



# Thickson's Woods Land Trust

Spring 2017  
Newsletter 51

## Spring has sprung, or maybe not! One day is cold, the next seems hot!

*By Dennis Barry*

This year when February days turned warm and sunny, folks began to believe "The Groundhog" really did know what he was talking about; or not, depending on which groundhog you happened to hear "quoted." Have you ever noticed these prognosticating rodents are always males? Obviously female groundhogs have better sense than to come out of their cozy dens in midwinter.



Stephen Vernon posted his thoughts about groundhog predictions on Twitter.

Spring in Southern Ontario is notoriously elusive and this spring is no exception. While global warming is a reality accepted by most scientists, they also agree that wilder swings in weather will be part of the pattern.

Many years of hoping to have syrup making in Haliburton County correspond with the school break reminded me time and again that March weather is unpredictable. One year on St. Patrick's Day the weather was so cold sugar maples were frozen solid, so I went skating on a temporary pond in the pasture. The next year on March 17 the pond was ice-free and woodcocks were performing their evening courtship flights over a nearby willow grove as I trudged back to the farmhouse at dusk after a long day hauling buckets of sap.

So what about this spring in Thickson's Woods? As a longtime student of weather, I know better than to make predictions. But what the heck, I'll do it. The worst that can happen is that I'll be wrong and be lumped in with the poor groundhogs, who get blamed for late springs when they really didn't make any predictions. Humans just put words in their mouths, so to speak.

Today, March 23, I predict that warm weather will be slow to arrive this year and it will be after Easter, perhaps almost Earth Day, before winter is finally left behind. And if I'm wrong and it warms sooner, folks will be so happy they'll be inclined to forgive, if not forget.

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Charitable Registration # 11926 3176 RR0001

# EARTH DAY

**Saturday April 22, 9:00 to Noon**

**Garlic Mustard Search and Destroy Campaign**

Cancelled in case of rain

Each year we learn more about the intricate connections between all plants within a forest. We're learning that trees, wildflowers, ferns, mushrooms and all other plants in a woods have underground connections that allow them to share nutrients to their mutual benefit. Garlic mustard secretes chemicals into the soil that interfere with this process to the detriment of the whole ecosystem.

Thanks to your help last spring and fall, we've managed to eliminate a majority of the garlic mustard plants that sprouted in the spring of 2016. On Earth Day this year the goal is to remove those that were hidden under fallen branches and dense vegetation.

Garlic mustard has a two year life cycle. Seeds that sprout this spring will produce plants that bloom and mature in 2018. The tiny seedlings are easily removed when they first emerge just by brushing them with a garden glove or trowel. The more of these that can be destroyed at this early stage, the fewer will remain to thrive over the summer to add chemicals to the soil and produce seeds next spring.



**If you can help, park along Thickson Road north of the Waterfront Trail. Walk east to the entrance to the woods. Follow the path that wanders south through the woods to Lake Ontario. At the house on the right side of the laneway as you approach the lake, there will be tools, and containers for collecting the mature plants. No experience is necessary. Someone will be there to show you what to do. And if you have your own favourite equipment for tasks such as this, by all means bring it along.**

## IN MEMORIAM

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

|                         |                              |
|-------------------------|------------------------------|
| <b>Esther Allin</b>     | <b>David Hoeniger</b>        |
| <b>Dave Calvert</b>     | <b>Wilfred James Hiebert</b> |
| <b>John Carney</b>      | <b>Terry Jacenty</b>         |
| <b>Alex De Camprieu</b> | <b>Barbara Kalthoff</b>      |
| <b>Geoff Chopping</b>   | <b>Harlan Sano</b>           |
| <b>Jerry Cornish</b>    | <b>Stan Skinner</b>          |
| <b>Robert Hambley</b>   | <b>Mary Smith</b>            |

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.

