

News from the FWG: Summer 2005

By Christine Hanrahan

Spring 2005 was so cold and wet we wondered if summer was heading the same way. But by the time June rolled around, temperatures had risen along with the humidity, turning summer into endless days of steamy +30 temperatures. Remarkably, volunteers continued working at FWG despite the weather.

Backyard Garden News

The information sign for the Backyard Garden (BYG) was erected in late July and looks tremendous. Congratulations to Jay Ladell, BYG Manager, who did a great job on this attractive well designed sign. Check it out for yourself, it is the first thing you see as you head towards the backyard garden.

Changes to the garden continue with the focus this summer on creation of the grass garden where native local grasses, attractive as ornamentals and beneficial for wildlife, will be showcased. Brick edging has been placed around several of the garden beds, and new plant labels are being produced. If there is time, the patio behind the Interpretive Centre will be re-graded. As always, the work is carried out by the Friday morning group and the Wednesday evening gang who all carried on despite the



New BYG sign.

intense and stultifying heat. If you would like to help out in the BYG (a great opportunity to learn more about native plant gardening) please contact Jay at jay_ladell@yahoo.com or leave a message at 234-6767.

Events

International Migratory Bird Day, always the second Saturday of May, has been celebrated at FWG for many years. The event focuses attention on the return of spring migrants to their northerly breeding grounds. The cool, rainy weather of May 14th prevented many people from coming out, but 30 visitors braved the day for a guided birding tour of the FWG capably led by Dave Moore who can always find interesting things along the way, even if the birds are quiet. **The Annual Native Plant Sale** was held June 4th. More plants, more variety and more people

attending combined to make the day an overwhelming success, our best sale yet. Thanks to Jay Ladell who did a great job of organizing the event, and to Jay and Sandy for growing so many of the plants for sale, to Elizabeth Gammell for once again running the 'Information Table' and to all the volunteers who turned out in force to help. Stay tuned for the 2006 plant sale on the first Saturday in June.

Brochures

The new FWG general brochure is now ready and available for pickup from the Interpretive Centre. It replaces the original brochure from the mid-1990's with a fresh design, and new text. Many thanks to Elizabeth Gammell who did a superb job on the writing and design, and kudos to Jay and David for helping with layout and editing, and to the rest of the FWG Management Committee for their input and advice.

Problems

While the fire season seems confined to the beginning and the end of the school year (see: Hanrahan 2005), summer brings problems of a different sort. Plant theft from the garden appeared to be minimal this summer, but trouble arrived with a group of Orienteers in late June. This group of approximately 20 to 30 people dashed mindlessly back and forth through the FWG, heedless of newly planted shrubs and nesting birds. If we'd been notified of this event in advance we could have warned them about avoiding the garden. Adding insult to injury, it appears that they *drove* through the old field earlier (narrowly missing a Yellow Warbler nest) in order to set up their 'checkpoint'. A letter was sent to the group responsible.

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 control Dog-strangling Vine /Pale Swallowwort (*Cynanchum vincetoxicum*)

Despite many hours spent trying to control this species in 2004, we were dismayed but not overly surprised to see how vigorously Dog-strangling vine (DSV) or Swallowwort grew back in 2005. It was clearly more abundant than ever. Only the areas mulched in 2004 appeared to show some success and of course, we don't know if this is temporary or permanent. In 2004 two different types of mulch were tested: several cleared areas were covered with the



DSV - 2005, Photo by S. Darbyshire

cut DSV plants and then with tarpaulins, while other sites used thick layers of newspaper covered with soil. Although some plants grew on top of the mulch under the tarp covered pile, they were most likely from seeds that had lodged there and not from plants growing up through the mulch itself. It will be interesting to see what happens over the next few years as the mulch layers decay. Will DSV re-assert itself in these areas?

This past summer, DSV on the north side of the pond was cut and covered with large, heavy duty tarpaulins. Hopefully this will prevent the plant from growing again next spring, or at least



DSV flowers

growing as thickly. Several volunteers set up test plots to determine rate and density of re-growth after pulling or cutting the stem, and work was also done to determine plant density. If we are to come up with some sort of workable solution for controlling DSV at the garden then we need to learn more about the biology and ecology of this species. Check our website for reports on our progress with this invasive alien plant, and for links to recent scientific works: [.http://www.ofnc.ca/fletcher/research/index_e.php#dsv](http://www.ofnc.ca/fletcher/research/index_e.php#dsv)

Garlic Mustard (*Alliaria officinalis*)

Recent research has helped us learn more about this plant and how best to control it. Armed with this knowledge we now feel pretty confident that in time we will be able to remove most if not all of this species from FWG.

