

Connections

www.rougepark.com

Fall 2004 / Winter 2005

2004 Rouge Park Awards

page 2

Planning for the Little Rouge Corridor

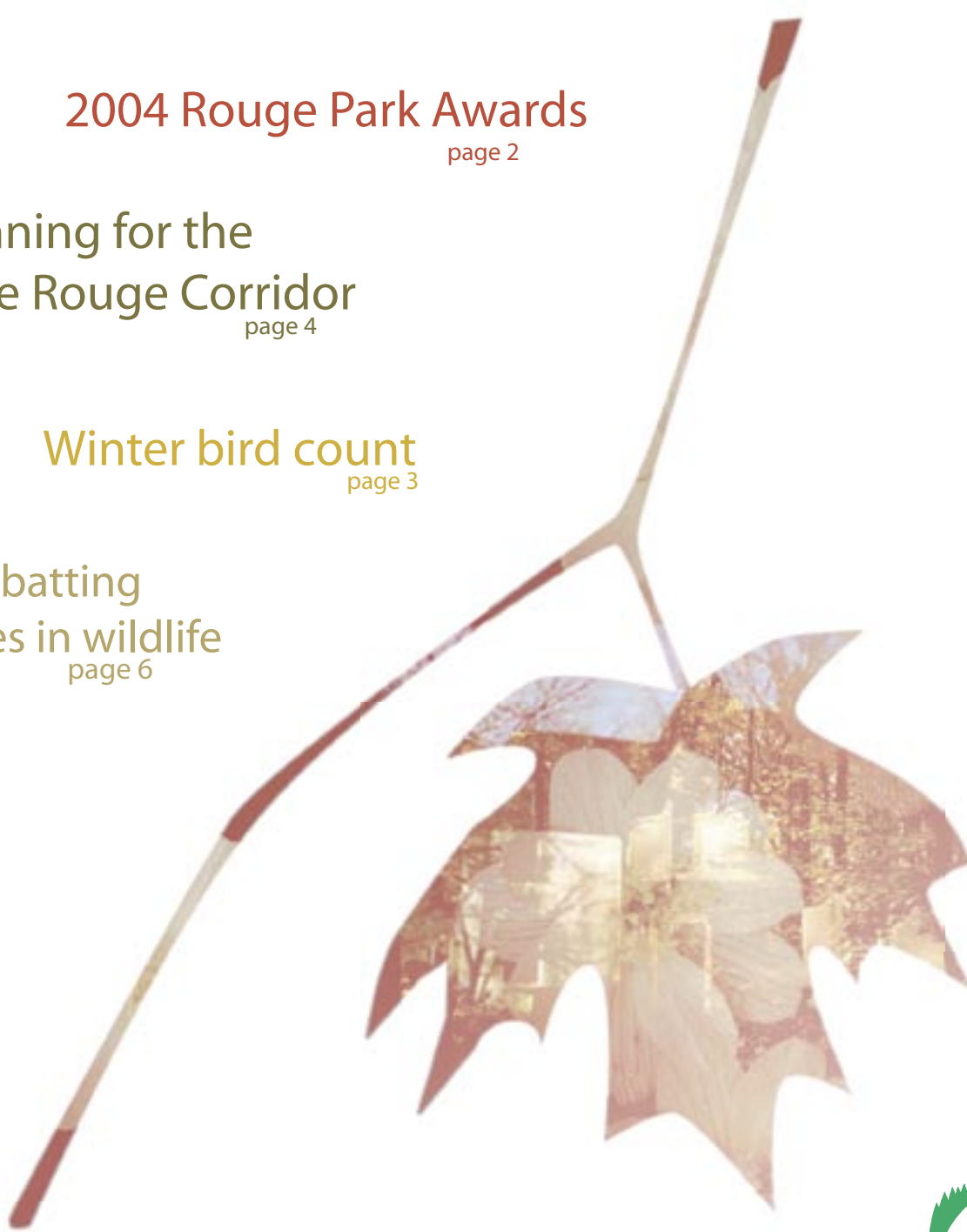
page 4

Winter bird count

page 3

Combatting rabies in wildlife

page 6



2004 Rouge Park Awards

Each year, the Rouge Park Alliance recognizes members of the community who have made outstanding contributions to the goal and objectives of North America's largest natural environment park in an urban setting. This year, at the 7th annual Rouge Park awards ceremony, eight individuals and one group were recognized for their work to benefit the Park.