# Remembering Esther Allin

by Margaret Carney



Some people, when you think of them, evoke a smile. Esther Allin does for me—a warm, quiet smile that leaves a glowing feeling in my chest. Probably because she smiled at me like that every single time we met throughout the long years of saving Thickson’s Woods and beyond. No matter how concerned she was about an issue, how focused on whatever project was at hand,

she took time to look at you with those bright blue eyes and smile from her heart—the best kind of greeting.

This lovely lady often had concerns in her wish to do all she could to protect nature. Earnest, committed, hard-working, loyal, she was quietly part of the team. Every pancake breakfast, every tree planting, every “open woods,” rain or shine, she and Bob were there, putting up tables, raising tents, helping clean up.

Esther wrote the book on “reliable.” When wonderful Ray Bryson stepped down as treasurer of the Thickson’s Woods Heritage Foundation after seeing us through the tumultuous five years of fund-raising to pay off the mortgage on the woods, Esther took over the task. Not because she knew accounting or was comfortable with math or numbers—she wrote nature poetry!—but because we needed someone willing to do it. And she carried on for a decade until Brian Steele magically appeared and made saving the meadow a reality. Esther’s writing skills were at least useful in the hundreds of thank-you notes to donors she sent out with all those tax receipts.

She didn’t talk about values, she embodied them, and made the world a better place just by being herself.

Esther loved birds—watching them, counting them, treasuring each sighting. She always kept her feeder filled, even when she moved back home to Morrisburg after Bob passed away. She brought nature with her wherever she went, and a sense of order and commitment. And her beautiful smile.

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## Father’s Day

Sunday June 18, 8:00 to 11:00am

*Bring your Dad!*

### Dog-strangling Vine - Search and Removal

This relative of milkweed completely dominates any area where it is not controlled. Native plants are overwhelmed and die out, along with insect species that depend on them. Monarchs will sometimes lay eggs on it. Unfortunately, the caterpillars that hatch don’t survive, adding another layer of stress to an already struggling butterfly population.

Dog-strangling vine seeds are spread by the wind. Seeds sprout to produce very small plants. These take several years to mature into vines and bloom, climbing high into shrubbery reaching for sunlight.

The task on June 27 is to locate and flag plants. Individual plants or small groups can be removed by hand. Larger patches will be targeted for later treatment.

**Meet at the wooden gate to the meadow along Thickson Road. Bring drinking water and snacks. A very sharp small round-mouthed shovel is best for uprooting stray plants. Wear long pants that can be tucked into**

**socks, and long sleeves. (The grass may be very wet early because of heavy dew) Bring insect repellent to spray your shoes, sleeves and pant legs.** The critical job is finding and flagging stray plants, so don’t feel you can’t help if you’re not up to digging.



Dog-strangling Vine (Mike McEvoy).



# Exciting Times at the Youth Summit



I wanted to express how grateful I am for your sponsorship that allowed me to attend the 2016 Ontario Nature Youth Summit. This was my third youth summit and it was a great opportunity to once again reconnect with old friends, and meet new, active young individuals that share the same enthusiasm toward the outdoors and environmental advocacy. As someone who has devoted a great deal of time and effort to environmental initiatives over the past few years, attending the summit is always a great way to learn what others are doing in their communities.

I have also been on the Ontario Youth Council for two years now, and being able to take a leadership role this year and help run an action-planning forum and inform other attendees how to effectively run a community event was an amazing learning experience.

I participated in various workshops during the weekend including primitive living skills, freshwater life, local food and environmental campaigning. During the freshwater workshop, we were able to get right into Lake Couchiching and collect and examine species. We even found a baby snapping turtle!

Overall, the time spent outside in beautiful Geneva Park was extremely educational, inspiring and reenergizing. Thank you very much again! It is experiences such as this one that provide youth like me with the tools, connections and the drive to work toward the greener future I want to see!

