



CONFLUENCE AND CONSERVATION

Newsletter of the Alton Grange Association/AGA

Fall 2009/Winter 2010

President's Message

Greetings!

Happy New Year! The cross country skiing and snowshoeing season is upon us, and the Grange has been a great place to enjoy these activities. Thanks to board member Joanne Whyte, the trails are now blazed: Green, Purple, Pink and Yellow (in addition to the Bruce Trail side trail - Blue), and we plan to put up trail maps this year to ensure you can enjoy all the routes through the property.

Our friends at the Upper Credit Field Naturalists organized two great events with us – more on that later in this newsletter so keep reading!

The pilot project with Credit Valley Conservation (CVC) on Invasive Species Monitoring got off to a slower start but we will be re-energizing this project in the spring. "...Invasive species are now considered one of the most serious threats to global biodiversity." (quote source: CVC) and since two of our Association's objectives are *to protect, restore and enhance the natural, scenic, educational and cultural values of the Grange Property*, and *to promote public responsibility, understanding, and stewardship through the wise management of the natural resources of the Grange Property*, we believe this is an important project for the Association, especially to ensure the Grange has a healthy ecosystem and native biodiversity. We will let you know when we arrange the refresher course for volunteers.

And many thanks yet again to member Anita Bolan and her employer, Johnson Controls! Anita's second application to their Blue Sky Involve program

resulted in another \$1,000 project grant for the Alton Grange. This program encourages employees to give back to their respective communities and we appreciate Anita's support for our work in the Grange.

Enjoy the rest of the newsletter and please pass a copy on to your family and friends.

THANKS AGAIN TO JOHNSON CONTROLS FOR THEIR GENEROUS DONATION TO THE ALTON GRANGE ASSOCIATION



L-R Anita Bolan, Brock Whitehead & Kevin Norris

REMEMEBER

PLEASE STOOP AND SCOOP!! OTHER PEOPLE DON'T WANT TO TAKE HOME WHAT DOG OWNERS WON'T!

Some trails currently have a lot of canine waste on them. Please respect others using our trails.

2 EVENTS THIS PAST FALL WITH THE UPPER CREDIT FILED NATURALISTS

This fall there were 2 events held in the Grange in conjunction with the Upper Credit Field Naturalists. The first was Birding for Beginners, and the second was "The Alton Grange".

Birding for Beginners

What is that bird? Is it a Goldfinch or a Pine Siskin? A Cardinal or a Cedar Waxwing? How can I attract birds to my feeders? I need to buy binoculars, but I don't know enough about them! HELP!

All these questions and more were answered on Oct. 17th when experienced birders from the Upper Credit Field Naturalists Club partnered with AGA to offer a Beginners Birding Course at the Alton Library. The agenda included: identifying birds by their shape, size, colour and song; learning about feeders and how to attract a variety of birds to our backyards; types of habitats and where to go locally to find birds. A representative from Wild Birds Unlimited in Guelph brought several styles of binoculars and explained the optimum magnification and field of vision for birders' use. After lunch, everyone trooped out into the Grange to test their new skills. Unfortunately there were no exciting sightings, only a few chickadees, finches, and a downy woodpecker. But enthusiasm was high, and everyone agreed that it had been an outstanding day of learning about birds!



The Nature Walk, on November 1, was led by Mark Whitcombe, who is a field botanist and has worked for many years in Outdoor Education with the Toronto District School Board. Mark is an all round outdoors renaissance man. Our walk began at the Alton Library parking lot, where we were already shown some of the wonders of the natural world around us. We were given a brief history of the geology of the area. The Grand River used to be the main drainage basin for this area before the last ice age. When the ice age occurred; one of the earliest patches of bar ground was in the Dundalk area, followed by an area to the north of Alton called the "Alton plug". This plug caused the

course of the Grand River to change and formed a new drainage basin which became the Credit River. We proceeded into the Grange where we learned that food was all around us – inside burdock burrs and inside goldenrod galls. The fly that occupies the golden rod gall is able to produce a natural anti freeze that allows it to survive our harsh winters. In the spring, it is able to burrow out through the side of the gall with a can-opener like appendage on it's head. We were shown how the Chickadee learns to extract the grub from inside the gall and that you can discern the difference between the work of a "pro" and an "amateur". Shaws Creek was shown to be teeming with life of all sorts. Our walk continued and we were given a lesson in determining the age of trees. There are trees in the Grange that though they appear to be only seedlings or saplings are in fact quite old!

We were shown how to detect Balsam gum from the Balsam fir. It was used for microscope slides and aircraft instruments right up until the middle of the 20th century because of its extreme clarity. We continued to the sugar bush area where we learned more about our native sugar trees and their ideal habitat.

We were forced to end our walk here as a couple of hours had already passed. It was a fascinating walk that showed us that there is a whole lot more going on around us than we see at first glance!



