

Connections

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Fall/Winter 2008

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Things Are Under Way in the Bob Hunter Memorial Park Area

It's been nine months since my appointment as Chair of the Rouge Park Alliance, and I am continuously impressed by how well our members demonstrate their willingness and ability to work together to improve the Park.

I have had the privilege of attending a number of tree planting events, including one that was a collaboration between the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, York Region and Rouge Park, as part of Trees Ontario's 50 Million Trees program. We also held our first ever Annual General Meeting where we honoured Ron Christie, a former Alliance Chair with the Rouge Park Award for his efforts in guiding and growing the Park. Through celebrating our past members, and moving forward in establishing new relationships, the legacy of Rouge Park continues to grow.

I am especially pleased to see the efforts underway in Bob Hunter Memorial Park. We are working to implement the strategies outlined in our plan for this significant area of the Park. Through a joint venture with York Region plans are well underway for the implementation of a considerable portion of the trails component identified for this area of Rouge

Park. Over the next year, you will see entrance gateways appearing along the main roadways as well as parking areas to access short looping trails for the casual hiker, low impact hiking trails for the long distance hiker and multi-use trails along the roadside. As an avid hiker myself, I am looking forward to the experience of hiking along the first official Rouge Park trails in York Region and the unique experience each trail will provide.

Equally exciting is the ecological restoration planned for this area in 2009. This includes the connection of the Bob Hunter Memorial Park area's Box Grove Forest to the Little Rouge Creek core forests to the east and has been made possible through collaboration between some of our members (York Region, the Province of Ontario's Trees Ontario Foundation and TRCA). This connection will contribute to our highly protected Nature Reserve Zone through the creation of vital interior forest habitat.

It's been a fruitful nine months and I look forward to contributing to the progress of this tremendous nature reserve.

*Alan Wells,
Chair, Rouge Park Alliance*



Alan Wells was appointed by the Ontario government as Chair of the Rouge Park Alliance, Rouge Park's board of directors, in February 2008. Prior to joining the Alliance, Alan worked with the Province of Ontario as a Development Facilitator, helping groups resolve issues concerning growth management, infrastructure planning and environmental protection. He had over 25 years experience working with York Region, serving as CAO for 7 years. Alan has been a volunteer with the Uxbridge Watershed Advisory Committee and Toronto Region Conservation Authority's Duffins and Carruthers Creeks Watershed Resource Technical Advisory Committee. He is a member of the boards of directors of the Oak Ridges Trail Association and the Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust.



Rouge Park has undertaken the construction of a topsoil berm on the west side of Bob Hunter Memorial Park to provide habitat variety, panoramic views, and protection from noise and light from the newly urbanized area to the west.

The Plans Are In Place, and We're Ready to Go!

John Kennedy once said "Things do not just happen. They are made to happen." It's a maxim we believe here at Rouge Park. We also realize that action without adequate and clear thought is often wasteful. As another great statesman Sir Winston Churchill said, "Planning is essential."

Plans may not be all that exciting but what is exciting is turning those plans into reality – and it's been an exciting year for us here at Rouge Park with the approval of two new plans designed to further our efforts in restoring and enhancing the Park for our visitors and inhabitants alike.

The 2008 Natural Heritage Actions for the 21st Century Plan answers two major questions; what types of habitats should we be creating in the Park, and how should we prioritize our restoration initiatives? Working with the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority and the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation, Rouge Park was able to establish an approach that finds balance between healthy Park habitats and appropriate visitor use. The Action Plan has formed a set of guidelines to shape our restoration efforts in years to come.

The Heritage Appreciation and Visitor Experience (HAVE) Plan is

an exciting new initiative that will guide us as we introduce a visitor-focused model for Park enhancement. HAVE is a suite of programmes, activities and services that can assist Rouge Park and its partners and stakeholders in achieving the Park's mission, vision and goals.

We are excited about the changes to come, and hope you are too. To download a copy of these plans, please visit our website at www.rougepark.com.

