

# Fletcher Wildlife Garden: Strategic Plan 2011–2012

## 1. Who We Are

The Fletcher Wildlife Garden (FWG) is a long-term project of the Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club (OFNC). Established in 1991, it is managed by an ad hoc committee of the OFNC and maintained by dedicated volunteers with financial support from the OFNC, donations, grants from funding agencies, and fundraising activities.

The FWG seeks to encourage as many people as possible to create or restore natural landscapes on their property to provide wildlife habitat within the city and to show home owners how they might make their properties, both urban and suburban, more wildlife friendly. The FWG encompasses 6.5 hectares of the Central Experimental Farm and is located immediately south of the Farm's Arboretum. It consists of an Interpretive Centre, a demonstration wildlife-friendly Backyard Garden and a variety of natural habitats that are connected by trails. The FWG is readily accessible to naturalists, gardeners, schoolchildren, and other residents of the city and its suburbs.

The Interpretive Centre disseminates information on regional natural history and conservation issues. It offers displays, guides, a library, identification aids, and instruction leaflets ("how to" sheets) on aspects of wildlife gardening based on our own experience and geared toward local conditions, i.e., eastern Ontario. It is open when staff (summer students) or volunteers are available.

The Backyard Garden behind the centre is intended to show how anyone can transform their own garden into one that is wildlife friendly. Volunteers work to restore and enhance the Backyard Garden and natural habitats to provide food sources, shelter, water, and a wide range of potential homes for regional wildlife. The various habitats serve as models to anyone who has similar suitable habitat that they wish to make more wildlife friendly.

All brochures, how-to sheets, inventories, photos, and information about our experience are available on the FWG web site ([www.ofnc.ca/fletcher](http://www.ofnc.ca/fletcher)), which also offers a virtual tour of the garden. The FWG uses an electronic newsletter, issued several times a year, to report on progress, let volunteers and the public know what's new at the garden, and publicize FWG events. Our photo "blog" is an informal record of wildlife sightings at the garden. Most recently, we have created an FWG group on Facebook in hopes of reaching a different audience.

This long-term plan describes the intended directions of the FWG over the next 5 years. We intend to review it annually and supplement it with an annual work plan.

## **1.1 History**

After several years of searching and negotiation, a site was selected in 1990, in Ottawa's Central Experimental Farm immediately south of the existing Arboretum on land no longer needed for expansion of the Ornamental Gardens. The site included an unmanaged ravine with a small creek, trees of various ages that had been planted by Agriculture Canada, and a considerable expanse of mowed grass. A grant from the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources paid for a comprehensive development plan by a landscape architect. Support for the project came from the Friends of the Central Experimental Farm, the Ottawa chapter of Landscape Ontario, and the staff of the Central Experimental Farm. These supporters provided both expertise and the ability to undertake and pay for major projects.

Work began in 1991 to create new habitat areas. A dam across the upper end of the ravine created a pond, which has since sheltered a variety of birds, frogs, turtles, fish, and numerous invertebrates. Trees were planted in an open field to create a New Woodlot. A stand of mature green ash and red oak formed the basis of another woodlot. Fallen leaves were spread under these trees to amend the soil and allow a forest understory to develop in place of mowed grass. Suitable trees, shrubs and woodland flowers were planted to assist the process. Other shrubs were used to create a "hedgerow" on one side of the New Woodlot, similar to fencerows found on farms prior to mechanization. A Backyard Garden was created by the Ottawa Chapter of Landscape Ontario. The garden features plants, particularly native plants, that are noted for their attractiveness to animals in general (particularly insects) and includes a pond as a water feature. A number of bird boxes and two bird feeders were set up on the FWG, and a 1.5-km nature trail was created to wind through the various habitat areas. Today considerable naturalization has taken place, some of it by alien invasive species which we are trying to control.

The FWG species lists include approximately 150 species of birds (about 25% nest on the site), about the same number of wildflowers (and additional ones in the backyard garden), about 40 butterflies, and smaller numbers of other groups. Red foxes, beavers, raccoons, and white-tailed deer have been seen.

The FWG celebrated its 20-year anniversary in 2010.

## **2. Mission and Strategic Objectives**

### **2.1 Mission**

Encourage residents of the Ottawa area to create or restore wildlife-friendly habitat and gardens on their urban or rural property, emphasizing the use of plants native to this region.

## **2.2 Strategic Objectives**

The strategic objectives of the FWG are:

1. Outreach and education
2. Habitat improvement
3. Control of invasives
4. Natural history of the FWG

## **2.3 Principles of Operation**

All initiatives and projects undertaken by the FWG are subject to review to ensure that they adhere to the intent and spirit of:

1. Use, as much as possible, native plants indigenous and common to our area.
2. Maximize biodiversity.
3. Eliminate the need for herbicides, pesticides, and other artificial additives.
4. Minimize the need for maintenance.
5. Ensure the safety of volunteers and the public.
6. Provide a work environment that offers satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment to volunteers.
7. Provide clear and accurate information.
8. Support only those activities that are consistent with the FWG's mission, the terms of reference agreed to with the OFNC, and the terms of the agreement with Agriculture and Agri-Foods Canada.
9. Liaise with relevant organizations/groups.

## **3. Audience, Shareholders and Stakeholders**

The following political, economic, technical, legal and societal dynamics describe the operating environment related to FWG, and they may significantly influence how FWG structures its work activities and what outcomes are intended.

### **3.1 Audience**

The general public is the main target audience of the FWG. The FWG's goal is to have a positive, reversing impact on the ever-increasing habitat loss that is leading to the decline of many plant and animal species. This impact may be increased wildlife gardening by the public or an increase in the level of awareness of the public of the importance of preserving wildlife habitat. The FWG seeks to explore and make public various aspects of the use of native plants in the garden to attract birds and butterflies and to encourage the propagation and use of native plants.

