CONFLUENCE AND CONSERVATION

Newsletter of the Alton Grange Association/AGA

Spring/Summer 2010

President's Message

Hello fellow members of the Alton Grange Association (AGA)

We are extremely fortunate to have a gem like the Grange property in the midst of our community and to be participating in it's stewardship. I want to thank two retiring Board members, Richard Paterak and John Cartwright for their contributions to the association. As well, Deb Wilson deserves our thanks for her leadership as our past Chair person. Deb's initiatives, in particular – development of a longer-term vision for the property and Association; finalization of the trail network, new signage, invasive species mapping, and a cheaper liability insurance rate, (one of our biggest expenses!) - exemplifies the goals of our organization: wise management of the natural, scenic, educational and cultural values of the Grange property; promoting public education, responsibility and building partnerships.

As you all know, the Grange property is unique for a number of reasons. Besides containing provincially significant wetlands and playing host to many unique species of flora and fauna, two branches of the Credit River come together on the property.

Currently, our part of the Credit River Watershed is facing development challenges that can forever alter the quality of the water in the river and the surrounding environment that it helps support. Concurrently, provincial initiatives are underway to characterize water sources and develop plans to protect them. The latter is a clear indication that having clean water in the future is going to take on a new level of importance for all of us. For these reasons, and the goals of the AGA, your Board intends to pay more attention to these issues in the coming year.

In closing, I am pleased to welcome two new Board members, Anita Bolan and Paul Hayward. I also encourage you to convey your thoughts and suggestions about the Association to us. Your involvement is crucial if our collective goal is to ensure that the Grange property is protected and enhanced for future generations.

Paul Newall
Chair, Alton Grange Association

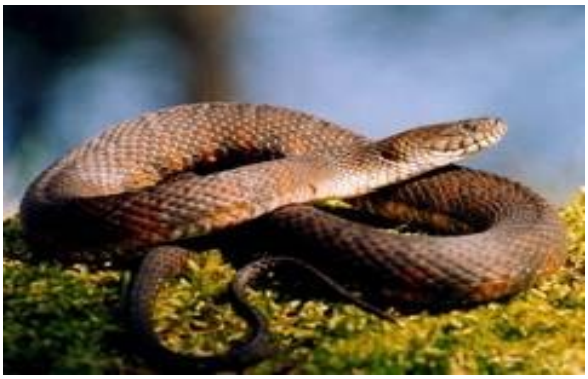
Sciensational Sssnakes!! at the Alton Grange Annual General Meeting

We're glad that many of you were able to attend our AGM at the SGI Centre on Thurs, April 29. The house was packed and about one third of the crowd were younger people, many dressed in scouting and guiding uniforms.

After a brief business agenda, our guest speakers, Jenny Pearce and Kyle Horner of Sciensational Sssnakes near Orillia presented a fascinating talk about snakes, their ecology and conservation issues. Standing before a crowd with a handful of writhing snakes holds everyone's attention! Myths about snakes being slimy and cold-blooded were dispelled and Kyle and Jenny focused mainly on our native species: garter snakes, water snakes, milk snakes, hognose snakes, and finishing with Canada's longest snake, the black rat snake. Jenny and Kyle also brought some turtles and told us about their habitat and conservation concerns, and corn snakes, which are usually pet snakes having been bred in captivity for 70 years.

At the end of the presentation, Jenny and Kyle explained how to handle the snakes and promised that they would be the last to leave, so everyone would have a chance to touch, hold and ask questions about the snakes. They were true to their word and it was rewarding to watch a young girl helping to put one the snakes into its pillow case for the trip home. She said "I'll never be afraid of snakes again!"

The Alton Grange executive would also like to thank Lisa Hohban Brusse, program coordinator with the Credit Valley Conservation, and Chris Punnett and Joanne Avison of the Upper Credit Field Naturalists Club for bringing displays and information to our meeting. It was a great evening.



As a follow-up to our AGM topic, **Ontario Nature** (with assistance from Ministry of Natural Resources and Province of Ontario) is creating an "**Ontario Reptile And Amphibian Atlas**". They are asking the public to report their observations of turtles, snakes, frogs and salamanders.