Goldenrod galls with a fly exit hole on the left, and chickadee extraction hole on the right

THE COYOTE (*canis latrans*)

You may have heard them some evenings, but, chances are you haven't seen them. The coyote is an elusive resident of the Grange and area. These intelligent and adaptable animals seem to be able to live closely with humans, and can in fact thrive in

more urban situations. Many people have concerns about wild carnivores living in their neighbourhoods, and to live in harmony with them it is necessary to respect and understand their needs.

Coyotes are not indigenous to Ontario. They are natives to the Great Plains, but have been moving eastward over the past century. The eradication of the wolf and the clearing of the forest has created a new niche here for the coyote. There have been only 2 recorded human fatalities from coyote attacks. In 1981, a toddler in California died as a result of injuries from a coyote attack. In October 2009 folk singer Taylor Mitchell died from injuries sustained during an attack by a pair of coyotes in Cape Breton. Later evidence showed that these individuals may have been wolf-coyote crosses as they were quite large, even though this is rare due to the wolf's hostility towards the coyote.

The coyote's diet is quite varied. Their main source of food is mice, voles and rabbits. They are however, opportunistic hunters and will eat insects, fish, berries and other summer fruit, or fruit fallen from trees, and even what falls from your bird feeder. They are also capable of taking down large prey such as deer in the wild. It will adjust its hunting methods to the prey size and food sources available. The coyote is a remarkably hard runner, galloping at 40 km/hr, and capable of reaching 64 km/hr. Its sense of smell is so well developed; a sudden odour can make it change its course in mid step. One of the biggest concerns is from the agricultural community. Coyotes can and will attack and kill livestock. Caledon has a compensation program for farmers that have lost animals to coyotes. There had recently been a lot of news in Toronto about a coyote which had taken and eaten a small pet dog. Efforts to trap the animal were not successful. In Alton, the disappearance of many pet cats, especially those let out at night can possibly be attributed to the coyote.

The coyote mates during February and March with pups being born about 2 months later in litters of 3 to 7. Pups are weaned at about 6 weeks and leave their parents in the fall to find their own territory. The colour variations of coyotes ranges from blonde to red and brown with an average weight of about 30 to 35 pounds. Their most common social group is a pair, or parents and their offspring. They can however, form some loose social groups, but they do not have a tight pack structure like wolves. In the wild a coyote lives up to 10 years, and up to 18

in captivity. It appears better than dogs at observational learning.

If you wish to avoid confrontations with coyotes at home you should:

- dispose of garbage in secure containers, and use securely enclosed compost bins
- if you have fruit trees, pick fruit when ripe and remove windfalls
- install motion activated lights
- keep pets indoors at night (especially cats)
- spay or neuter you dog
- clean up around your bird feeder
- have guard animals (donkey, llamas, dog)
- do not feed, or leave out pet food
- yell at or otherwise try to frighten a coyote if seen

If you encounter a coyote:

Coyotes are usually wary of humans and avoid people whenever possible. Aggressive behavior towards people is unusual, and is often a result of habituation due to feeding by humans. If you encounter a coyote, remember the following:

- never attempt to "tame" a coyote
- never feed a coyote
- do not turn your back on, or run from a coyote
- use whistles, personal alarms or other loud noises to frighten an approaching or threatening animal

In conclusion, although it sometimes causes problems, the coyote has its rightful place in the animal kingdom. More and more people, including farmers, appreciate (or at least tolerate) its value as a scavenger and predator of rodents. The coyote's economic importance and its role in nature should be considered in any evaluation of the animal. In areas occupied by people and their domestic animals, bounties have proved ineffective in control. Predator control aimed at specific local problems should be sought rather than a ban on the species as a whole.

The coyote has survived and thrived in spite of the many challenges it faces. In the cartoons, the coyote may never have caught the roadrunner, but in life it really has earned the name **Wile E. Coyote**.



UPCOMING EVENTS

Alton Grange Association – Annual General Meeting – Late April or early May. Details to Follow

To follow is a brief list of topics covered by the Upper Credit Naturalists. Meetings are held on the last Tuesday of each month at the Seniors Centre, 26 Bythia Street, Orangeville. 7:30pm. Visitors are welcome

January 26, 2010 Re-introduction of Salmon to the Headwaters are – Mark Heaton

February 24 Ferns – Dawn Renfrew

March 24 Frogs & Salamanders Don Scallen

April 28 Climate Change Impact on Wildlife, Insects & Plants – Dr Paul Gray

REMEMBER!

If you have any topics you would like to see covered in an upcoming newsletter, or would like to submit an article – please let us know!

CONTACT US

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Our Mission

- To protect, restore and enhance the natural, scenic, educational and cultural value of the Grange Property.
- To promote public responsibility, understanding, and stewardship through the wise management of the natural resources of the Grange Property.
- To compile and manage natural resources information on the Grange Property.
- To promote partnerships to assist in accomplishing these goals.
- To manage and maintain the Grange Property in accordance with the goals and objectives of the Alton Integrated Resource Management Plan.