The many people who volunteer at FWG represent a second importance audience. The FWG gives them the opportunity to participate in activities and events related to wildlife gardening and natural history. Their work provides an avenue to attain satisfaction and develop a sense of accomplishment. Some volunteers serve on the Management Committee. Others choose to perform tasks that represent research in techniques and procedures to maintain and improve the various habitats at FWG. All volunteers help the FWG attain its mission and goals.

A third audience consists of those people who do not have an intimate interest in participating in wildlife gardening, but who merely enjoy the pleasures of the natural settings and/or the more organized beauty of the Backyard Garden.

### **3.2 Shareholders**

The OFNC and Agriculture and Agri-Foods Canada (AAFC) are the dominant shareholders. The OFNC operates the FWG through a memorandum of understanding signed with AAFC. This memorandum lays out guidelines and stipulations for the use of AAFC land by the FWG, defines the responsibilities and obligations of both partners, and also prescribes its renewal. The president and council of the OFNC are the final authority for the Garden.

The chairperson of the FWG Management Committee or his/her delegate sits on the OFNC Council and is responsible for keeping the Council informed of developments.

The chairperson of the FWG Management Committee or his/her delegate serves on the Central Experimental Farm Advisory Committee (CEFAC). This body serves as an important means of obtaining input from the public, the FWG, the Friends of the Central Experimental Farm (FCEF), and the Agricultural Museum and will provide advice and recommendations to assist AAFC in its land stewardship role.

### **3.3 Stakeholders**

FCEF is the predominant stakeholder in the FWG. Because FCEF and FWG operate on AAFC land and there may arise occasions when they have a common interest in matters that could affect their activities, a representative of the FCEF serves as an observer on the FWG Management Committee. A representative of the FCEF also serves on CEFAC.

## **4. Operating Environment**

### **4.1 Organization**

#### **4.1.1 Management Committee**

The day-to-day management of the Garden is the responsibility of the chairperson and members of the FWG Management Committee. This committee assumes direct responsibility of behalf of the OFNC.

#### **4.1.2 Volunteer Participation**

Volunteers, for the most part, carry out the activities of the FWG and their input regarding planning and work priorities is solicited. A volunteer coordinator and habitat managers are appointed, when possible, to ensure that volunteers are available and to direct volunteers in gardening and maintenance activities. They work with the Management Committee. A list of volunteers is maintained.

#### **4.1.3 Employees**

In general, the sole employee of the FWG is a student hired for the summer when funds are available.

#### **4.2 Physical Assets: Interpretive Centre and Habitats**

The Interpretive Centre serves as a

- room for meetings, lectures, workshops, demonstrations, etc., for up to 40 people
- permanent exhibit space on walls; temporary exhibits
- reference library
- small sales area for OFNC publications
- office space

The land of the FWG is divided into Habitats, which consist of

- Backyard Garden
- Amphibian Pond/Wetland
- Butterfly Meadow
- Hedgerow
- New Woodlot
- Ash Woodlot
- Old Field
- Open spaces
- Ravine

#### **4.3 Financial Aspects**

- The main, relatively consistent source of revenue for the FWG is its annual plant sale held on the first Saturday in June.
- The FWG receives a modest annual budget from the OFNC.
- Subject to availability, the FWG will apply to granting organizations for funds for specific projects,

- Donations of varying amounts are received from individuals and organizations/corporation.
- Bequests intended for specific projects will be accepted if in line with the Mission and Objectives of the FWG, for example, the pergola in front of our Interpretive Centre, with appropriate acknowledgement of our benefactors.
- For occasional larger, more expensive projects, the FWG may request special financial assistance from the OFNC

## **5. Work Program to Achieve Strategic Objectives**

The Work Program within each Strategic Objectives follows:

### **5.1 Outreach and Education**

1. Increase the public's knowledge of local ecology and inspire people to garden for wildlife by participating in local events focused on the natural environment.
2. Provide examples of wildlife-friendly habitat that is typical of the Ottawa area (such as pond, woodlot, old field, hedgerow).
3. Demonstrate techniques and principles for creating natural habitat that will attract wildlife.
4. Share our experience and exchange information with others.
5. Develop and maintain appropriate signage on FWG activities and habitats.
6. Hold an annual plant sale, predominantly of native plants.
7. Co-operate with the OFNC's Education and Publicity Committee to hold workshops at the Interpretive Centre.

### **5.2 Habitat Improvement**

1. Carry out improvement and repair projects related to the physical assets of the FWG, e.g., the Amphibian Pond bridge.
2. Create and maintain habitats that are as natural as possible and that are typical of the Ottawa region.
3. Enhance the various habitats by planting native species that provide food and shelter to local wildlife and by adding features, such as bird boxes, rock piles, perching sites, etc., to increase wildlife use.

### **5.3 Control of Invasives**

1. Carry out literature searches in terms of both the scientific reports and physical control methods.
2. Implement and evaluate effectiveness of selected physical control methods.
3. Develop a strategy for long-term control.
4. Liaise with other groups facing invasives issues,

#### **5.4 Natural History of the FWG**

1. Maintain a logbook and an electronic database of observations of birds, mammals, insects, butterflies, and amphibians/reptiles at FWG.
2. Maintain a database of plants in the Backyard Garden, including growing information for gardeners and wildlife uses of the plants.
3. Update lists of birds, butterflies, insects, etc., in brochures for revising fact sheets on the natural history of FWG, e.g., trail guide, pamphlets on butterflies at FWG, on site and for publication on the FWG website.
4. Maintain records, reports, etc., of activities and studies undertaken at the FWG.

#### **6. Work Program Objectives**

The Work Program objectives of the FWG are presented in a separate document that is updated on an annual basis.