Gord Weeden receives the 2004 Rouge Park Award, presented by Ron Christie, (right) and Lewis Yeager, Rouge Park's current General Manager (left)

2004 Rouge Park Award winner, Gord Weeden, was an enthusiastic recipient and reminded everyone of the importance of partnership in making

this unique park a great success. Gord was the inaugural GM for Rouge Park, serving from 1995, when the Park was established, until 2001, bringing many years of experience in provincial parks with him to the job.

"It was not easy to be the pioneering staff at a newly formed, and in many ways experimental, park when Gord started at Rouge Park in 1995,"

reflected Rouge Park Alliance Chair, Ron Christie. "His ability to work with people was a key factor for the Park's success in gaining support from many local groups and individuals, all four levels of government, and the private sector.

In the early days of Rouge Park, Gord fostered those relationships to raise awareness about Rouge Park and the many tasks that needed to be done."

Awards were also given to private land owners of residential and corporate properties who exemplify good stewardship by implementing environmental Best Management Practices. These land owners, who have demonstrated a commitment to protecting the environment on their lands for the long term were recognized as Rouge River Keepers.

In addition, Heritage Awards were given to six individuals who have each made a significant contribution to the protection, restoration and enhancement of the natural ecosystems of the Park by ensuring the health and diversity of its native species, habitats, landscapes and ecological processes.

For more information about the awards and how you can nominate a group or individual, visit www.rougepark.com or call 905-713-6028

Maryam Nassar



Rouge Park is for the Birds: Annual Winter Bird Count

Maryam Nassar



Over a century ago, ornithologist Frank Chapman suggested that birders across North America

inventory local species in their neighbourhood on Christmas Day. Bird Counts have since become a tradition throughout North America, often involving large coordinated events. The information collected from bird counts is combined with national data bases designed to promote understanding and appreciation for conservation, wild birds and their habitats. It is a fun and educational way for local residents to learn about the birds that live in, or migrate to and from, their community.

Rouge Park is a prime location for viewing a variety of bird habitats. Rouge Beach area provides ample opportunities for viewing wetland and shoreline bird species. Nearby wooded and meadow areas in Rouge Park, at Woodlands Area and various trails in the Park, offer other habitat types where a variety of birds may be found.

"A good indicator of our success with ecological restoration is the bird community in the Park," observed Barb Davies, who works for Rouge Park managing natural heritage programming. "In January 2004, we held the first annual Bird Count in Rouge Park. Volunteers recorded 57 species and over 13,000 individual birds, a good indicator of the high quality and variety of habitat that Rouge Park provides."

Highlights of the 2004 count were sightings of the provincially vulnerable Red-shouldered Hawk, an indicator of mature deciduous and mixed forests, and the Horned Grebe, a sensitive wetland species whose status is not yet well understood. These findings tell us that the bird community in Rouge Park is diverse, and that species formerly thought to be absent from the area are actually inhabiting the natural areas preserved in the Park.

People of all ages and ability levels are welcome to participate in Rouge Park's Winter Bird Count, whether in the field or by counting birds in their own back yard. The Rouge Park count will encompass a large section of the Park's diverse and environmentally significant landscapes in the Rouge River watershed in Toronto.



Join Us!

Whether you are an experienced birder, a nature enthusiast, or just want to learn more about Rouge Park and its birds, you can play a role in the Rouge Park Winter Bird Count on Sunday January 9th, 2005. Experienced birders are encouraged to lead a counting group by serving as a Captain.

