

Connections

www.rougepark.com

Fall 2007 / Winter 2008

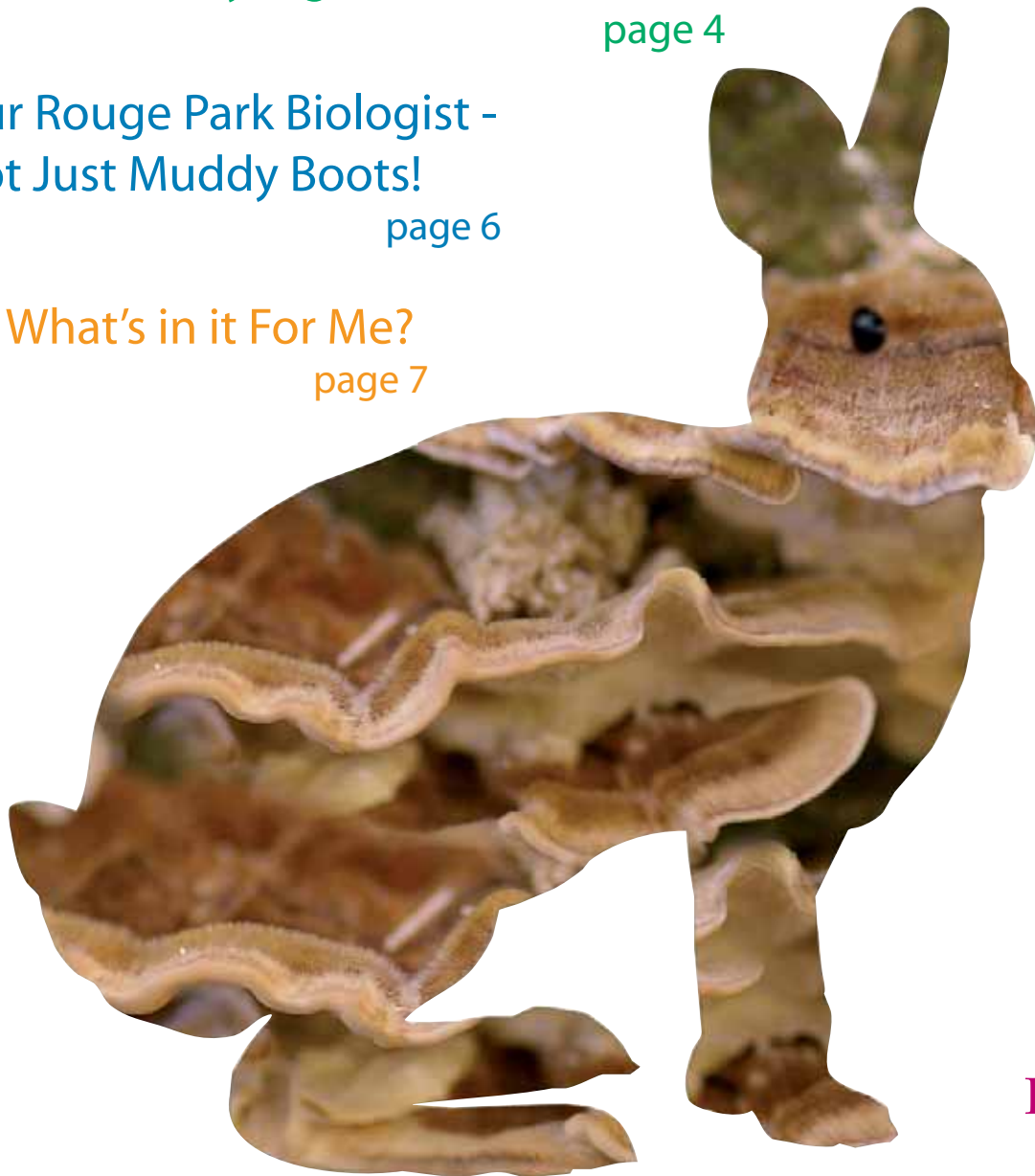
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Signs of the Times

One of our strongest needs is to make people aware of the extensive investments in time and money that are going into the ecological restoration of Rouge Park. Re-creating the habitats of earlier days is a slow process, particularly when it comes to forests, where it may be many years before visually attractive woodlands develop.

