

## News from the FWG: Summer through Winter 2005/2006

By Christine Hanrahan



*New patio, 2005*

The long hot summer progressed into a warm fall with the balmy days lasting into November. This mild weather allowed volunteers to continue working at a variety of outside projects quite late into the season.

### Backyard Garden News

Changes to the BYG continued apace as visitors familiar with the garden will have noticed. Jay re-laid the patio behind the Interpretive Centre and it is now both level and attractively curved. The brick edging that was mentioned in the last update

was placed around more beds making mowing of the grass that much easier. The centre bed has been re-made so that it now becomes one with the woodland walk. The native grass garden is just about complete and in 2006 more of the innovations outlined in the five year plan for the garden will be implemented. All the work is performed by a dedicated band of volunteers under the direction of Jay Ladell. If you would like to join in (and new members are always more than welcome) please contact Jay at [jay\\_ladell@yahoo.com](mailto:jay_ladell@yahoo.com) or leave a message at 234-6767.

### Events

Under warm, sunny skies on September 24<sup>th</sup> we took part in AAFC's open house. Although the projected number of visitors didn't materialize a steady flow of people, ferried around the farm on double-decker buses, visited the garden. A bilingual information sheet, "Welcome to the Fletcher Wildlife Garden" was prepared as a handout. Copies are still available at the centre.

Winter is generally a quiet time at FWG but mark your calendars for our two upcoming regular events, International Migratory Bird Day on Saturday May 13<sup>th</sup>, and the Annual Native Plant



*AAFC open house at FWG, Sept. 2005*

Sale on Saturday June 3<sup>rd</sup>. More information can be found in the “Coming Events” section of this publication, or by checking our website at <http://www.ofnc.ca/fletcher>. If you have native plants you would like to donate to the sale please contact Sandy Garland at [sgarland@magma.ca](mailto:sgarland@magma.ca). We will also be participating as usual in the Wildlife Awareness Event at Billings Bridge, part of the Ottawa Wildlife Festival. Visit us there on April 7, 8 and 9, 2006.

The Great Backyard Bird Count will be over by the time you read this report. FWG has participated for some years now and it is always fun to see how many birds we can find during this count. Watch for details in the next update.

## Problems

Surprisingly, no fires were found this fall, perhaps a first! This is not to say that we didn't have our share of problems, although I'm happy to say that none were serious. A newly erected boundary sign was removed and slightly damaged in late fall. One of the Old Field birdhouses lost its top (yanked off and discarded nearby), and one of our picnic tables was 'borrowed' in January and found at the bottom of the BYG facing the canal. Perhaps the most disheartening problem we encountered was the damage to two white pines just north of the Ash Woods. Since this happened shortly before Christmas we can only assume they were taken for Christmas trees. One was lopped off near ground level, the other about 4 feet above the ground. We've watched these trees grow from tiny saplings so it was doubly sad to see this damage. Once again we remind readers that if they see anything suspicious at FWG to please call AAFC Security at 759-1985 and the FWG at 234-6767.

## Managing the Garden

### *Invasive species*

The last update contained a great deal about invasive species control (Hanrahan 2005). Late spring and summer are the months for much of this work although buckthorn and Amur Maple removal continued well into the fall. Many thanks to Tony Denton and Colin Freebury for their concerted efforts on this particular task.



*Old Field, Nov. 2005*

### *Old Field*

As buckthorn and Amur Maples were removed from thickets around this habitat, the density of cover for wildlife diminished. To remedy this, we have been planting a variety of native shrubs to replace the invasives. The fall of 2005 saw this planting continue on the eastern edge of the Old field. Many thanks to Colin Freebury and Claudia Burns for helping out.

### ***Hedgerow***

The trail alongside the Hedgerow has become increasingly overgrown in sections as trees and shrubs on both sides meet. Visitors have been breaking off the branches in order to get through. Our choice was to re-route the trail around these obstacles, cut down some of the vegetation, or shorten the trail and allow the rest of it to grow over. We chose the latter. A new directional sign encourages visitors to follow the newly re-routed trail at the appropriate point.

### ***Pond***

Over the last few years we've been increasingly concerned with the health of our pond. Anecdotal evidence suggests that there are fewer aquatic invertebrates than in previous years and this was borne out by some dip net sampling David Hobden did in 2005 to compare with results from 2003. We know that we need to conduct systematic monitoring of the pond but haven't quite decided how to proceed. A Carleton University student did some water and benthic organism tests in the pond during the spring and summer of 2005. We don't yet have the results from her work but perhaps future updates will have more news.



*Pond, Sept. 2005*

In the meantime, we have asked other people for their opinions. Several suggested that the pond needs to be made deeper otherwise it is well on its way to becoming a marsh rather than a pond. This can only be done by bringing in heavy equipment for excavation. Others have noted that the pond is fed by nutrient rich water, run-off from the farm fields across the road. Another problem is that the water flows in very close to where it flows out again thus there is little circulation. Also a

concern are the cattails that have increased and spread substantially over the last 3 years although they are dying out in some parts of the pond. (And we'd like to know why that is too). In late summer and fall Sandy Garland and Diane Lepage spent considerable time removing quantities of the dead cattails. We don't want to remove all of them because they attract nesting Red-winged Blackbirds. Looking back at my notes I see that in 1996 there was no evidence of this species nesting at the FWG. At the same time, cattail growth was limited. As the cattails spread creating good nesting habitat, the blackbirds began nesting with at least 8 pairs by 2005. Ideally we'd like to maintain this nesting success while at the same time helping the health of the pond.