For more info or to register, contact Michelle Closson at 905-713-7729 or email michelle_closson@rougepark.com



Heritage Award winners

Left to right: Steve Varga, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources; Chris Hope, City of Toronto; Lilli Duoba, Town of Markham; Mike Fenning, Toronto and Region Conservation Authority; Tom Boudreault, City of Toronto; (not shown) Garry Pringle, Ontario Realty Corporation.



Rouge River Keepers

Fuzail Siddiqui of Station Creek Golf Club, Whitchurch-Stouffville (back row, right) is joined by Kelly Carrick (back row, centre) and his family, also of Whitchurch-Stouffville, to receive Rouge River Keeper awards for outstanding private land stewardship.

Despite its name, Little Rouge Creek is anything but small. It is the second longest watercourse in the over 250 kilometre-long Rouge River system which is home to Rouge Park. Rising in the Oak Ridges Moraine in Whitchurch-Stouffville, the Little Rouge winds its way south through a rural landscape of forests, wetlands, farms and old fields, into the Park in eastern Markham, before joining the Rouge River just north of Highway 401 in Toronto.

linkage between Lake Ontario and the Oak Ridges Moraine, roughly 50 km north of the lakeshore.

The large land base of Rouge Park is significant. In April 2004 Rouge Park received a donation of close to 1400 hectares from the Province of Ontario. The Park is now responsible for managing over 3800 hectares of land, or 38 square kilometres, a substantial amount of protected, natural lands in the urban and

rapidly urbanizing area around Toronto. The Park is expected to ultimately grow to over 50 square kilometres.

Our management plans recommend a detailed review of the lands associated with the Little Rouge Corridor and the development of a strategy for their

management and protection, in consultation with the local community, non-government organizations, municipalities and other agencies.

We are now in the process of choosing the consultant team that will help us create options for the integration and resource management of Rouge Park lands in Toronto and York Region as part of this ecological corridor. Public consultation will be essential in identifying issues and determining

the best alternative for the Park. "We are at the beginning of an intriguing planning process for the Little Rouge," observed Lewis Yeager, General Manager of Rouge Park. "I am



R. Hasner, TRCA

particularly pleased that Carolyn Woodland, Director of Development Services at Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, accepted our offer to be the Chair for the Little Rouge Corridor Steering Committee which will guide our work. Carolyn's return to the Rouge is a welcome occurrence; she was part of the consultant team that developed the original *Rouge Park Management Plan* in the early nineties, the key document which helped to establish the Park."

"I'm excited about the opportunity to be involved with Rouge Park again," said Carolyn Woodland. "When we went through the original planning process in the early nineties, we focussed on protection at a large

scale. In planning for the Little Rouge Corridor, we have the opportunity to consider specifics such as wildlife management, ecological restoration, interesting and varied public use, and financial viability."

The Little Rouge Corridor is important for the future of Rouge Park as a major north-south environmental link in the Greater Toronto Area, one of the most essential natural connections shown in the new draft provincial plan for a Greenbelt in the Golden Horseshoe area of Ontario (see map on page 5).

Opportunities for public input will be advertised locally and at www.rougepark.com. If you would like more information, please contact us at 905-713-6038 or e-mail lrc@rougepark.com