Jaime Rae, Whitby. Ontario Youth Council

## GIFTS THAT WILL LAST FOREVER

Metres of the nature reserve have been saved in the name of:

**Carrie and Lurana  
Victor Parsons**

Thank you to everyone who gave a friend or loved one a share in this living legacy — a gift that will last forever!  
On our website we recognize all past donations to honour friends and loved ones

# The Perfect Storm

*By Dennis Barry*

One consideration in choosing when to visit Thickson's Woods is weather. But what weather is best? It's complicated! There's temperature to consider, and wind direction and intensity. And what about precipitation, cloud cover and fog?

Last spring, May along Lake Ontario's north shore was unusual in that day after day was mainly sunny and rain-free, with moderate winds and almost no fog. There was little to make migration difficult, so birds moved through unhindered. Good for the birds, for which we are grateful, but not so good for the birders.

So what weather does make for the best birding? I vividly remember my first expedition to Point Pelee back in the early 1960s. We left Hepworth at the base of the Bruce Peninsula late one Friday evening in early May and drove southward for several hours, arriving at the park well past midnight. In those days camping in Pelee was allowed. Since it was so late and we were exhausted, and dawn would arrive very early, we decided to sleep in the car and set up camp the next day.

Not long after falling asleep, we were awakened by loud cracks of thunder. Flashes of lightning were soon followed by torrents of rain pounding on the roof of the car. Thoughts of a long anticipated adventure turning into a soggy nightmare crossed our minds, but a more gentle drumming of rain soon lulled us back to sleep.

What seemed like only moments later, we awoke to a loud chorus of bird song. Fumbling for our binoculars, we climbed stiffly out of the vehicle and looked around. As dawn brightened the eastern sky, we tried to sort out the many songs, some familiar, but many intriguing mysteries to newbie birders. When the sun peeked through the tangle of trees bordering the campground, all around us we could see warblers and vireos, tanagers and orioles, each busily refueling after an arduous journey north, perhaps across several US states and then Lake Erie to this most southerly mainland bit of Canada.

Only after many more years of birding did I come to realize how lucky we had been to arrive at Point Pelee National Park after the best possible nighttime weather to make for ideal birding. So when folks ask, "What are the best weather conditions for birding at Thickson's?" I always say, "Hope for a warm, wet weather system moving up from the Gulf of Mexico, with southwest winds providing an assist to migrants, perhaps even scooping up some southern species and carrying them north of their normal nesting grounds. Then hope for a cold front moving south from the Canadian arctic to meet the warm air over Lake Ontario. This needs to happen well past midnight, triggering thunderstorms and a shift from southerly winds to northerly."

If the cold front arrives earlier, migrants may not fly that night, or may be forced down before getting to Lake Ontario.

## Birds Beavers and Butterflies Nature Festival

Saturday, September 16, 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. in the meadow

Plans are already under way. Some of your favourite acts have been booked, such as Speaking of Wildlife and Creepy Critters.

We were worried that the amazing Max Toaze, our talented local magician, was going disappear again, but he's generously agreed to come confound our guests for at least one more year. We're honoured, because he's recently turned down international gigs.

Mid-September should be a peak time for fall wildflowers in the meadow, and bird migration should be in full swing.





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

*by Phill Holder*

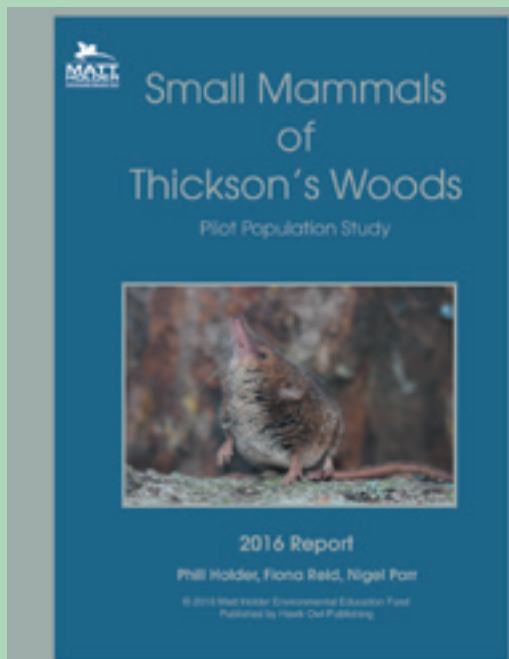
A good year to be in the Reserve, 2016! Birding was wonderful as usual, and thanks to Glenn Coady we added Piping Plover to our checklist, bringing the total species count to 318, approximately 70% of all Ontario species. Another illustration of how important Thickson's Woods is to bird life. An updated field checklist is now available.

