Thickson's Woods Land Trust

Autumn 2025
Newsletter 68

Come Celebrate your Success

Saturday November 29. 9:00 a.m

For many years you've been faithfully showing up in late November to battle garlic mustard so it wouldn't take over the woods and crowd out desirable native wildflowers. Happily, last fall's search yielded only a few scattered plants. While this doesn't mean the pest is irradicated, it's time to stop and appreciate the Thickson's Woods you've worked so hard to protect.

Red-breasted Nuthatch at Thickson's Woods (*Phill Holder*).

So on Saturday November 29, let's relax and wander about the reserve. We'll meet at 9:00 a.m. at the bench on the east side of Thickson Road at the Waterfront Trail. Bring binoculars and some sunflower seeds to feed the resident chickadees. This will also be a chance to renew acquaintances with some of the forty species of trees and shrubs that call the reserve home. You'll be surprised how tall some of the cucumber trees have grown.

On Lake Ontario, wintering ducks should already be in their best breeding garb. With water levels still low after this summer's drought, we may be able to walk along the sandy shore below the bluff, if wind directions are right.

Resident nuthatches and woodpeckers may be joined by wintering whitethroats and maybe even a fox sparrow, if we're lucky.

Perhaps there'll be a surprise sighting, as so often happens. No matter, you'll be able to take pride in the fact that Thickson's Woods Nature Reserve will be here to welcome each new season for generations to come.

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Charitable Registration # 11926 3176 RR0001

Nurturing the Backyard Ecosystem

by Chelsey Cunningham newest member of TWLT board of directors

American Robin eating Serviceberry

In 2021, with an abundance of free time, I dove into a new hobby, gardening in support of the pollinators, specifically bees and butterflies. New garden beds were filled with echinacea, bee balm, butterfly milkweed, coreopsis, lavender and beardtongue and I waited with excitement for the buzzing to begin. The more time I spent in the garden, the more I began to treasure the calming songs of birds that watched from above. How could I nurture these little ones as well? I wondered. In a flash of excitement, how many of my projects begin, I decided to build a birdhouse. I found a plan on 70birds.com that was designed for some of my favourite visitors, nuthatches and downy woodpeckers. I spent $25 on a 1-inch x 12-inch x 6 ft. pine board and #6 1-1/2-in steel wood screws, materials to create two houses, one of which I donated to Thickson's Woods Land Trust. I also used galvanized steel netting to create a nest riser, for better airflow to reduce flies, and a cage around the entrance to protect against squirrels and raccoons. I mounted this one in my yard in March using screws and washers on a T post five feet off the ground, and watched giddily from the window. Sadly, as of mid-August 2025, no feathered friends have expressed interest in the house. While I hold out hope for a spring tenant or some winter roosting, my quest to support birds doesn't end there.

Like any other piece of real estate, it's location, location, location. If I wanted baby birds around, I had to give mom and dad a good reason to seal the deal. Luckily, I had just discovered the native plant movement and its leader, Doug Tallamy. I devoured the entomologist's lectures about the food web and the heavy lifting that keystone species provide, as host plants to moth and butterfly larvae. Ninety-six percent of our terrestrial birds rely on insects as part of their diet, and thousands of caterpillars are needed to raise a single brood. Therefore, my next task was to infuse my property with as many host plants as possible this season. My passion for nature lies chiefly with plants and insects, so it was an endeavour I took up with joy. Being able to expand the garden and provide more nectar for my pollinators, while contributing to the health of birds, was exciting, even if it meant some bugs would say goodbye sooner than others. I started by figuring out which keystone species were local, and either added to my collection or allowed surprise arrivals to stay where they sprouted. I am lucky to have had some of the heaviest hitters turn up in my central Oshawa backyard, such as Chokecherry (340), Black Raspberry (127), and Goldenrod (104), which combined support 571 caterpillar species, according to the National Wildlife Federation. I have planted Eastern White Pine (200), Low Bush Blueberry (217), Blue Wood Aster (100), Red Osier Dogwood (98), Serviceberry (92) and many more. What resonated most about Doug's message was his idea of the homegrown national park. That each one of us lucky enough to steward a slice of this earth for a short time can create a natural oasis among a sea of lawns. I managed to plant dozens of plants this year, and I must admit that my trowel is tired, but I eagerly await spring so I can start all over again. Maybe in the coming years, if I were so fortunate, I'll have the honour of hearing little tweets emanating from my birdhouse.

