

News from the FWG: Summer 2007

By Christine Hanrahan

August is reaching its mid-point as I write this, and the season is fast racing by. Summer is traditionally the busiest time of year at the garden but is so brief that doing all that we want to, can be a challenge. Nonetheless, we've managed to accomplish quite a lot, as you will see.

Backyard Garden News

Regular visitors to the garden will note two important changes to the BYG. Although initially we thought the BYG pond would have to wait for complete rehabilitation, this has, in fact, been accomplished. The wonderful results are thanks to the ingenuity and hard work of a group of volunteers capably led by Tony Denton. Even the long-defunct upper pond is now working, complete with a constant, gentle trickle of water into the pond below, serving as a magnet for critters of all sorts. Not long after the pond was completed four Green Frogs moved in, almost as if they'd been waiting!

The other major project involves the Woodland Walk section of the BYG, one of the garden's most enchanting features. Over time, several species of plants had begun to dominate (yes, even native species can be thugs in the garden) and other species were lost. Betty Campbell, a long-time volunteer who'd retired from the garden a little while ago, has come back to lead this work with the assistance of Brian Turnbull, our summer employee. They have added lots of logs and moss, and it is looking promising.



New Gazebo

A multitude of tasks are undertaken to keep the garden in such excellent condition. If you enjoy gardening and nature, why not consider donating a few hours per week to the BYG? Volunteers meet Friday mornings from spring through early fall. Contact the FWG at either 613-234-6767 or fletcher@ofnc.ca.

Signs and Other Structures

Signs identifying the major habitats in the garden, such as the Hedgerow, New Woods, etc. have now been installed. The next step is to

place signs explaining each habitat. As always, Charlie Clifford is the man behind this work. In early June, a very enthusiastic group of volunteers from PriceWaterhouse Coopers green team spent the day at FWG helping out, including assisting Charlie in installation of the habitat signs. From what I heard, the digging was **very** tough. Good thing then, that the volunteers were all young!

Perhaps you have noticed the Gazebo that now adorns the front of the Interpretive Centre. We are very proud of it! It is something we have wanted for a long time and thanks to the generosity of the late Eileen Evans' family, we have it. A ceremony to remember Eileen and to dedicate the Gazebo, will be held in the fall. I'm sure Eileen would have been delighted by this beautifully built structure. [Details on the ceremony elsewhere in T&L.]

Events, Tours, Walks

Native Plant Sale Inclement weather put only a slight damper on the sale, and we raised a good amount of money to enable us to carry out the various projects, such as the above mentioned, BYG pond. Many thanks to all the volunteers who organized the event, grew the plants for sale, and staffed the event during the day itself.

Dedication of the Dale Crook Bench In late June we held a ceremony to dedicate the new BYG bench, created in memory of Dale Crook. Dale's family and friends, including of course, those from FWG,, turned out on a perfect summer evening for the event. Several people spoke about Dale and his influence on the FWG. His wife, Pat Crook, was presented with a miniature version of the bench complete with plaque, to take home.

Talks and Walks Several OFNC walks were held at FWG and one more is scheduled for September. As well, we've had requests for other walks and several groups have had guided tours of the garden. The FWG also gets several requests each year for someone to talk about gardening for wildlife or gardening with native plants. Sandy Garland usually fulfills these, and by all accounts people greatly enjoy her talks. In one case, her talk was followed by an interview about wildlife gardening for a New York State public radio show!

Field Camps

Geography students from Carleton University held their summer field camp at FWG. The students made good use of the resources at the Interpretive Centre and spoke at length with some of the volunteers. Their reports are now filed at FWG. One of the most interesting aspects of their work was the interviews with visitors, during which they asked a set of questions to determine such things as why they visit the garden, how often they come, how they found out about it, and so on. Although some of the responses were expected (walking dogs is popular), we were really pleased to hear that many of the visitors had changed their gardening habits as a result of visiting the FWG. They were now more interested in native plants and creating wildlife-friendly gardens than previously. Amusingly, one participant in the exercise said he came to the garden to meet female gardeners! One can only wonder....