*Bob Clay, Restoration
Michelle Holmes, Interpretation*



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Rouge Park's Latest Makeover

An old drainage ditch, visible on aerial photography, told the tale of past efforts to drain a marsh for agriculture near Old Finch Avenue and Reesor Road. Despite these efforts, the land continued to flood, aquatic plants would sprout, and waterfowl would occasionally visit. The marsh wasn't ready to give up.

Over the past year Rouge Park, assisted by Toronto Region Conservation and a local community group, worked to give

the marsh another chance. Each group offered its specialized skills, surveying the site, examining soils, planting vegetation, and installing a new dam which resulted in the revitalization of the marsh. As work progressed on the site, herons, ducks and wild turkeys were often spotted, perhaps curious about the new habitat unfolding before them.

These restoration efforts are only the initial phase of the renewed wetland. We plan to continue with plantings and site maintenance, offering both people and animals an opportunity to be a part of this old marsh's new history.

*Bob Clay,
Restoration*



© Rouge Park

Wetlands play an important role in improving biodiversity and the health of our watersheds.

New Visitor Guide Available

The new Rouge Park Visitor Guide is ready and chock-full of things to see and do while you visit the Park. Whether you have only an hour to spend, or are looking for an overnight adventure, the new Visitor Guide offers plenty of ways to go wild in the city!

Take your family on a tour along a lush forest trail, enjoy the picturesque views and escape that busy city bustle. With all the beautiful scenery and crisp air, it won't even feel like exercise.

Grab your reusable water bottle, your camera and your sense of adventure and you can be a tourist in your own city. With many of our trails accessible by transit, you'll be immersed in nature in no time at all.

Download or request your copy of the Visitor Guide today at www.rougepark.com.

Happy trails!

*Michelle Holmes
Interpretation & Culture*



The perennially-popular Glen Eagles Vista offers the perfect vantage point for taking in spectacular fall colours and winter scenes. The vibrant maples and oaks are magnificent!

Walking Your Dog in the Park?



Preserving and restoring Rouge Park's biodiversity is important—for people and for the wide variety of living things that live here.

The trails in Rouge Park are a great place for you and your four-legged pal to get some fresh air and exercise. Keep these points in mind while you're enjoying the sights and sounds of this natural area, and help protect your Park.

These trails wind through designated nature reserves - homes to many small wildlife species who may nest on the forest floor, or rely on ground cover for food and shelter. An encounter with an off-leash dog, which suggests a coyote or a wolf to small birds and mammals, can prove stressful or fatal to these animals, and could disrupt breeding for the season.

While you consider your dog friendly and no danger to others,

off-leash dogs do cause fear in other people and dogs.

Poison ivy can be prevalent in areas near the trails. Wandering dogs can easily pick up and transfer this skin irritant on to you and others.

It's also important to pick up after your pooch - their waste alters the natural ecosystem which we strive to preserve, and may infect youngsters playing along the trails.

By leashing your dog, you show your consideration for the Park, and all of its visitors. Thank you for making this extra effort.

*Michelle Holmes
Interpretation & Culture*

The View From Here

When I first arrived from France in 2002 to volunteer at Rouge Park, I wasn't overly impressed. At a first glance I really didn't see anything special; some areas simply looked like lands that had been abandoned for several years. But I had yet to understand that to enjoy and appreciate Rouge Park required more than just a glance, I needed to take a second look.

As I hiked along the trails, I suddenly saw what I couldn't see before. In Rouge Park, life is everywhere! The birds were so much more colourful than the ones I had encountered in France, and I discovered new little animals called "chipmunks", bold and chatty.

It occurred to me that what I had taken for abandoned land was in fact habitat, thriving with plants and animals. Soon, everywhere I looked I was hunting for signs of wildlife, and sure enough the Park didn't disappoint – birds, butterflies and wildflowers in every direction.

Not only was I learning new plants and animals, I was discovering their surroundings - the serene forest where the only interruption was a bird bursting into song, the meadows that offered a beautiful valley vista, and the wetlands offering a feast for curious shorebirds.

Filled with wonder I took in all the sights the Park had to offer. I was struck by how lucky people here are to have this right in

their backyard. No need to travel to some exotic location when in moments you can be immersed in nature, surrounded by the trees, the river, the wildlife. Right in the city! If hikes in Rouge Park were prescribed by doctors, there would be fewer nervous breakdowns, I thought as I strolled along the trail.