Swallowtail caterpillars

While it's not a native plant, one of the most exciting moments this year was the arrival of Swallowtail caterpillars on the dill sown specifically for them. They were shortly eaten by a wasp, but food web… am I right? The other top two moments would be sighting a firefly and frequent visits from monarchs, which seem to have caught on rather quickly that I planted Common Milkweed for them.

All this to say, when helping the environment seems daunting and out of reach, the simplest of acts can have a ripple effect. Letting that goldenrod flourish or planting an aster can mean one insect's next meal, and winter's a good time to get your sowing plan in order!

Our Green Heart

The Soul and Science of Forests by Diana Beresford-Kroeger

Review by Dennis Barry

"Outside our bodies, there is another pulse that keeps us alive. It is the green of the living landscape. The trees of the forest offer oxygen and our lungs receive it. In and out, back and forth, beat, beat, beat, we are made and remade from the breath of trees, with a sprinkle of stardust from the solar system and beyond."

That's the opening paragraph from Diana Beresford-Kroeger's latest book, *Our Green Heart*. It's the most important book I've ever read, and I urge you to read and reread it if you care about planet earth.

Here's why.

Diana Beresford-Kroeger grew up in Ireland and refers to herself as "the last child in Ireland to receive a Druidic education." Orphaned very young, Diana spent her school years in Cork living with her mother's brother, her Uncle Patrick, where she read everything she could in his extensive home library. She spent her summers in the Lisheens Valley with her great aunt Nellie, where she learned the Brehon laws of the Celts, "the distillation of three thousand years of wisdom." Here, "I was taught the uses of medicinal herbs that have since found their way into today's cutting-edge medicines."

Released in 2024, the latest of her many best-selling and award-winning natural history books, *Our Green Heart* is referred to by Diana's publisher, Random House Canada, as an "inspiring culmination of her life's work as botanist, biochemist, biologist and poet of the global forest."

After a distinguished career as scientist and researcher, Diana "fled academia to found my own experimental farm." On this farm outside Ottawa, she continues to search for answers to many unsolved mysteries about trees and forests, while preserving specimens of rare and threatened trees.

Because *Our Green Heart* deals with so many critical issues facing us today and so many questions that remain unanswered, it's impossible to distil Diana's ideas and findings without missing out on so much of her wisdom and insights. I'd simply like to touch on crucial highlights as they relate to why we must continue to protect Thickson's Woods, while advocating for the absolute necessity of protecting and restoring global forests worldwide, especially old-growth.

Eastern White Pine

Critical and Surprising Insights from Diana's Research and Observations

"A tree, any tree, will have taken 400 to 500 million years to reach its own state of perfection. Having achieved it, a tree is matched to its forest companions and soil and perfectly aligned with its geo-position on the planet's surface, which in turn is clocked to the sun. …Therefore, such a community is impossible to replace…"

Trees native to any given area on earth have evolved over millions of years to survive in their unique environment. Built into their DNA is a memory of past challenges and the tools necessary to deal with them successfully. The transplanting of eucalyptus around the world created forests not only vulnerable to climatic changes they've not evolved to cope with, but the genetic qualities suited to their native homeland create dangers in areas not designed to tolerate them.

Native trees in California such as the Monterey pine evolved the ability to thrive in periods of drought and fire, using strategies suited to their specific ecosystem. But native forests in California have been cut down. The eucalyptus planted to replace them produce oils and resins that are highly volatile, some at temperatures as low as 48 C. Their shed bark, full of these flammable ingredients, accumulate throughout these forests, acting as an accelerant and causing any fire to explode across the countryside.

"Trees make soil, and forests make a lot of it, the good loamy soil upon which all of our lives depend." Creating a centimetre of soil can take up to one thousand years.

While we're all familiar with flowers as sources of nectar that feed many insects and other animals, little is known about plants that exude sweet liquids from the surfaces of leaves and bark.

"Trees have form. They are smart. They behave like computers and seem to have some kind of brain."