The other Carleton University summer camp, the one with the little folk, was also back this year. Once a week during the summer Brian led them on a morning walk to introduce them to nature.

Summer Employee

Brian Turnbull, our summer employee, was a delight to work with and we were sorry when his position ended. Not only did he do everything we asked him to, but he wasn't afraid to make suggestions, take the lead on various projects, and provide help for a variety of tasks. One of our ongoing issues is the Amphibian Pond. For several years we've been trying to get a handle on the health (or not) of this pond, but without much success. This year, thanks to Brian, we really moved ahead in our understanding of the pond. He amassed a huge amount of information, both from research online and from searching out and then contacting, knowledgeable people. Using what he learned, he was able to provide us with valuable suggestions and practical solutions to aid our pursuit of pond health. Brian also proved to be a great nature photographer, with some enviable shots of butterflies and other creatures. You can see examples of his work on the FWG blog <http://www.ofnc.ca/fletcher/newsletter/Blog/index.php> and around the Centre.

Brian is studying Environmental Science at Carleton University (entering his 4th year), where he is on the Dean's Honour List. He said that he chose this field, after trying out another un-related area, because he was concerned about the impact of humans on the environment and wanted to do something to help mitigate the problem. Working at FWG has opened his eyes to how complicated eco-systems can be, and of course, he is referring in particular to the pond (about which he became almost an expert). I asked him what he especially liked about working at FWG. He said two things in particular came to mind - the quantum leap in his knowledge about wildlife, and learning about ponds and wetlands and their intricately balanced systems.

Habitats

Diane Lepage continues with work on the Butterfly Meadow, assisted by a varying number of volunteers. It is looking pretty good now, and although by the time you read this, fall will be here, keep it in mind for a summer visit next year.

Problems

After a quiet spring, with no fires and no vandalism, we were surprised to find a huge fire by the Ash Woods in mid-summer. This spot, behind the bird feeder, was a popular location for fires last year as well. However, this one was not only the biggest, but this group of thugs removed our bird feeder and burned it. Adding insult to injury, it seems they also burned the small ladder Dale Crook made to enable us to reach the feeder when filling it.

Plants and Animals

Birds

Two new species were added to the FWG bird list recently. A Solitary Sandpiper was found in the pond by Diane Lepage in May, and in July a most surprising visitor arrived: a Virginia Rail. We don't know how long it had been around, but several people reported seeing a "heron-like" bird in the cattails. Chris Bruce was able to take a couple of beautiful photographs which can be seen on the FWG blog.

Summer breeding season is all but over as I write, apart from the late-nesting goldfinches. Every year it seems we wait for the birds to return and then in the blink of an eye, it is over and they are on their way south once more. On August 8th I knew fall was coming when I saw a fall-plumaged

Canada Warbler at FWG!

The Green Herons were the star attraction again in 2007. This year, however, the interest was particularly intense because the herons nested in the garden. Despite attempts to keep this quiet, word spread amongst the photographic community with the result that a well trod trail and a large area of flattened vegetation near the nest site, occurred. When the five young fledged and started hanging out at the pond with the adults, interest quickly turned there and more vegetation was trampled as more paths were made down to the water's edge. It was a bit of a relief when the herons finally departed. I can only imagine the fuss that would ensue should a pair of Virginia Rails take up residence in the pond! Apart from all that, I felt quite sorry for the frog population with seven hungry herons stalking them. No wonder they were more silent than usual.

The American Kestrels checked out their nest box a number of times, but in the end they seemed to find a tree cavity a little distance away more to their liking. Or so I suspect, since I don't know for sure. They certainly made their presence known in the spring and again for a brief period in July when a couple of youngsters could be seen and heard near the red barn.