The progress since my first summer with Rouge Park is astounding! In the last six years, many areas have been restored, attractive signs now point out important features in the Park, and the new plans for ecology and visitors are truly exciting. I especially like the new boardwalk at Rouge Marsh. What a difference in six years!

I was so grateful that I had such an area to explore during my visits to Toronto. I am amazed how the efforts of the small Rouge Park staff have accomplished so much to protect this great tract of land and how they strive with their partners to maintain that delicate balance between caring for the natural ecosystems and providing rewarding experiences for visitors like me.

I travelled across an ocean to experience the wonders of Rouge Park. When I return to France, I will be looking for areas of public land that can become "Rouge Parks" at home. Think of how lucky you are, you only need to find your nearest TTC stop! I hope you enjoy your hike as much as I did.

Anne-Laurence Labarraque



Anne-Laurence is a biologist and science teacher in France and assisted Rouge Park staff this summer. She previously spent the summer of 2002 as an intern biologist for Rouge Park.



Rouge Park - A Safe Haven for Species at Risk

We often describe Rouge Park as a sanctuary for nature and the human spirit. In fact, it's part of the Rouge Park Vision, something that is very dear to us. The word 'sanctuary' often prompts visions of peaceful tranquillity, being surrounded by fresh air as we listen to the serenading insects and birds. But what does sanctuary mean to those songbirds, and the diverse population of plants and animals living in our Park?

Rouge Park offers protected habitat to many plants and animals. Some are considered rare or at risk. Melinda Thompson-Black, Species at Risk Biologist for the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, identifies the two foremost causes of species becoming at risk in Ontario, "The first reason is habitat loss and fragmentation and the second is habitat specificity, meaning that some species will only occur in particular habitat types."

Rouge Park inhabitants can also find themselves at risk when their homes are disturbed by people or other animals. When we plan our Park trails we are careful to consider the natural surroundings in order to have the least impact on habitat. You can help too – by staying on our designated trails, you'll be immersed in nature while helping to protect habitat in the area. Trampling of rare species, disturbing ground-nesting birds, and harming smaller critters like salamanders are mishaps easily avoided by keeping dogs leashed in Nature Reserves.

you're lucky enough to spot one. The Blanding's Turtle (*Emydoidea blandingii*), which is endangered in Ontario, has been seen at some of Rouge Park's newly created wetlands. Blanding's Turtle populations have been declining as a result of poor nesting success rates, and a lack of ideal habitat. Often their habitats are fragmented by roads, a vulnerability for female turtles that often lay their eggs on the soft roadside gravel. Rouge Park provides a large tract of protected land offering a safe haven to these and many other turtles.

Rouge Park has endeavoured to protect and expand these natural habitats through land acquisition and ecological restoration. More recently, the Park has undertaken monitoring initiatives to gain a better understanding of existing habitats and activities which may be affecting our ability to protect rare species. In 2009 we will begin closing unofficial trails, and continue our work with volunteers to remove invasive species.

There is hope. In 2000, Rouge Park partnered with the Ministry of Natural Resources to reintroduce Wild Turkeys (*Meleagris gallopavo*) to the Park. These birds, at one time extirpated from southern Ontario, have made themselves at home in Rouge Park and their population continues to flourish. They've been spotted every year during our Annual Winter Bird Count. Join us this year, and you may see them too.

Barb Davies, Natural Heritage
Vicki MacDonald, Biologist

What does extirpated mean?

When a plant or animal no longer exists in the wild within a certain geographical area.



The Bashful Bulrush is a plant that truly lives up to its name. Also known as the Few-flowered Club Rush (*Trichophorum planifolium*), this inconspicuous plant could only be found in two locations in Canada, one of which is Rouge Park, though it hasn't been spotted recently. In partnership with the Royal Botanical Gardens and the City of Toronto, we have initiated investigations to see whether keeping deer out of an area where suitable habitat for Bashful bulrush exists will improve conditions enough to reintroduce the plant. This small, ordinary-looking plant, and other rare plants like American Ginseng, could easily fall victim to off-trail hiking shoes – so please be mindful and stick to the trails.