Trees produce sound. While the sound is below our level of hearing, it still has a soothing, calming effect, much like a lullaby.

Trees can hear. (Diana explains how)

Many species of fungi are found within the vascular system of trees. The number of fungal species seems to be unique to each species of tree. Pines host sixty-four species compared to fourteen for oaks.

When trees of all species in a forest produce a bumper crop of seeds at the same time, this is referred to as a mast year. Exactly how this happens or what determines the timing is not understood. "Somewhere in the genetic pool of knowledge deep within a tree there is an understanding of future weather patterns. The accuracy of this understanding is a life-or-death matter for a tree and, consequently, for the forest ecosystem."

Tyler Dawson climbing Red Oak in Thicksons' Woods to install owl nesting basket

"The boreal is the workhorse of the planet, maintaining the oxygenation of the atmosphere." Locked in the permafrost and under boreal forests is an amount of carbon three times that currently in our atmosphere." "The boreal forest system … is the ecological shield of our living, breathing world."

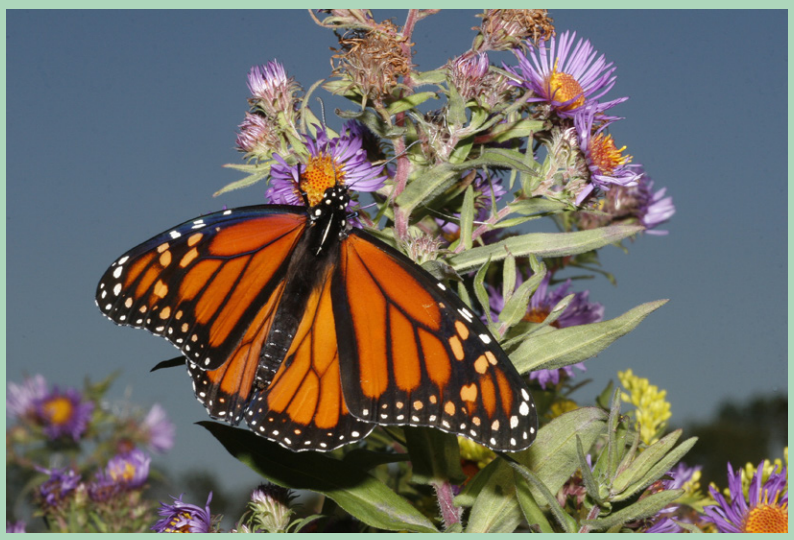
It is a certainty that we depend on forests in ways that are not as yet understood…" Diana provides glimpses into a few of these.

"Trees set the stage for the advent of the human family. Forests brought the atmosphere of the planet into a balance that could sustain human life."

Plants created our atmosphere. The global forests were the oxygenators of our atmosphere. They converted carbon dioxide into wood fiber and oxygen. Now they are almost gone. Without them, the great carbon cycle fails and the volume of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere will reach the point of no return. "Climate change is real, whether or not world leaders acknowledge its existence. Make no mistake. The war is coming for you, and its carbon offensive will stop your heart."

Bee pollination

Bull Frog (*Jim Richards*



Monarch (*Jim Richards*)

"For the past five years, flowers in (my) plantation forest have been coated with a dark carbon film that seems to have the propensity to stick to itself and to flowers' inner surfaces. As summer progresses, so does the carbon layer, blocking pollination and, most importantly, feeding. This leaves the pollinators unable to receive a full bounty of sugars, which in turn affects their immune systems, which are already under attack by pesticides and herbicides. Insects and pollinators are in decline all over the globe, especially honeybees. The decline of these small creatures spells out a very big problem called famine."

"This past year there was a silent spring in my arboretum… Pollinators didn't hum in the trees. The butterflies were missing. The ichneumonid wasp houses were nearly empty. There were no frogs, no ribbons of bullfrog eggs, no tadpoles. There was one snake --- only one."

People do not make good protectors of world ecosystems "because greed often clouds clarity of thought."

"In ancient times we listened to trees' messages, and they guided many of our actions.

Answers to today's problems require those same ears."

