \$20 including tax, but not postage. All proceeds go to funding the research programs.



Bats are incredibly complex animals, and are subject to folklore, and misunderstanding. Because of their nocturnal nature they are very difficult to study. Ontario's bats are under increasing pressure from habitat loss, White Nose Syndrome and wind turbines. Fortunately there is an increasing interest in bats and we hope this book inspires naturalists, especially the young, to become involved with bats and their conservation. Full of information, this book will appeal to amateurs and professionals alike to learn about these masters of the night.

Illustrated with the beautiful artwork of Fiona Reid and colour photographs, it shows all the bats of Ontario with identifying features, how to identify them using Bat Detectors, discussing threats and their conservation.

Price \$20.00

Mobs of Midges

By Dennis Barry



A Thickson's Midge (Mike McEvoy)

Birds fortunate enough to make a migration stop in Thickson's Woods in spring don't go hungry. The huge numbers of midges present throughout the warm months provide ample food for all. But as a birder, you need to know where the food is. Midges are tiny fragile insects that are easily blown by the wind. Even a gentle westerly breeze will push the midges toward the eastern sections of the woods. On sunny windless mornings, midges might be high in the tops of the pines. It's surprising to see White-throated Sparrows and Rusty Blackbirds busily gobbling midges high in the canopy.

Extreme weather is not the norm in May in southern Ontario. Many days are sunny and pleasant. Other clues can help to decide if this might be a good migration day and make your visit to Thickson's more rewarding after you arrive. Knowing weather during the previous evening and overnight will help. Strengthening winds from a northerly or northwesterly direction are not good. Nor are easterly or southeasterly winds, at least for passerines. They do give an assist to waterfowl and shorebirds moving up across the Appalachians from the Atlantic Coast.

In good weather the best conditions seem to include light winds from the south or southwest, normal to a bit above normal temperatures for the date, and relatively high humidity. That doesn't guarantee a good migration, but it does increase the odds. I've found that the first day with suitable weather will often bring larger passerines such as thrushes, grosbeaks and tanagers. The following fair weather day will see large numbers of smaller species such as warblers, vireos and sparrows.

Some days that seem perfect for migration actually are so accommodating that birds don't stop along the lakefront, but put down instead in yards and woodlots a couple of kilometres inland. Or on pleasant mornings, especially later in May, there may be many birds in the woods at dawn, but within an hour or less, they will have drifted north across the meadow and up Corbett Creek Valley.

Glenn Coady swears by following radar overnight to spot flocks of birds on the move, so you might want to explore that technology as well.

Another factor that will impact your enjoyment of your visit is leaf cover. Some springs are cool, so leaves are slow to open, allowing good visibility well past mid-May. However, when there's an extended warm spell in late April, leaves open much earlier, making spotting birds much more challenging. Compounding the problem is the fact that males migrate earlier than females. Since females rarely sing, and they're less brightly coloured, spotting them among dense camouflaging leaves can be frustrating.

The best advice for enjoying Thicksen's Woods to the max in spring is visit early and often. And pay attention to the weather.

In late summer and fall, weather also plays a significant role in bird movement. Early August might see a stray warbler or flycatcher appear in the woods, but southward migration really gets under way in earnest with the arrival of the first cold front later in the month. Since birds are no longer vocalizing and tree leaves and lower vegetation are at a peak in terms of hiding birds, successful birding requires a different approach.

Birds move at a more leisurely pace on their way south. There's no rush to be the first on breeding territory, or to raise families during the narrow window when insect populations are at their peak to feed hungry nestlings. Birders who adopt a similar approach can have a more enjoyable and relaxing experience.

At this time of year, dense foliage prevents insects from being blown about by the winds, so food can be found almost anywhere in the woods or meadow. It's a good idea to carry a light portable stool on a strap over your shoulder. Find an opening in the woods where you can sit and watch the outer edge of foliage on trees or shrubs. Relax and watch to see what appears. Be patient. Flocks of passerines tend to move through the woods from east to west, feeding as they go. A tree that seems completely empty of life one minute may be filled with birds a few minutes later. While you wait, there will be a variety of

insects hidden in nearby shrubbery that will eventually show themselves to keep you entertained.

In the meadow, find a shady spot to sit within the low canopy of the nannyberry and dogwood. You'll be amazed at how close birds will come as they pick insects off twigs and leaves. Or choose a spot where you can watch a sunny glade as butterflies and bees visit the opening goldenrod blossoms, and dragonflies zip about to catch their share of the insect food on offer. Closer looks might reveal a hidden crab spider deep within a blossom hoping to capture an unwary fly, or a praying mantis equally well camouflaged waiting for a meal to come close enough for a lightning-fast strike.

So take your cue from the wildlife around you, relax, be patient and enjoy.



Warbling Vireo (Mike McEvoy)

Yes, I want to help protect Thicksen's Woods Nature Reserve. It's a very special place!
We need spaces where plants and animals can thrive and people can relax in nature.

Here is my tax-deductible contribution of \$ _____ Date _____

Name _____ Address _____

City _____ Prov/State _____ Postal Code _____ Tel. _____

e-mail _____

Cheques can be payable to Thicksen's Woods Land Trust.

Mail to: Box 541 Whitby, ON L1N 5V3 (Charitable Registration # 0674382-52-13)

Thickson's Woods Nature Reserve

16th Annual

Birds, Beavers & Butterflies Nature Festival

Learn about nature from the experts!

Enjoy exciting activities - fun for all the family!

Saturday, September 16
9:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

Adults \$5 Kids \$2 Families \$10 (Cash only)

Please note that for the protection of wildlife, dogs are not allowed in the nature reserve.

(Please lug-a-mug / water bottle.)



More Festival Fun!

Silent auction
Yummy bake sale
Refreshments by Divine Dining
Nature art & gifts

Join the Experts!

Bugs and botany ID
Bird banding
Geology
Guided nature walks

Special Events!

- ❖ Build your own nature box
- ❖ Speaking of Wildlife 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m.
- ❖ Magic Show 11:00 a.m.
- ❖ Creepy Critters 12:00 Noon



For Kids 2 to 92!

Face painting
Wishing tree
Hawk Watch
Lunchtime Nature Concert

All proceeds support Thickson's Woods Nature Reserve.



Directions: from Hwy 401 in Whitby, take Thickson Road south to the Waterfront Trail.
Follow the signs.

Info: 905-433-7875 or www.thicksonswoods.com E-mail: nature@thicksonswoods.com