## **Managing the Site**

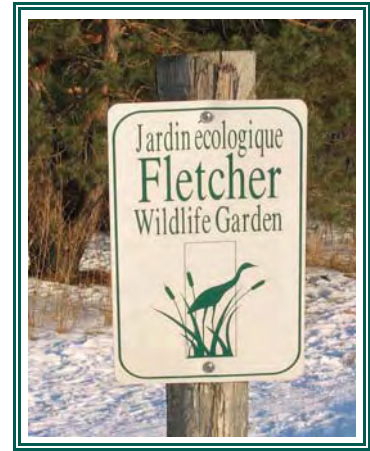
### ***Bill Holland Trail***

The trail from just south of the parking lot down to the pond and up the slope on the south side was laid with gravel to help alleviate the muddy, slippery conditions that come with wet weather. We had many positive comments on the improvement and thanks go to all the volunteers who helped with the task, especially Sandy for organizing it all.

### ***Signs***

More boundary signs were put up to help demarcate the FWG. Consideration will be given to placing further signs in the spring. Thanks to Charlie Clifford for this work.

We're getting closer to coming up with a new sign to replace the large map sign by the parking lot. Deciding on the design, the material, and the types of information we wanted to display all took time but there is a good chance that by summer 2006 you will see a new and improved sign.



*Boundary sign*

### ***Miscellaneous***

Two memorial trees, sugar maples, were donated to the FWG and planted by AAFC at the south-west boundary of the garden. In time we hope to create a band of trees and shrubs along this side of the garden to meet up with the thickets on the western edge of the Old Field.

We received two kind donations of books, from Bev Scott (by way of Bev Peterkin) and from Eileen Evans (through her daughter). Some we retained for our library, the rest we listed for sale. Thus far approximately \$200 has been raised for the FWG from this effort.

Jay Ladell, our BYG Manager, very generously replaced all our old light bulbs with energy efficient fluorescent ones, at his own expense. Not only is this more environmentally friendly, but they are much brighter than the others. Thanks Jay!

## **Plants and Animals**

### ***Birds***

Just as the last Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas volunteer wrap-up was getting underway, a Barred Owl flew past the Interpretive Centre pursued by what seemed like hundreds of crows. It landed first in the ravine and then north of the Ash Woods. This was a new species for the FWG list. A few days later the owl was spotted again in the conifers north of the woods, and again was being mobbed mercilessly by hordes of crows. Another owl, a Great Horned, this time, was found on the Christmas Bird Count, but so far as we know hasn't been seen since.

The Red-tailed Hawk, present around the farm since mid-July 2005, continues to be seen regularly as of this writing (early February). Cooper's Hawk nested in the Arboretum in 2001 and have been consistently seen around the farm and the FWG ever since. This past fall and

winter they have been particularly noticeable.

A juvenile Northern Shrike perched near the BYG on October 19<sup>th</sup> constituted the first Ottawa report for the season. It is not often that we get to hear this species singing or calling but this bird was vocally active for at least 10 minutes. There has been only one more sighting of this species as of early February.

Several Pine Grosbeaks were found feeding on crabapples on December 7<sup>th</sup>. The last time I saw this species at FWG was the winter of 1994. Small flocks of Pine Grosbeaks continue to be seen occasionally in the Arboretum. Also in late January, approximately 8 robins were found. A White-throated Sparrow has stuck around the BYG since fall and can be found almost daily feeding with the House Sparrows. A second White-throated Sparrow was present in early January for awhile.

### ***Other Fauna***

After an absence of more than a year, it seems that foxes have returned to the farm. The winter of 2004-2005 was characterized by a dearth of fox sightings or signs (scat, tracks), while the den sites were all quiet. In late fall 2005 a couple of reports came in from people who thought they'd seen a fox around the fields but neither report was verifiable. When the first snow came I went down to the pond to look for tracks and found one set of what could only be fox tracks. Cause for hope! I checked the farm fields frequently and found only occasional sets of tracks, but one day in mid-January I finally saw a very healthy looking fox outside one of the traditional den sites! If all goes well we may be lucky enough to see this animal on a more regular basis again. And perhaps our rabbit population will return to some sort of balance!

### **Volunteer Opportunities**

If you would like to help us remove invasive species, plant trees, work in the BYG, or with any number of other activities, please contact the FWG (details at end of article).

The Friday morning (BYG) and Sunday morning (the rest of the FWG) work crews will begin work in the spring and the Wednesday evening group will be a springtime only group in 2006.

**Acknowledgments:** As always, a big thank you to the many volunteers who make the garden the wonderful place it is. All photos by Christine Hanrahan except as noted.

**References:** Hanrahan, Christine. 2005. News from the FWG: Summer 2005. T&L 39(4):166-173.

#### **FWG Details and Contact Information**

The FWG is located off Prince of Wales Drive on the Central Experimental Farm. For more information please visit the website at: <http://www.ofnc.ca/fletcher.php>. Brochures about the garden are available from the Centre on Friday mornings from spring through fall, Sunday afternoons in the summer, or during the week June through August when we have a summer employee.

- FWG phone number: 613-234-6767
- David Hobden, Chair, FWG Management Committee: [dhobden@magma.ca](mailto:dhobden@magma.ca)
- Jay Ladell, BYG Manager: [jay\\_ladell@yahoo.com](mailto:jay_ladell@yahoo.com)
- Sandy Garland: website and information about the FWG: [sgarland@magma.ca](mailto:sgarland@magma.ca)
- Christine Hanrahan: bird and wildlife observations: [vanessa@magma.ca](mailto:vanessa@magma.ca)