Diana's Bioplan

"Nobody made a greater mistake than he who did nothing when he could do only a little." (Edmund Burke, eighteenth century Anglo-Irish philosopher)

The Problem

Forests worldwide have been destroyed, resulting in increased carbon levels in the atmosphere, a warming planet and the destruction of ecosystems everywhere.

What Needs to be Done

First: Protect what's left of the ancient virgin forest.

Second: Plant trees. Every person on the planet must plant one tree per year in its native habitat for the next six years. These trees must be cared for and protected for six years, when they will reach a substantial size. These 50 billion trees will start to slowly reduce the carbon level in the atmosphere from current levels of 410 to 412 parts per million down into the 300s. As the new forest grows, each tree will use more and more carbon dioxide, accelerating the reduction process.

Third: Learn about trees in your neighbourhood. Research what trees are native to your area and learn how to plant and care for ones you plan to plant.

Why Protecting Thickson's Woods is so Important

Diana's research highlights the following:
"Science is the search for truth, and the land teaches with a wisdom that is never found in universities."

Children benefit more than we realize "learning from the best of teachers, which is the natural world in all its bounty… A child's smile can hold more depth of knowledge than any university anywhere."

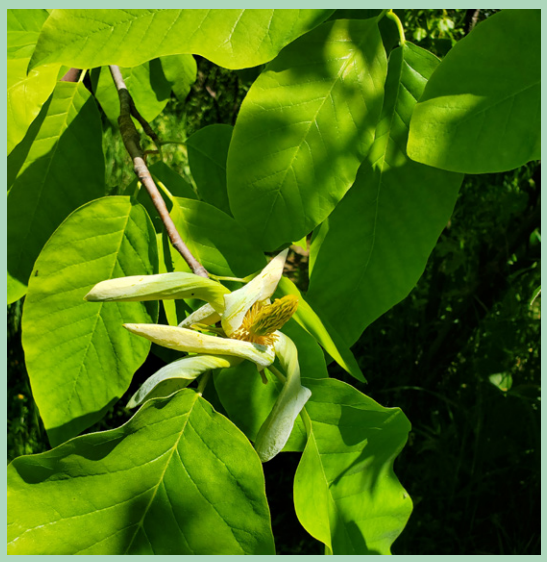
She writes about "the beautiful Magnolia acuminata, the cucumber tree, whose numbers are larger in one garden in Ireland than in all of Canada, and Liriodendron tulipifera, the tulip tree, which was so useful to the Huron people." (Thanks to the late Richard Woolger, Thickson's Woods' grove of cucumber trees is one of the largest in Canada, and there are a growing number of tulip trees in the reserve.)

"Pines produce a vast quantity of aerosols, protector molecules for the human body, saviours for many people with a propensity for cancer and aids to anyone exposed to environmental pollutants."

"The mother trees of ancient pedigree are almost gone. Such trees carry a genetic flexibility from past generations… The grandparent plasm can inject the grandchild with the knowledge necessary to survive."

Much like elephants, trees communicate using very low frequency sound waves known as infrasound that can travel great distances "although we have no idea what they communicate."

Are the giant white pines in Thickson's not only sending visual signals to spring migrants crossing Lake Ontario, but, since most passerines migrate in the dark, sending audible signals as well, perhaps over much greater distances?



Cucumber Trees at Thickson's Woods (*Phill Holder*)

Our Green Heart is filled with a wealth of critical information necessary for the survival of much of life on earth, including us. Once you read it, I know you'll agree. Buy copies and donate them to local schools and libraries. And plant trees; and encourage and support others who plant trees too!

Diana closes with these encouraging words: "the global forest represents peace and love to all nations. It represents the first gift of life at birth, that single new breath. A beginning."

Black-throated Green Warbler (*Jim Richards*)

Recent donations have been made in memory of these special people

Susan Ferreira

Marie Gibson

Kathy Parker

Donald Leslie Smith

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.

Super Moon (*Phill Holder*).