To get a copy of our new *Invasive Species Information Sheet on Garlic Mustard*, check out our website at: http://www.ofnc.ca/fletcher/research/index_e.php#garlic

Common Burdock (*Arctium minus*)

Common Burdock has become quite a problem at the garden in the last few years. Current research into burdock control has given us new insights into this plant allowing us to believe that in time we will be able to control the species. Approximately 300 burdock plants were cut back this past summer, with a few left standing to provide winter seeds for birds. Hundreds of burdock basal rosettes are growing at FWG but continued removal over the next 5 to 10 years should, we hope, see reasonable control of this species. For more information about burdock download a copy of our new *Invasive Species Information Sheet on Common Burdock*, from our website: http://www.ofnc.ca/fletcher/research/index_e.php#burdock

Buckthorn species (*Rhamnus frangula*, *R. cathartica*)

As noted in previous articles, we have been working at removing both buckthorn species from FWG since 2001. In 2004 many fruiting (female) trees were taken out of the thickets around the Old Field. Tony Denton has been handling this project for the last five years and has seen helpers come and go. It would be wonderful if we could find some willing able-bodied folk to



Glossy Buckthorn

Fruit

give him a hand sometimes. This valuable work is time-consuming for one person. If you'd like to get involved with the buckthorn project, and learn about controlling invasive woody species at the same time, please

contact Tony at ajmd1@sympatico.ca. We know that this species, along with various other trees, can re-sprout quite rapidly from the trunk, even when cut close to the ground.

Tony came up with the ingenious idea of

covering the stumps with heavy plastic pool liner and covering with soil. So far, we have not seen any re-growth. We have recently learned of a bioherbicide, a microbial biological weed control agent, that might have applications for use at FWG. Hopefully, we will have more news in future updates.

Flowering Rush (*Butomus umbellatus*)

Over the last few years, Flowering Rush has been consistently removed from the FWG pond and finally appeared to be far less prevalent in 2005. However, vigilance is needed as with any invasive species, and so the three pond ladies, Sandy Garland, Isabelle Nicol and Diane Lepage were back in the pond again in 2005 removing the plant. This time they had some help from a Muskrat who has taken up residence in the pond and shows an appetite for Flowering Rush roots.



Flowering Rush

Amur Maple (*Acer ginnala*)

This garden ornamental has spread like the weed it is throughout the garden and most of the saplings are now producing seeds, thereby increasing the number of new maples exponentially. Colin Freebury cleared a large area of this species in the fall of 2004, but in 2005 we noticed that they were back and thicker than ever. As of this writing (mid-August), plans were underway to remove one of the large 'mother' trees and as many of the seedlings and saplings as possible.

Other invasive plants

Purple Loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*) appeared in several new locations at FWG in 2005, although its stronghold is still the Old Field area. Galerucella beetles introduced onto some plants in that area last year obviously moved on before doing any damage. We always remove any plants we see and are confident that we can contain them that way. Canada Thistle (*Cirsium canadensis*) increased dramatically throughout the garden in 2005 and it is clear that we are going to need to look seriously at how best to deal with this plant which spreads not only by seed but vegetatively.

Plants and Animals

Plants

It may seem from the above report on invasive plants, that all we do at FWG is think up ways to eradicate vegetation! In fact, we are always fascinated by the variety of plants at the garden and how things change from year to year. While many of the plants are non-native species, as you would expect from a site that had been cultivated for agriculture and ornamental plants (all those crabapple varieties!), it is very gratifying to see all the native species that appear without our help. Most noticeable in late summer of course are the goldenrods and asters, particularly in the Old Field area. Fortunately, many of the non-native plants are not terribly intrusive even though common, and many provide nectar for insects, particularly butterflies, and seeds for birds.

Birds

Sadly, it appears that Green Herons did not nest at FWG in 2005. Unlike previous years they were rarely seen after May, often only every few weeks at most. The kestrels, on the other hand, did nest after a hiatus in 2004. While very much in evidence during April and part of May they were fairly inconspicuous apart from the young birds jockeying for position to stick their heads out of the nest box and take a gander at the world. By early July the two young had fledged and eventually the entire kestrel family left the garden for other areas.



Tree Swallows

The Tree Swallows, so noisily evident throughout the summer departed en masse as always, this time around 14th July, although birds moving around the region were sometimes briefly seen at FWG. As of mid-August, I had cleaned half the nest boxes at FWG and those with TRSW nests (the majority) were, for the most part successful.

One nest with four eggs was abandoned, another nest had one unhatched egg, but of the 18 boxes cleaned to date, only one dead bird was found, a half-fledged house sparrow. A report on all the nest boxes at FWG will eventually be posted on our website.