For as bashful as the bulrush seems, another inhabitant of the Park almost appears to smile, if

Rouge Park Volunteers Do Some Heavy Lifting

Over 3500 pounds of litter were tidied up in Rouge Park as over 70 volunteers came out to lend a hand. Participants cleaned up during three separate events this fall – Rouge Beach and Marsh, the Finch Meander Area, and along Littles Road in Toronto. This was a great opportunity for community organizations, families and friends to come together and take part in enhancing the Park for wildlife and people alike.

“The cleanups were a huge success and without the volunteers that would not be possible” said Sheryl Santos, event organizer from Rouge Park. “We are raising awareness about the impact that human activities are having on our environment. Litter can entangle or be ingested by wildlife; it also ends up in our streams and waterways polluting our water supply. By picking up litter we can create healthier habitats for both plants and animals.”



Volunteers weren't afraid to get their hands dirty along the shoreline at the Finch Meander Area of Rouge Park.

Working together with City of Toronto staff and donations from the Home Depot, members of the community worked tirelessly to tidy up important habitats. The most prevalent type of litter was drink containers, and over 40 tires were removed.

The cleanup events at Rouge Beach and Marsh and the Finch Meander Area were part of the TD Great Canadian Shoreline

Cleanup, a cross-Canada event with over 63 000 volunteers.

Rouge Park plans to greatly increase the work it does with volunteer community groups” said Lewis Yeager, General Manager of Rouge Park. **“If you or your group wishes to become more involved please call us at (905) 713-6038.”**

*Michelle Holmes
Interpretation & Culture*



Volunteers from Rouge Valley Mennonite Church work together with Rouge Park help to tidy up trash along Littles Road.

Join Us for Our 6th Annual Winter Bird Count

Mastering the ability to adjust binoculars while wearing mittens is just one reason to join Rouge Park's 6th Annual Winter Bird Count. Add in the hot chocolate, the tranquillity of the Park, and the opportunity to spot an owl or two, and it's worth the early wake up call. Join us January 11th for this great opportunity to learn more about the Park and its local inhabitants and provide us with valuable information at the same time. As past participants have advised, dress warmly! To find out more, email us at birdcount@rougepark.com. See you in January!



“Chicka
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What Does Your Adventure Look Like?

Recently Rouge Park staff attended a National Historic Sites Alliance of Ontario conference where Parks Canada demonstrated a new way to offer customized interpretive programming to park visitors. After taking a short quiz, visitors learned their "Explorer Quotient" which indicated what sort of park experience they would find most rewarding. The visitors were then encouraged to embark on an adventure customized for that Explorer Quotient.

Ever wonder why you and your partner may not travel well together? It could be that you have differing Explorer Quotients. Someone labelled a 'free spirit' may simply enjoy spending time with a friend, not needing loads of information about the locale, while a 'learner' might enjoy spending their time lingering over displays, soaking up all the details. To take the quiz, visit <http://eqcaen.canada.travel/>

At Rouge Park, with our new Heritage Appreciation and Visitor Experience (HAVE) Plan, we also want to know what type of adventure you'd like to have, so as we develop our Park programming we can be sure you have a great time during your visit. Feel free to drop us a line at share@rougepark.com.

*Lewis Yeager, General Manager
Michelle Holmes, Interpretation*



Family & Fitness

Science & Wonder



Solace & Snapshots

About Us

Rouge Park is Canada's premier urban wilderness park. The 47 km² of protected lands in the Ontario Greenbelt preserve wilderness habitats in and near Toronto, Canada, from the Oak Ridges Moraine to Lake Ontario. Visit us to enjoy hiking, camping, a beach and spectacular views. Many areas are accessible by public transit. Alan Wells is Chair of the Rouge Park Alliance, the Park's board of directors. Rouge Park's General Manager is Lewis Yeager.

Our 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.

Our 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 news, stories and photos. E-mail us at connections@rougepark.com or send to Rouge Park
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