To be blunt, many of our restoration sites look like abandoned fields at first glance. Many Park visitors have asked what is going on at some of these exposed locations. With the help of Ontario's Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal, we have now put in place a series of signs



at visible locations where we have restored forests, streams and wetlands.

The panels, which feature screech owls, river otters and wood ducks, will display the dates

that community volunteers and others worked at the site, and give visitors an idea of the exciting future ahead. As the natural areas mature, they will become our star attractions, and the need for the restoration signs will pass.

*Lewis Yeager
General Manager*



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More Than 5000 Birds Spotted During Bird Count

Dozens of volunteers emerged from their warm homes one early Sunday morning to participate in Rouge Park's 5th Annual Winter Bird Count. The keen observers were able to spot over 5000 birds from 58 different species, including owls, wild turkeys and a variety of hawks. Birds that typically migrate, such as robins, bluebirds and red-winged blackbirds, were also seen.

"The Winter Bird Count was a huge success this year," said Vicki MacDonald, a biologist with Rouge Park. "We use this information to monitor bird populations in the Park, and we create habitats for the benefit of these and other species. The volunteers play a very important role in this research."

Rouge Park is Canada's premier urban wilderness park. At over 47km², the Park provides a reservoir of biodiversity in Ontario's Greenbelt, and continues to create new wilderness habitats and monitor the health of existing ones. The Winter Bird Count is an annual event and volunteers of any skill level are welcome. To be notified for next year's event, please email us at birdcount@rougepark.com.

*Michelle Holmes
Communications*

Did You Know?

The American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*) is a small colourful falcon, and this year we found 2 in the Park!

How to Make a Great Wilderness Park: It's All About the Right Ingredients

As Rouge Park grows it becomes increasingly important to consider each of the ingredients needed to build a successful urban wilderness park. Nature is diverse, and re-creating a healthy mixture of forests, wetlands, streams and meadows, requires a carefully laid out plan.

The challenge lies in creating a balance between a variety of habitats for plants and animals, while allowing for low-impact, yet rewarding visitor experiences. Coordinating such a balance in an urban area can prove to be complicated. However with our commitment to restoration we are succeeding.

Trilliums, blue jays, monarch butterflies and river otters all need healthy habitats. While some of these species will share their habitats, others may require more unique surroundings in which to live and grow at different stages of their lives.

A considerable array of habitat types is needed for Rouge Park to reach its full potential as a wilderness park - from new forests with shrubby choke cherry bushes to old forests made up of towering white pines.

Wetlands are important too, including small ones that dry up in the summer, and marshes where ducklings can learn to fly. Grassy wildflower meadows and even agricultural fields are all essential ingredients in the making of a great park.

Small, even temporary, streams provide breeding grounds for a wide range of insects, amphibians and fish, offering protection from larger predators that cannot access these shallow channels. Like vernal ponds, these tiny aquatic habitats are there when they are most needed, even if they are smaller, or even dry, later in the summer. As well, because the water is often moving slowly

and has long contact with stream bottoms and banks, small streams are a major source of exchange for nutrients, organic matter, minerals and gases.

You'll be able to sample some of the ingredients of our great Park in this issue.

*Bob Clay,
Restoration Manager*



Not Just the Usual Suspects

In these pages, you will read about the exciting restoration projects that are being undertaken by Rouge Park, with the help of community groups and volunteers of all ages. The resources to do this important work, however, do not arrive out of thin air!

A number of Rouge Park's member organisations, along with others, make it possible to undertake these stream, wetland and forest projects. The Waterfront Regeneration Trust, which holds and invests money provided by the Government of Canada at the origin of Rouge Park, provides core funding for the Park's programmes and projects year after year.

The government of Ontario has also stepped forward with significant contributions from the Ministries of Public Infrastructure Renewal and of Municipal Affairs and Housing, for good works throughout Rouge Park, including our exciting new Bob Hunter Memorial Park area. As well, the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation has helped us develop an improved method of site restoration planning, as well as working with us and our member organisations to establish signs that boast about Rouge Park as part of Ontario's Greenbelt. We look forward to hosting part of this September's "Tour de Greenbelt," a major new cycling event for the Golden Horseshoe.

Money and other valuable support for our restoration efforts also come from the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, as well as the Towns of Markham and Richmond Hill. As we thank these contributors to Rouge Park's success, we look forward to establishing even more successful partnerships in the future.