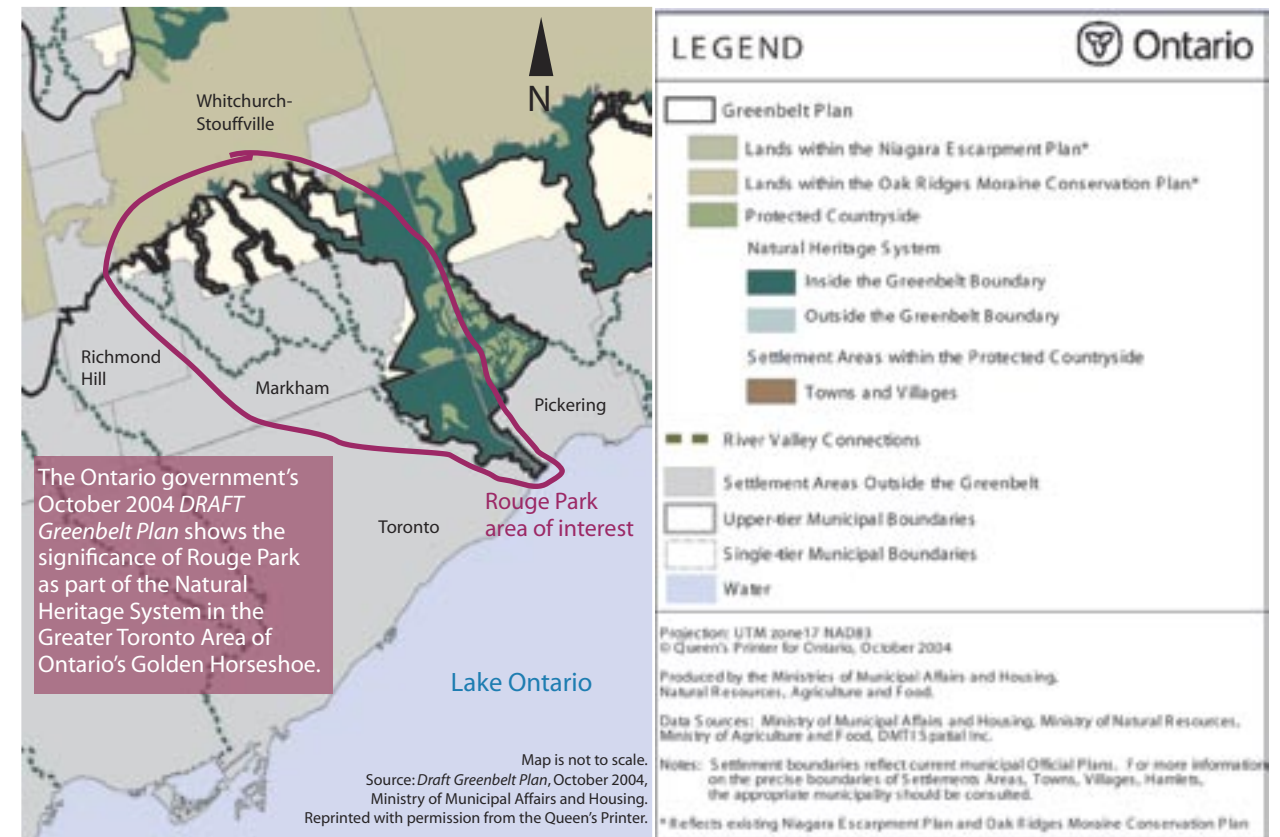
L. Wise, 1998

One of the healthiest watercourses in the Toronto area, Little Rouge Creek is home to the Redside Dace, a rare minnow. The nearby forests and wetlands provide shelter and food to support nationally rare birds such as Hooded Warblers and species of special concern such as the Red-shouldered Hawk. Protection and expansion of these natural heritage features is paramount to the creation of a functional ecological corridor.

When the area downstream from the confluence of Little Rouge Creek and the Rouge River is included, the Little Rouge Corridor serves as the Greater Toronto Area's most pristine natural



R. Hasner, TRCA



Lewis Yeager

Urban Nature

While urban areas close to natural lands have substantial impacts on nearby ecosystems, learning to coexist with nearby natural areas and wildlife helps us lessen our damage and preserve these areas. These readings offer practical insights into the human-nature relationship, and can be obtained through public or school libraries.