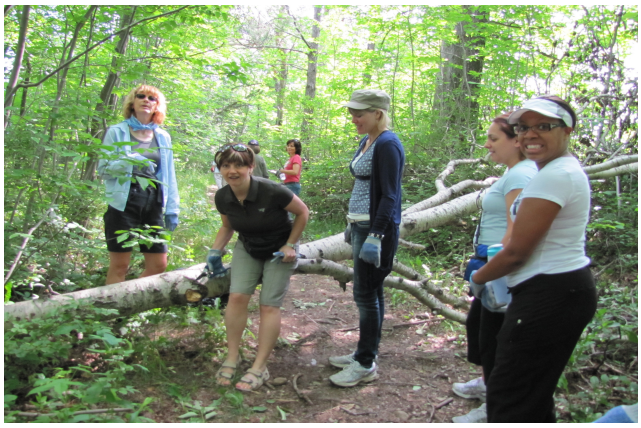
Four ways to submit observations:

1. Use their online reporting form, found both on their website www.ontarionature.org and at oraa.ca/observationform.asp .
2. Download the reporting form from Ontario Nature's website, fill it in, and email it to joec@ontarionature.org .
3. Download the printable reporting cards at www.ontarionature.org and mail them to Ontario Nature
4. Call 416-444-8419/1-800-440-2366 ext. 243 to report a sighting.

The information collected for the atlas will improve our knowledge of the distribution of reptile and amphibian species in Ontario. This data is important for scientific research, monitoring the status of our native biodiversity and informing conservation work with rare species.
Visit their website to learn more about Ontario's reptiles and amphibians and the atlas program or submit you observations using the online form. Go to www.ontarionature.org and click on "Reptile and Amphibian Atlas".

Team building day at the Grange for Employees of Peel Region

What better way to build team cohesion and get to know each other than by getting into nature. That's just what a workplace team did recently. Thinking outside of the box, a group of 12 decided to help out the community, while learning to work stronger together. We clipped, we pruned, we picked up garbage, we discovered the bird call application on the iPhone really does work, and we got to talk without office distractions; other than the buzzing kind of course. As a bonus the team was able to get acquainted with another area in the Region of Peel; discovering a little unknown oasis.
Many thanks the the Alton Grange for arranging this wonderful day for us.
Caren Heramchuk



You want us to do what with it?

Peel Health Team

A Biting Issue

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Spring is just about over, and summer is beginning. The other day, some of our Grange Directors were commenting that there seems to be fewer mosquitoes this spring than other years. Having been up north camping, or walking in the Grange in the past and being literally eaten alive, my first reaction would be good, and good riddance to the little blood suckers! But after sober second thought I wondered why this was and just what are the implications of an ecosystem without mosquitoes? Many municipalities in Canada have undertaken a aggressive larviciding program in order to combat the West Nile Virus. Who can argue against trying to prevent or curtail a nasty disease for both humans and animals. But is there a price to pay as there so often is when man meddles with his environment? West Nile Virus spreads from infected birds to mosquitoes, then to other species including mammals like horses, squirrels, raccoons, humans and one reptile species. The most significant vector is the mosquito species culex pipiens which prefers breeding in small ponds of stagnant, dirty water, discarded tires, various containers, ditches, catch basins and storm drains. It doesn't travel far from its original larval habitat. The full reproductive cycle is usually 1-3 weeks. In Peel, the use of larvicide is one of the major components in the battle to control mosquitoes. There are 2 larvicides federally registered and provincially classified for commercial use under permit for West Nile Virus in Ontario. Bacillus thuringiensis var. israelensis (Bti), the least toxic and a relatively specific mosquito larvicide affecting only mosquitoes and some flies and methoprene, which is sold under the trade name Altosid, and is an insect growth regulator. Methoprene is the weapon of choice here. It is considered a biochemical pesticide because rather than controlling target pests by killing them outright, methoprene interferes with a insect's life cycle and prevents it from reaching maturity or reproducing. EPA tests in the US indicate that it is of low toxicity and poses little risk to people and other non target species, with one exception. Methoprene is highly toxic to invertebrates such as crayfish. It poses no risks to people who have to work with the product on a regular basis. It does not leach in soil, and therefore should not persist or contaminate ground water. It breaks down rapidly with exposure to sunlight, both in water and on inert surfaces. Health Canada states that methoprene has been shown to be “practically non-toxic to mallard ducks and only slightly toxic to fish.” Altosid had very little effect, if any, on exposed non-target organisms including waterfleas, damselflies, dragonflies, snails, tadpoles and mosquito fish. It is nontoxic to bees and tests with earthworms showed little if any toxic effects on contact. However, as with the use of any pesticide, there are issues. Larvicides may temporarily reduce mosquito populations, but are not proven to reduce disease, either in wildlife or in people. If mosquito populations are temporarily reduced, it could well have adverse affects on predator populations. Also, larviciding should not be considered a default reaction and should only be used where warranted. There is no question that the use of larvicides is a vast improvement from the aerial fogging and spraying with organophosphates like Malathion which adversely affect everything thing they touch and may lead to resistance.