*Lewis Yeager
General Manager*

Forests - A Key Ingredient of the Park

Have you ever heard someone say that 200 years ago a squirrel could have run from Quebec to Windsor without ever touching the ground? In its travels, the squirrel would have scurried through trees in what would one day be Rouge Park, enjoying the forests of maple, beech and pine that were once so prevalent.

It's true today too - the lands that have become Rouge Park have many impressive forests, and we are continually planting more trees for future woodlands. These will, in time, grow into mature forests, providing homes for a multitude of birds and other animals, and a diverse collection of plants.

It can take years, even a century, to grow a forest of the same magnitude and quality the squirrel once saw. Yet even as the forest grows it serves a purpose, by providing homes to many animals that are not found

in a mature forest. As we plant seedlings, and care for them as they grow, we provide habitat for many small mammals like voles and mice, and for birds like the song sparrow.

Eventually these young shrubby areas will evolve into middle-aged forests where the trees may be 10 metres or more in height. This sort of woodland provides habitat for deer, wild turkeys, many warblers, jays and cardinals. Walking through this type of forest, even though it is still relatively young, you can see it filling in and becoming a thriving community.

As the forest reaches maturity, it continues to evolve into interior forest. One species will give way to another that is more adapted to the later stages of the forest's life. Finally, perhaps a hundred years from now, those tiny seedlings will reach their full glory as a mature old growth forest.

The forest will continue to change and respond to weather effects, and provide homes for birds such as scarlet tanagers, elusive oven birds, and flying squirrels who will find shelter in the tall majestic maples, oaks and white pines.

These mature forests, throughout their developmental stages, form the broad base upon which the rest of the Park's habitats rest. Forests, along with the wetland and meadow openings are all important parts of the Rouge Park habitat we are trying to re-create today. While squirrels may not be able to run from Quebec to Windsor without touching the ground, we're doing our part so that one day they may move through the trees from Lake Ontario to the Oak Ridges Moraine.

*Bob Clay
Restoration Manager*

What is an interior forest?
Learn more at www.rougepark.com!



Volunteers plant trees at a restoration site in Rouge Park on Earth Day, 2007.



As the years pass, these young trees will evolve into forest habitat.



New restoration signs for growing trees.

Wetlands – Oases in the Park's Forest

Wetlands are an important component in a healthy park, providing aquatic habitats and moderating the natural fluctuations in surface water.

Marshes are usually the first thing that comes to people's minds when they hear the word 'wetlands' but the truth is there are many types of wetland.

Marshes were once common and associated with the streams in the Rouge River system, but it is likely that vernal or spring pools, small depressions in the forest floor holding water from melted snow, and intermittent and treed swamps from ground water seepage were more common.

As we restore the Park's natural habitats we are re-creating wetland conditions. The first thing we do is consider the surface of the land. One of the results of almost 200 years of constant ploughing is that the land has been flattened so that the original shallow depressions were lost. Sometimes before we plant trees, we will reshape the land surface to create the relief needed for wetlands.

Meadows - The Prairies of the Park

While many of our restoration projects involve reforestation, and wetland creation, meadow lands are also an important consideration. If the Park's forests have openings, grasses and meadow flowers can thrive and young trees can begin their growth to maturity.

There is a myriad of birds and animals from monarchs to bluebirds that are dependent on forest openings. Those openings can be of a variety of sizes all the way from a small patch to a large field.



Once water is back on the land, it only takes a few years for the wetland to develop - far less time than the forest needs to grow.

In areas where wetlands may have been, or in riparian or stream bank areas, we select species that will grow and develop in wetlands.

An exception is the swamp that is just a forest with really wet soil, or that is flooded at certain times of the year. This is a unique type of habitat to recreate.

The wetlands we develop are home to a wide range of animals, including frogs, turtles, a variety of birds and mammals and fish. A healthy wetland has all the right organisms to keep insect populations under control and, of course, they add to the beauty of the Park.

*Bob Clay
Restoration Manager*



Though many of the openings will occur through the natural aging process of a forest, we are creating others through the planting of prairie grasses and flowers.

In other cases, agricultural fields that include hedgerows and grassy, hay areas simulate more wide open patches for animals. They may not be the wide open spaces of the western prairies, but they will be the prairies of Rouge Park.