City of Toronto and Toronto and Region Conservation Authority. *City of Toronto Natural Heritage Study: Final Report*. 2001

This report provides an inventory of ecological information in Toronto, and is designed to guide the development of natural heritage policies in the Official Plan. It clearly demonstrates that Rouge Park is the most important collection of natural communities in Toronto.

Dempster, D.P. "How to Save Trees from the Bulldozer." *Civic Public Works* (February 1989): 10-12, 16. A practical article on tree tolerances to root damage and means of protecting trees during construction activities.

Gorrie, Peter. "Urban Squatters." *Canadian Geographic* (September/October 1992): 38-46. An interesting introduction to urban wildlife, emphasizing the changing relationship between people and animals, particularly raccoons, in Canadian cities. More and more city dwellers see raccoons and other creatures as sharing the urban environment, rather than the "pests" they were once considered to be. Good tips on raccoon-proofing your chimney, attic, etc.

Talbot, J.F., L. Bardwell and R. Kaplan. "The Functions of Urban Nature: Uses and Values of Different Types of Urban Nature Settings." *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research* 4:1 (1987): 47-63. A useful article on urban green space and its values to city dwellers.

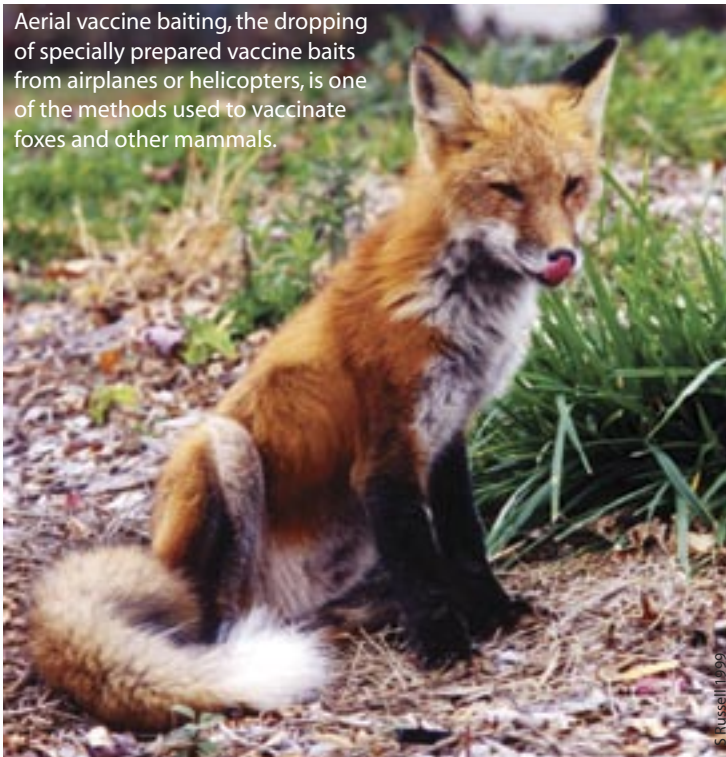
Rouge Park bookshelf

Taming a killer: combatting rabies in wildlife

Lewis Yeager

With thousands of visitors to Rouge Park each year, we have inquiries from people who have come across wild animals that are dead or ill and behaving strangely, either in the Park or elsewhere. Most concerns are about rabies, particularly in raccoons. Fortunately, the much publicized "raccoon strain" of rabies has not been found in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), and the former widespread incidence of the Arctic Fox strain is now much diminished.

Aerial vaccine baiting, the dropping of specially prepared vaccine baits from airplanes or helicopters, is one of the methods used to vaccinate foxes and other mammals.



Rabies is a viral disease that is always fatal to humans and other mammals once symptoms develop. Since the virus may be transmitted in saliva and other bodily fluids of affected animals, bites from wild animals and pets should be viewed with concern, and medical advice sought immediately. Fortunately, effective and less painful immunization is now available to bite victims that replaces the long series of uncomfortable injections that was once required for

those exposed to rabies.