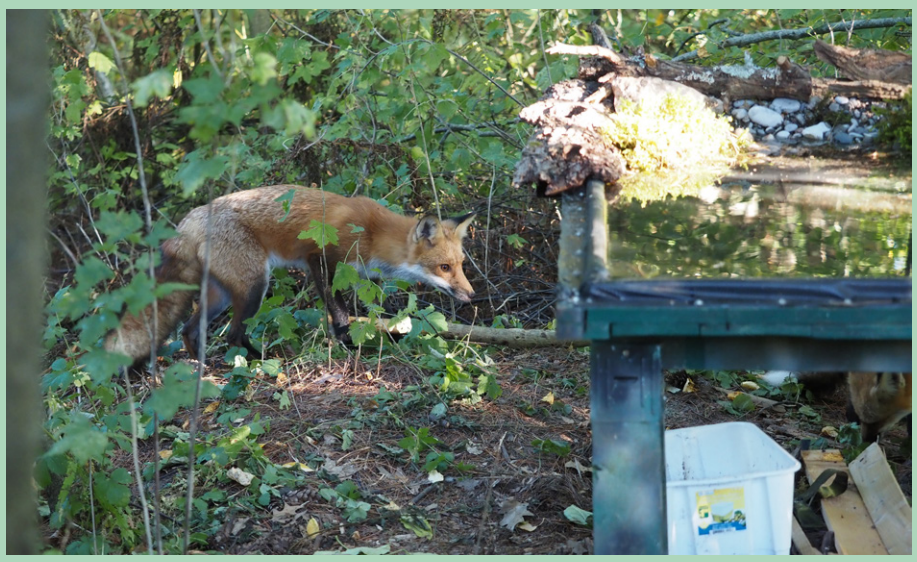
Never Fails to Excite

by Phill Holder

You would think I'd seen it all!

I've written about our first family birding trip to Thickson's, when we arrived from the UK in April 1982, the stresses of lumberjacks trying to destroy the Thickson's Woods, formation of the nature reserve, purchase of the meadow, all the spring coffee and pancake breakfast mornings. Fall festivals, the Matt Holder Research projects, moth studies and the life-long friends made through TW over the years. Not to mention the rarities TW provided to birders. I remember my first being a Varied Thrush at Dennis and Margaret's feeder in the winter of 1984.

The reflection pool set-up (*Phill Holder*)



The cautious first encounter on September 20th. (*Phill Holder*)

I also talked about building a reflection pool and how that provided yet another exciting experience, of photographing visiting birds coming for a bath or drink.

This fall, I set up my blind and reflection pool with Mike McEvoy, and we had the remarkable privilege of being visited by a family of Red Foxes. I'd seen foxes at Thickson's many times, but mostly as they crossed a trail or were sauntering along Crystal Beach Road. A fox never seemed too worried about being seen, but was aware of its environment.

The reflection pool is only about 6 or 7m from the hide so I was shocked to suddenly see a Red Fox appear nearby. Then another two arrived, slightly smaller, and it was obvious we were being visited by a vixen and her two young. It was early in the morning and barely light. The vixen was alert, circled the pool and seem to check it out before taking a drink.

To our surprise, then effortlessly leapt onto the pool, keeping an eye on us but totally comfortable.

First drink (*Phill Holder*)

One of the young was actively following Mom, but the other stayed several feet away and was very wary. Although we saw the three foxes in the area, this was the only time we had the three foxes visiting the pool together. It was not long before we had Mom and one young on the pool again. I had never been as close as this to a fox in my life. What an experience! The young were smaller than the vixen, but I suspected close to the age where Mom was about to chase them off to find their own way in life.

Over the next couple of weeks we were visited often by the foxes, and on one occasion Mom leapt onto the pool and was joined by the youngster to be groomed. Interestingly, the only vocals we heard were soft murmurs from the young one.

The young fox was murmering while being groomed.
(*Phill Holder*)

Very wary (*Phill Holder*)

I was amazed at how stealthy the foxes were. They just appeared! We could hear squirrels, chipmunks and White-tailed Deer coming as they walked through the dead leaves. Even the White-throated Sparrows were heard as they turned over crispy leaves. We never heard the foxes walking about, even when we were watching them.

It was also remarkable how agile they are. The young walked the perimeter of the pool, which is 18mm wide, without getting any toes wet.

After a week or so, it was mostly the vixen on her own that visited. We did have the male visit once, but it was a quick, much more cautious visit.

One of the youngsters seemed to be waiting for the all clear from mom. (*Phill Holder*)

Just having a drink. (*Phill Holder*)

All the foxes were in supreme condition, except the male appeared to have a tick on the right front leg.