Other Fauna

As everyone knows, it has been a fantastic year for Monarch butterflies. They returned early and were seen daily in increasing numbers at the FWG. We also found quite a few Monarch caterpillars, a good sign. Other butterflies were also abundant at the garden, in particular Red Admirals. A Striped Hairstreak was briefly seen on Swamp Milkweed in the BYG in July. Eastern-tailed Blues are now regularly observed at FWG and another once rare butterfly appeared at the garden as well. On July 12th I found a Delaware Skipper near the Pond. Given that this species is turning up all over it was only a matter of time before it arrived at the garden. First found in 1998 by Peter Hall near Burritts Rapids, it has since spread out across the region (Layberry, 2007).



Confused Haploa

I am always delighted by the variety of insects we get at FWG, in addition to the butterflies. Some beautiful moths can be found, including the Hummingbird Moth and the strikingly patterned Confused Haploa. We continue adding more species to our lists of insects, including moths and butterflies. For updated versions of these lists please check out:

http://www.ofnc.ca/fletcher/alphabet/insects/index_e.php and http://www.ofnc.ca/fletcher/alphabet/moths/index_e.php. We've also started an inventory of butterflies at the FWG

<http://www.ofnc.ca/fletcher/research/inventories/butterflies.html>, based largely on data collected by Peter Hall from 1990 on. Eventually, we hope to prepare similar inventories for other groups of insects, and for all fauna at the garden.

The Chipmunk population in the garden appears to have burgeoned and these cheeky little creatures are quite bold and unconcerned by people presence. This means that we get to watch some really engaging activity. One Chipmunk has discovered that the seedheads of the Cup-



Chipmunk eating seedhead of Cup-plant

plant, make good eating and while they lasted, could be found happily munching away. We still have few to no groundhogs these days, but the squirrels and rabbits are more than holding their own and we see them frequently. As fall approaches, the squirrels become more active and the Red Squirrels in particular, once again become very visible.

Invasive Species

Not a summer goes by that we don't think, talk and do something about, invasive plant species at FWG. In spring Garlic Mustard occupies us, in early summer and throughout the season, it is Dog-strangling Vine (DSV) or Pale Swallowwort, and in

mid-summer it is the aquatics in the pond that demand attention. Work on the latter is done, as always, by Sandy Garland and Diane Lepage, who have been working on Flowering Rush and Frog's Bit for several years now. There are signs that the Flowering Rush may be decreasing somewhat.

As for the DSV, goldenrod continues its work of displacing this aggressive plant. We first noticed the impact of goldenrod (both Canada Goldenrod and Grass-leaved Goldenrod) on DSV last year. This year, we continued assessing the situation and found that the goldenrod was spreading into areas formerly occupied by DSV. It is still too early to say for sure that other plants are now moving into areas occupied by DSV, but the signs are encouraging. For example, there is one small site which was previously occupied only by DSV. It was mowed over the last few years, and in 2006 was scythed several times, leaving only the few goldenrod plants. In 2007, I noticed the goldenrods had expanded. Volunteers again cut around this stand and at the time of writing there is good stand of goldenrod along with abundant Queen Anne's Lace. The DSV seemed to be singularly reduced in number. There is no doubt that DSV remains a tremendous problem, but the work of volunteers, particularly the Sunday morning group, combined with the natural spread of Goldenrod is having some positive impact. Interestingly, the Sunday group has been using scythes to cut the DSV. This works well not only in permitting a fast cut over a large area, but in allowing desirable plants to be spared. Mowing, particularly with the big tractors used in previous years, does not permit such fine-tuning.