Clearly, the reduction and elimination of rabies in wildlife and domestic animals is an important goal. The Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources' (MNR) Rabies Research Unit has spent the past 30 years in a most successful campaign to eliminate rabies in wildlife.

Incidence of the Arctic Fox strain

of rabies in foxes, skunks, coyotes and other wild mammals in Ontario has been reduced from thousands of cases a year to almost none over the past ten years. MNR has focused on several complementary means of controlling rabies: aerial vaccine baiting, trap-vaccinate-release (TVR) and controlling the disease at the point of infection when a new case is confirmed. Aerial vaccine baiting consists of dropping specially prepared vaccine baits from airplanes or helicopters in areas that have a high incidence of terrestrial rabies. In July 1999, Ontario had its first case of "raccoon rabies". The mid-Atlantic

strain of raccoon rabies has been a major public health issue in parts of the United States since the 1940s. As of September 2004, 130 cases have been reported in eastern Ontario, but none has been found in Rouge Park or the GTA. The TVR programme is used to immunize raccoons along international borders and in the rabies high-risk zone, in an attempt to prevent the disease from spreading or becoming established in Ontario.

The eight species of bats in Ontario each has its own strain of the disease, but the most common are Little Brown Bat, Big Brown Bat, and Silver-haired Bat. Although bats are the most widely distributed mammal, less than 2% of bats submitted for testing have rabies (2% of all bats acting strangely, dead, or having possibly bitten a human or pet). In the overall population, this percentage is much lower. Bats are very important insect predators in the wild and in urban settings, so their benefits are substantial. Risk of human exposure can be reduced by securing attics or other parts of the home from bat access. Cave explorers should consult with one of the caving organizations about necessary precautions in caverns with bat colonies.

Fear of rabies should not prevent anyone from enjoying urban wildlife or the natural environments of Rouge Park as long as common sense is used. To eliminate the threat of this terrible disease entirely, all pet dogs and cats should be immunized, and the innovative wildlife rabies research and management work by MNR should be further encouraged.

¹ More information on raccoon illnesses may be found in Dorcas MacClintock's *A Natural History of Raccoons* (Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1981): 69-80.

Rabies Net

Main Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) rabies site:
<http://rabies.mnr.gov.on.ca/>

A rabies overview fact sheet and rabies statistics from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency:
<http://www.inspection.gc.ca/english/anim/heasan/disemala/rabrag/rabrage.shtml>

The Rabies Reporter at <http://www.gis.queensu.ca/rreporter/>, is a scientific newsletter about current issues in rabies research and control, a joint effort of MNR Rabies Research Unit; the Canadian Food Inspection Agency of Agriculture Canada; the Ontario Ministry of Health; and the Geographic Information Systems Laboratory at Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have very comprehensive rabies resources at <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/rabies/Introduction/intro.htm>, including a page for children to help them understand this distressing disease: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/kidsrabies/>

The Pasteur Institute is a good source of international rabies information:
http://www.pasteur.fr/recherche/rage/page_seule_english.html

Bat Conservation International, Inc. posts information on rabies carried by bats:
<http://www.batcon.org/discover/rabies.html>

The American Veterinary Medicine Association site outlines measures for rabies control:
<http://www.avma.org/pubhlth/rabcont.asp>

Rabnet is a World Health Organization data bank which offers online access to information on rabies prevalence, diagnosis, surveillance, and control in humans and animals from around the world:
<http://www.who.int/GlobalAtlas/home.asp>

WorldWildWeb

If you go out in the woods today, here's what you might find ...

When you're in Rouge Park in the fall and winter, you may notice some deciduous trees still holding onto their leaves. One of these is the young American Beech (*Fagus grandifolia*), the only native beech tree in North America. Related to oak and chestnut trees, beeches can live for hundreds of years, and grow over thirty metres tall. In this area, we usually see trees 25 metres tall and 1 metre in diameter.