There were at least 8 Red-winged Blackbird nests in the Pond, perhaps more and there was consequently, much blackbird activity until they too left in July. For whatever reasons, the blackbirds failed to congregate at FWG in late July evenings as they have done in the previous 2 years. The absence of both swallows and blackbirds by late July was striking and despite the searing temperatures it was apparent that summer was entering its final stages.

The usual species nested in and around FWG this

Dale Crook

With great sadness we report that Dale Crook, a long-standing FWG volunteer, passed away in August 2005. Dale was very active at the garden, working on buckthorn removal (his article on buckthorn can be found on our website), compiling an inventory of walnut and butternut trees at FWG (also on the website), maintaining our feeders, and so much more. Dale had a passion for and an insatiable curiosity about, the natural world and was always bringing interesting observations to our attention, pointing out things that we had not noticed. He took many wonderful photos around the garden and could often be found

summer, including Baltimore Oriole, Great-crested Flycatcher, Red-eyed Vireo, Warbling Vireo, Yellow Warbler (several nests wereand others, some unexpected birds turned up as well. A Turkey Vulture was roosting in the Arboretum on June 16th, a Black-crowned Night Heron flew around the farm on June 12th, and a Red-tailed Hawk found perched on the red barn at FWG in mid July has stayed around since. There were reports of Vesper Sparrow and Horned Larks on the farm around Morningside Lane, in the same area as nesting Savannah Sparrows and Killdeer. A female American Redstart hung around the Ash Woods for a few days before vanishing. This species occasionally nests at FWG.

Other Fauna

I spent several enchanted evenings in June late at night at FWG listening to the amazing chorus of frogs, so loud it could be heard on Morningside Lane on the other side of Prince of Wales Drive! Although Gray Treefrogs were the primary vocalists, American Toads and Green Frogs were interspersed. The cacophony was quite literally deafening, but wonderful. In late June, the nightly chorus was enhanced by scores of fireflies flitting amongst the cat-tails like miniature fairy lights. Truly magical.

Green frogs are still occasionally calling as I write (mid-August), but activity has definitely fallen off. Other species found at FWG were Bullfrogs and Wood Frogs, the latter fairly abundant (for the size of the pond) in May.

It was a good summer for butterfly diversity at FWG, although none were seen in large numbers. In particular Clouded Sulphurs, all the blues, and Common Ringlet populations have been noticeably low at FWG over the last few years.

My notes for the summer of 2005 show sightings of Silver-spotted Skipper, Hobomok Skipper, Least Skipper, European Skipper, Tawny-edged Skipper, Cabbage White, Clouded Sulphur, Spring Azure, Silvery Blue, Summer Azure, Banded Hairstreak, Eastern Comma, Mourning Cloak, Milbert's Tortoiseshell, American Lady, Fritillary Sp., White Admiral, Viceroy, Little Wood Satyr, Common Ringlet, and Monarch. The latter species more in evidence at FWG, and elsewhere this past summer, after so few sightings in 2004.



Banded Hairstreak

Other insects of interest included Cicadas (one hitched a ride on David Hobden's hat!), hoverflies, Ctenucha Moths, several species of Sphecid Wasps, Pennsylvania Leatherwings, Milkweed Bugs and Beetles, various Scarab beetles, Phymata, Megachilid bees,bumblebees, and various other bees, wasps and dragonflies. Soldier beetles were found nectaring on DSV flowers and Dance Flies were quite common around DSV leaves on late evenings in June.

The Muskrat first noted in the spring has been present all summer as well, and as noted above, seems to enjoy a diet of Flowering Rush roots. Groundhogs made an appearance this year after being absent for some time from FWG, but two were found dead, no doubt the victim of dog attacks.

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 continue throughout the fall, with the latter no doubt operating until the first snow flies. The Wednesday evening volunteers will become a spring only group starting in 2006.

Acknowledgments: As always, a big thank you to the many volunteers who really showed their dedication in the summer of 2005 by continuing to work in spite of the hot and steamy weather.

All photos by Christine Hanrahan except as noted.

References: Hanrahan, Christine. 2005. News from the FWG: Spring 2005. T&L 39(3):123-130.

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>. There you can sign up for our free newsletter *What's Up at the Fletcher Wildlife Garden*, available electronically. Brochures about the garden are available from inside 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
- Jay Ladell, BYG Manager: jay_ladell@yahoo.com
- Sandy Garland: Newsletter, information about the FWG: sgarland@magma.ca
- Christine Hanrahan: bird and wildlife observations: vanessa@magma.ca