FWG Volunteers

People enjoy reading about people, even in a publication devoted to nature, such as ours. They like to put a face to a name, or a name to a face. At the FWG, we have been exceptionally lucky with our volunteers, many of whom stay for years, forming the backbone of the project. In this issue, I will introduce you to **Isabelle Nicol**. Club members who have been around for awhile, will recognize this familiar name, perhaps recalling the charming articles Isabelle wrote for Trail



Isabelle Nicol

& Landscape, about various wildlife species. More recent OFNC members may know Isabelle as the recipient of the club's 2006 Education Award. This was given in recognition of her work educating students and adults alike in the wonders of the natural world

(<http://www.ofnc.ca/awards/2007/nichol.php>)

Isabelle was very much aware of the garden in its early days and even helped out for awhile, but it wasn't until retirement that she began thinking seriously about getting involved. During visits to the

garden she'd notice how the garden was evolving and, as she says, "*I saw the wonderful transformation that had taken place. Now, having more time on my hands, I decided I wanted to help out as well, and make some contribution (in particular to the Woodland Garden, which has a beautiful assortment of our native woodland flower species).*" Isabelle enjoys both gardening and the outdoors and she saw working at FWG as a natural fit for her skills and interests. She notes that "*even the more mundane contributions I can make through weeding and keeping up the appearance of the garden*" are worthwhile and so "*I will help out where the needs are greatest.*"

However, Isabelle doesn't confine her activities to the BYG. For several years she has helped with removing invasive species from the Amphibian Pond, and more recently has devoted a lot of time to working on the Butterfly Meadow with the Wednesday evening group, and DSV removal on Sunday mornings. Working at the FWG for over four years, she has seen some positive changes, noting that "*the FWG has been beautified in many ways since I started, with the addition of stone walls, flagstone pathways, a reorganization of the brick patio...to give it a more attractive design, and [the addition of] a beautifully crafted bench*" dedicated to Dale Crook.

Like many others, Isabelle is quick to point to the other FWG volunteers as a big reason why working at the garden is so much fun. She says "*I have come to know many of them on a personal basis as we enjoy our Friday morning break over a cup of coffee and a cookie or two, people who add immeasurably to the ambience of the garden.*" Isabelle acknowledges that everyone has an important role to play. And, speaking of important roles, Isabelle, in addition to all the above work, has also taken on the role of Interim BYG Coordinator, until we find a new BYG Manager.

When asked what she likes about volunteering at FWG, Isabelle had this to say: "*It is a weekly*

treat to return and see how the pond, the rockery, and the butterfly, woodland, and heritage gardens, all respond to the care of these enthusiastic volunteers. All contribute greatly in many different ways - and, of course, and most importantly - the beautification of the area, using native plants, shows people how they, too, can provide a backyard habitat, that will attract, and thereby help to preserve, all those creatures that show up regularly in our communal backyards - birds, bees, butterflies, chipmunks, and the errant toad or two, that add so very much to our sense of well-being. Being an apartment dweller, I feel very fortunate, indeed, to have here, in the middle of the city, such a place to make a humble contribution to, that will inspire and help others to see the possibilities in their own backyards.”

Volunteer Opportunities

If you would like to volunteer at the FWG, why not drop by any Friday morning spring through fall, 9:00 a.m. to 12 noon, and see what it is all about. You can talk to the volunteers, explore the garden and get a feel for what we do. You can also discuss other volunteer opportunities at the garden while you are there. There is invasive species control, tree planting, or any number of other activities. Why not contact us? (Details at end of article). Regular volunteer groups meet on Friday morning (BYG), Wednesday evening (Butterfly Meadow) and Sunday morning (the rest of the FWG), spring through fall.

The FWG is run by a Management Committee and we'd be very happy to see new members. You are welcome to drop by one of our regular meetings (always the 4th Wednesday of each month, at 7:30 p.m. at FWG) and see what the committee does.

Acknowledgements: As always, thanks to all the volunteers who make FWG happen!

Photos: Christine Hanrahan.

References: Layberry, Ross. 2007. Butterflies of the Ottawa District: 103 species... and counting. *T&L* 41(1): 16-36.

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
- Sandy Garland: website and information about the FWG newsletter: sgarland@magma.ca
- Christine Hanrahan: bird and wildlife observations: vanessa@magma.ca

AAFC Security: 613-759-1985