Often, the copper-coloured leaves still cling to the young trees, even in the bitter cold of winter. Beeches not only provide beauty and colour in the forest this time of year, but we are fortunate to have American Beech in this area for other reasons. Over the years, people used these leaves for

mattress filling because they were more springy than the traditional straw and stayed fresh longer. Dried beech leaves can also be used to make "tea".

The nutritious sweet-meat nuts which are produced by trees 50 years and older have been known to please the palate of humans and wintering wildlife for centuries. Bears, deer, foxes, squirrels, and a host of birds, even ducks, find the nuts to be a welcome discovery in winter months when food supplies are scarce.

Beech nuts were used to make cooking oil and lamp fuel, roasted as a coffee substitute, and added to livestock feed when plentiful.

The thin, smooth, light grey beech bark is reputed to have antiseptic qualities, used in various forms for treating everything from skin conditions to bronchitis.

When you are on the trails in Rouge Park and spot a beech tree, enjoy its beauty and remember its importance for wildlife as winter sets in. Help protect your park: take only photographs and leave only your thanks.

(With info from www.huntontario.com)

Barb Davies

Unique in Toronto: Rouge Park is rare habitat

Maryam Nassar

Rouge Park is home to a unique feature: Carolinian habitat. In 1984, thirty-eight sites throughout southern Ontario were identified as critical, unprotected sites of Carolinian habitat; the only site in the Toronto Area was the land that is now protected as part of Rouge Park. Our important status as part of Canada's Carolinian life zone is now recognized with a permanent marker at Rouge Park's Glen Eagles Vista in Toronto.

Carolinian Canada is a non-profit coalition of government and non-government conservation groups and individuals working to conserve the ecological diversity of Canada's most threatened natural region. "This is an exciting day for Rouge Park," observed Ron Christie, Chair of the Rouge Park Alliance. "Exactly 20 years ago, the Rouge River valley in Toronto was identified as critical Carolinian habitat. Almost 10 years ago, people who were concerned about losing this critical habitat came together to demand that governments take action to protect the area, and so Rouge Park was created. A lot has changed since that time, but the need for natural areas close to the city, both for wildlife and people, is something that remains."



From left: Executive Director, Michelle Kanter and Chair, Ron Ambrose of Carolinian Canada are joined by Rouge Park Alliance Chair, Ron Christie, Alliance member Hon. Pauline Browes and Rouge Park General Manager Lewis Yeager at Glen Eagles Vista, Rouge Park in Toronto.

"It is great that we are recognizing and celebrating an ecological aspect of Rouge Park," said Lewis Yeager, Rouge Park General Manager. "Too often, the focus is on political and financial matters, when it is the ecological character of the Park that should be foremost in a young, growing park such as ours."

Michelle Kanter, Executive Director of Carolinian Canada emphasized that "It's important to celebrate the successes of conservation and recognize the many people in the community that protect natural

areas. We're happy to do this with our local partners." Carolinian Canada received funding from the Ontario Trillium Foundation to begin a programme marking all 38 Carolinian natural heritage sites identified two decades ago. A guide to the sites will soon be available for those interested in visiting them and enjoying this natural legacy.

Serving as the northeastern limit of the Carolinian life zone in Canada, Rouge Park lands are in a transitional zone for ecological habitat types.

Rouge Park Vision

Rouge Park will be a special place of outstanding natural features and diverse cultural heritage in an urban-rural setting, protected and flourishing as an ecosystem in perpetuity. Human activities will exist in harmony with the natural values of the Park. The Park will be a sanctuary for nature and the human spirit.

Rouge Park Goal

To protect, restore and enhance the natural, scenic and cultural values of the Park in an ecosystem context, and to promote public responsibility, understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of this heritage.

Connections

We welcome your submissions of news, stories and photos. E-mail us at rougepark@rougepark.com or send to:

Rouge Park
Connections newsletter
50 Bloomington Rd West
Aurora, Ontario
Canada
L4G 3G8