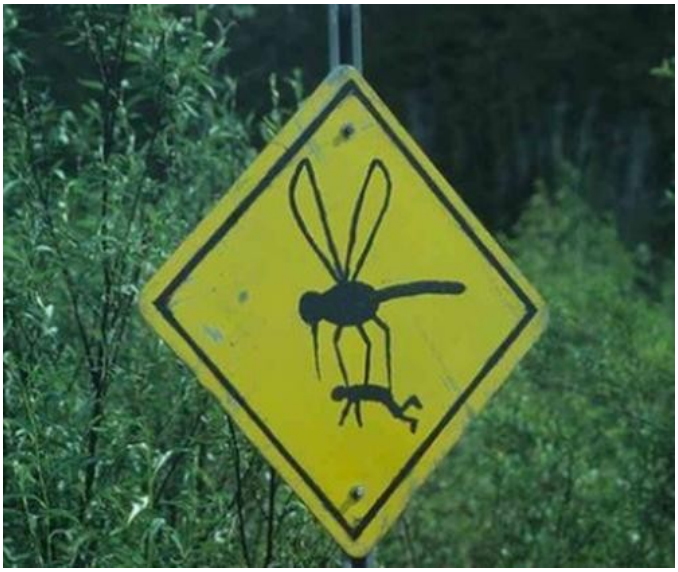
Of natural predators, the dragonfly eats mosquitoes at all stages of development and is quite effective in controlling populations. Although bats and Purple Martins eat a lot of insects, less than 1% of their diet consists of mosquitoes. Another effective predator of the disease bearing type of mosquito happens to be another mosquito. Toxorhynchites never drink blood. The larvae prey on the larvae of other mosquitoes and can eat up to 10 to 20 per day. During its entire development, a Toxorhyncites larva can eat over 5000 larvae of other mosquitoes! A number of fish are also known to consume mosquito larvae, including bass, bluegill, piranha (hopefully not in the Grange), catfish, fathead minnows, mosquitofish, goldfish, guppies and killifish.

DEET remains the number one repellant against mosquitoes. However, with increasing reports of harmful effects of DEET, there has been a move to find safer alternatives. For example, the much safer compound nepetalactone (found in catnip essential oil) has been found by Iowa State University

researchers to be about 10 times more effective than DEET in repelling mosquitoes.
While West Nile Virus remains an issue, it should not be viewed with panic. The risk of serious illness in humans remains relatively low. Peel has adopted a multi-faceted approach to the disease.

- Public Education and Community Outreach – through media, advertising, the web (www.peel-bugbite.ca)
- Dead Crow Surveillance – call the Peel Health Line
- Human Surveillance and Provider Education – updating health care professionals
- Mosquito Surveillance – collecting and testing samples of larvae and adults
- Larval Mosquito Reduction – larviciding priority stagnant water sites and encouraging residents and businesses to reduce breeding sites around their homes and commercial properties.
- Adult Mosquito Reduction – a contingency plan for the spraying of Malathion if necessary
- Monitoring Adverse Effects from Pesticide Use
- Research And Evaluation

The part of this programme that will always cause great concern is the use of Malathion, otherwise, the approach seems relatively balanced. Something to ponder while swatting and scratching.
Have a happy, bite free summer!



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.