Studies involving other animals confirm that the Reserve is a haven for nature in many forms. The results of our small mammal trapping program have been published and submitted to MNRF. The feedback came with positive reviews, and we were awarded permits to continue with the program this year. It was great fun and we made some important discoveries. The highlight was tiny Masked Shrews, a species I'd never seen before. Not so pleasant was seeing the August botfly infestation of White-footed Mice.

The pollinator garden was completed by Roots and Wings Homeschool Co-operative. We are keen to watch the native plants develop this year, and discover what pollinator species they attract.



Masked Shrew (Mike McEvoy)



The 2016 Mammal report is available as a downloadable pdf from our web site [www.mattholderfund.com](http://www.mattholderfund.com)

We continued our bat project by working with the Ontario Land Trust Alliance to install a static bat detector. This device turned itself on at dusk and off at dawn, recording any bat vocalizations within range. Preliminary data analysis is quite exciting. Six of the eight Ontario species were again recorded, suggesting there's a thriving population of bats living and feeding over the Reserve. The next step is to actually catch bats to determine how healthy they are.

Through the bat program, we quickly discovered how little the average naturalist knows about these fascinating flying mammals. In fact there is much yet to be discovered about bat ecology in Ontario, and this inspired me to ask Toby Thorne to write a book on the Bats of Ontario as part of the Matt Holder Field Identification Series. Toby accepted the challenge and we were fortunate that Fiona Reid, author of the Peterson Guide to Mammals of North America, agreed to allow us to use her wonderful bat illustrations.

The book is currently being prepared for printing and should be available for sale in May.

Anyone who has read our Aquila Newsletter or this one knows about our passion for moths! This project has been the most incredible experience I've had since I was a kid. The excitement of discovery awaits every time we set out the light traps. The cryptic diversity of colour, size, texture and shape seems infinite. We finished our trapping year in late October, when the overnight temperature fell below 10°C, but what an October it was! We added quite a few new species to the list, including the Alamo Moth, new for Canada, and many "southern" species that, like birds, find their way north in certain years. It seems like a long winter and we can't wait to get started again. We are really close to 1000 species and should reach that benchmark this spring.

To put Thickson's Woods in perspective with regards to moths, I recently had an email conversation with an expert from Ottawa, who proudly told me he was close to recording 2000 species in the Greater Ottawa area.



The Alamo Moth a first for Canada (Phill Holder)

He went somewhat quiet when I told him we were close to 1000 species in a reserve of 25 acres. The Checklist of the Moths of Thickson's Woods is now available for purchase from our web site.

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## Bees

This spring, the Matt Holder Environmental Research Fund will expand our pollinator program to include a study of bees that visit Thickson's Woods Nature Reserve. During our moth study we often find them, but have not focused on their identification. It's a natural progression of our overall biodiversity study to now include bees.

After discussion with Wildlife Preservation Canada, we are going to participate in their Provincial Bumble Bee program by using bumble bee boxes to encourage and provide habitat for these important pollinators. Boxes will be placed in various parts of the reserve. By monitoring them, we will be able to identify the species that use the reserve. A similar program using solitary bee logs should give a better understanding of what can be done to help protect these insects.