While we were visited by the foxes, nothing else came by, and after a while we would encourage them to leave so we could actually get some birds to photograph. They were very aware that we were there and seemed to have no fear of us humans. Although very wary, they seemed comfortable with their ability to react to any perceived threat.

In contrast, White-tailed Deer often walk along the trail only about 30m in front of the blind. They never get closer and always make sure they are partially hidden. They don't show fear, but know I am there and are wary of any noise or movement. Even panning the camera will cause them to adopt an alert posture.

The White-tailed Deer knew exactly where we were. (*Phill Holder*)

Birds seem to wait until one brave individual drops by for a drink, before assessing that there is no real danger, then for a few minutes everyone pops down to check out the pool. It's amazing that in the fall, the woods can be void of wildlife noise, appearing deserted, then suddenly there will be a burst of activity around the pool.

Likewise the other “fox” we were lucky enough to have visit us. An hour would go by with no activity, then, suddenly, there’d be many Fox Sparrows alongside White-throated Sparrows scratching in the leaf litter.

On one occasion, the silence was broken by Blue Jays and American Robins making a lot of noise. A brief search revealed a Barred Owl nearby, and we had just enough time to take a photograph before it was chased away.

Fox Sparrow. (*Phill Holder*)

Barred Owl (*Phill Holder*)

White-throated Sparrow. (*Phill Holder*)

Thickson’s Woods never fails to provide excitement!

Summer Staff Accomplishments

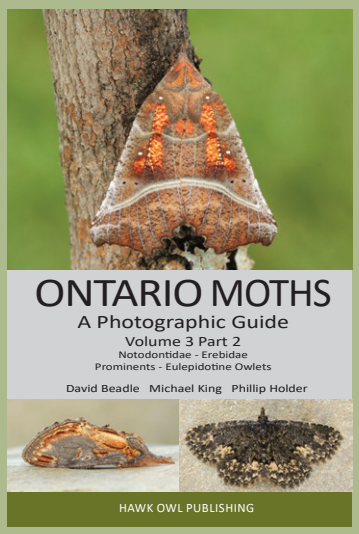
Imperial Moth (*Phill Holder*)

During the summer of 2025 Jennie Maxwell and Tyler Bamrah were hired to help with control of invasive species and find out more about elements of life in the reserve we know very little about. During their first eight weeks they concentrated first on searching out and removing garlic mustard plants in the woods, then digging up and also weed-whacking dog-strangling vine in the meadow. Generous grants through the Canada Summer Jobs program covered most of their salaries.

During the rest of the summer, they sampled aquatic life in Corbett Creek Marsh, updated information on the bumblebees living in the reserve and began to learn about the multitude of beetle species found here. Much of the funding for this was provided by Environment and Climate Change Canada through their Nature Smart Climate Change Fund administered by the Ontario Land Trust Alliance. Many thanks, as well, for the generous donation from the Matt Holder Environmental Research Fund that facilitated the purchase of two binocular microscopes and reference books to make possible the research on invertebrates. Thickson's Woods supporters also contributed to cover remaining costs.

Tyler and Jennie also worked on day-to-day tasks such as trail clearing and maintenance of plantings from previous years. Their summary reports on aquatic studies in particular were detailed and extensive. It's good to know that Corbett Creek Marsh is still home to some water life such as beetle and dragonfly larva, despite pollution from upstream, especially in Corbett Creek East.

We're extremely lucky to have such dedicated and hardworking young people come spend their summer maintaining the reserve and advancing our knowledge of the creatures that call it home. We wish them continued success in their chosen studies. It's reassuring to know that the future of the planet is in such capable hands.



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by Brian Steele, Treasurer

Please note that we've amended our on-line donation procedure, and no longer require a security question, making the transaction easier and simpler.

For "recipient" use Thickson's Woods Land Trust and our email address nature@thicksonswoods.com.

Under "message" you must put your name and postal address so we can send a charitable receipt.

Of course cheques are still very much welcomed.

Thank you so much for helping to support Thickson's Woods Nature Reserve, this precious corner of nature.

Yes, I want to help protect Thickson'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.

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