### Bumble Bees

As with other pollinators, bumble bees are extremely important to our biodiversity and some species are seriously threatened. The Rusty-patched Bumble Bee is endangered and the Yellow-banded Bumble Bee is of special concern in Ontario.

Bumble bee colonies are much smaller than those of honeybees and do not produce significant quantities of honey. Nectar is stored only temporarily, because just mated queens overwinter. The queen emerges in the

spring, finds a suitable nesting site and raises the first brood of workers by herself. She then remains in the nest and focuses on egg-laying. Workers take over foraging, cell-building and tending to the young. When the colony reaches sufficient size, the next generation of reproductive queens and males are produced and mating occurs. These mated queens disperse and the social structure of the original colony begins to break down. The founding queen dies in the fall. The young, newly mated queens hibernate over the winter, emerging in spring to start the cycle again.



Brown-belted Bumble Bee (Mike McEvoy)



## Solitary Bees

Solitary bees make individual nest cells for their larvae. Most species nest in small tunnels or holes. They are harmless to us, but are predators of small insects. Many solitary bees are very small and you may not even realize they are bees. All collect nectar and pollen from flowers and although they are known as solitary bees, some species will group their nest cells together.

Solitary bees are not aggressive. They rarely if ever sting unless trodden on. Even if they do sting, it is not a painful sting like honeybees and most of the time you will not even feel it. They do not make honey, build honeycombs, or swarm.

They are important pollinators. Artificial nest sites can be made by drilling holes in logs. These are often called “bee hotels”, but this is misleading, as they are the bee’s permanent home for most of its short life as it develops from an egg through a larval stage, then as a pupa, finally emerging as an adult.

Far from hibernating this winter, we have been busy building bee houses and bee hotels, improving our moth traps and designing and building a new folding one for travelling.



One of our Solitary Bee “Hotel’s” (Phill Holder)

## Notice

As described above we have placed Bee Boxes in the Reserve, both above and in the ground. The ones attached to trees are obvious and look like bird nest boxes. We will be monitoring them throughout the summer for activity. Bumble Bees are pretty docile, except when disturbed at their nest. Please observe the bees from a distance to avoid getting stung. If you find a Bumble bee colony, please let me know. Phill Holder



On the left, only the entrance pipe is seen of the underground nest box. The ones above ground are attached to trees or in gardens, and are obvious. Please do not disturb them. (Mike McEvoy)

All our research is funded entirely by the sale of our publications and small donations. Donations made to TWLT are not used for any Matt Holder Environmental Research activities.

To purchase publications visit us for a coffee and muffin at the entrance to the Meadow on May weekends, contact me at 905-987-1966 or email me at [hawkowl@bell.net](mailto:hawkowl@bell.net) or from our web site

[www.mattholderfund.com](http://www.mattholderfund.com)





This beautiful Silver-haired Bat was found in Thickson's Woods in a state of torpor on Monday April 3. It was a female, weighing 6g (which is normal for this time of year). Silver-haired Bats are thought to migrate south for winter and this one may have come back too early or even overwintered in the woods. Sadly, the bat passed, but it was a thrill to finally see a Silver-haired instead of just hearing them.

Silver-haired Bat (Mike McEvoy)

On Wednesday April 5, I joined a group of bat researchers at the Toronto Zoo, in part, to coordinate the bat research activities within Ontario and find a platform to share information. Over 50 people attended and the common theme throughout the meeting was that we still do not know very much about our bats. Their roost sites, movement patterns and populations in particular.

So I have a request: Do you have bats roosting on your property and would you confidentially share that information? We are trying to get an idea of species and population counts. Please contact me with any bat information you have at [hawkowl@bell.net](mailto:hawkowl@bell.net) Phill Holder

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.

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

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ Prov/State \_\_\_\_\_ Postal Code \_\_\_\_\_ Tel. \_\_\_\_\_

e-mail \_\_\_\_\_

**Cheques can be payable to Thickson's Woods Land Trust.**

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