*Bob Clay
Restoration Manager*

Our Rouge Park Biologist – Not Just Muddy Boots!

When you think of a park biologist, do you have an image of a person wearing muddy hip waders holding a measuring stick and a clip board? Someone who is willing to brave the hot sun, pouring rain, snakes and lots of mud?

Sure enough, if you met Rouge Park’s biologist, Vicki MacDonald, chances are she would have her boots on and her clip board in hand. But if you were to ask Vicki about her most handy piece of equipment, her answer isn’t what you might expect.

“My computer is really a critical tool. I use it to create habitat strategies, and analyze and prioritize restoration projects,” says Vicki. **“We use GIS software and aerial photography to visualize drainage areas, and vegetation and soil types, when developing plans for restoring the land.”**

By using a targeted approach, and documenting the characteristics of a site over a period of time, informed decisions are made about how to best manage the land. For example, by knowing that a certain area is prone to flooding in the spring, we can plant vegetation that will endure seasonally-moist soil.



Vicki MacDonald, Rouge Park Biologist

After the computer analysis is complete, the boots are put into action. Vicki ventures out to potential restoration sites and verifies what the computer has indicated. She will examine what type of vegetation exists on the land, what the soil conditions are, and validate what the computer modelling has predicted.

After a site visit, the new information is then compiled in a geographic database which shows how the Park’s natural habitats will appear after restoration activities have taken place, and the targeted ecological communities have been established.

It’s not all clip boards and computers though. Vicki knows one of the most valuable sources of information comes from the people who live in Rouge Park. “Many of our tenants have lived here for generations, and are very familiar with the characteristics of the land we are restoring,” says Vicki. “Something as simple as a conversation with a tenant over a cup of tea can yield knowledge very helpful to our restoration strategies.”

We just hope she leaves her muddy boots at the door!

Michelle Holmes, Communications

What does GIS stand for? Geographic Information Systems



Sample Site Prescription

Based on soils, drainage and other characteristics of the land, as well as nearby natural plant communities, the site prescriptions include potential areas for forest, wetland and other types of habitat to be re-established.

- Prescribed Wetland Areas
- Prescribed Reforestation Areas
- Prescribed Riparian Areas

So What's in it For Me?

When I first became a professional ecologist over 35 years ago, I discovered that many people and organisations were quite indifferent to their natural surroundings. While I walked to elementary school across a meadow, and through a swamp, these had disappeared by the time I went to high school. No more frog pond, bracket fungus, puffballs, woodpecker holes and soakers as part of my daily life. Most people thought that the supply of nature was inexhaustible, and not very useful in the first place.

While today I think there is a more prevalent appreciation of nature's benefits among urban dwellers, it is often not based upon personal experience, but rather others' experiences recounted in books, newspapers and on television. While nature may be important, it can appear as something exotic and remote.

If we, as city dwellers, want to be able to understand the issues of the day, such as climate change, energy alternatives, air quality and healthy living, and the importance of preserving diverse plant and animal communities, we need to have opportunities to connect directly with natural

environments, to appreciate what we might lose, before making policy decisions that might permanently reduce our quality of life.

Whether called natural capital, ecological benefits, externalities, or other terms favoured by economists, Rouge Park's role as "a sanctuary for nature and the human spirit" is vitally important to our future. Within reach by public transit for millions of urban dwellers of varying means, our variety of hiking trails can provide opportunities for healthier living to all age groups. As our forests expand and mature, they will provide benefits to air and water quality, and improve the pattern of stream flows in the Park's watersheds.

Finally, our children will have the opportunity to see, smell, and hear nature again. Perhaps they will walk past frog ponds, bracket fungus, puffballs and woodpecker holes whenever they wish, and take their parents and grandparents with them.

Lewis Yeager
General Manager



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NATURAL SANCTUARY

Plan your Rouge Park adventure at www.rougepark.com!



Please join us for
Our First Rouge Park Alliance
Annual General Meeting

Friday, April 4, 2008
For more information, call Rouge Park
(905) 713-6038

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Something Worth Exploring!

It's fresh, new and we've created it just for you! Brightly coloured and easy to navigate, our newly redesigned website makes visiting Rouge Park even more enticing.

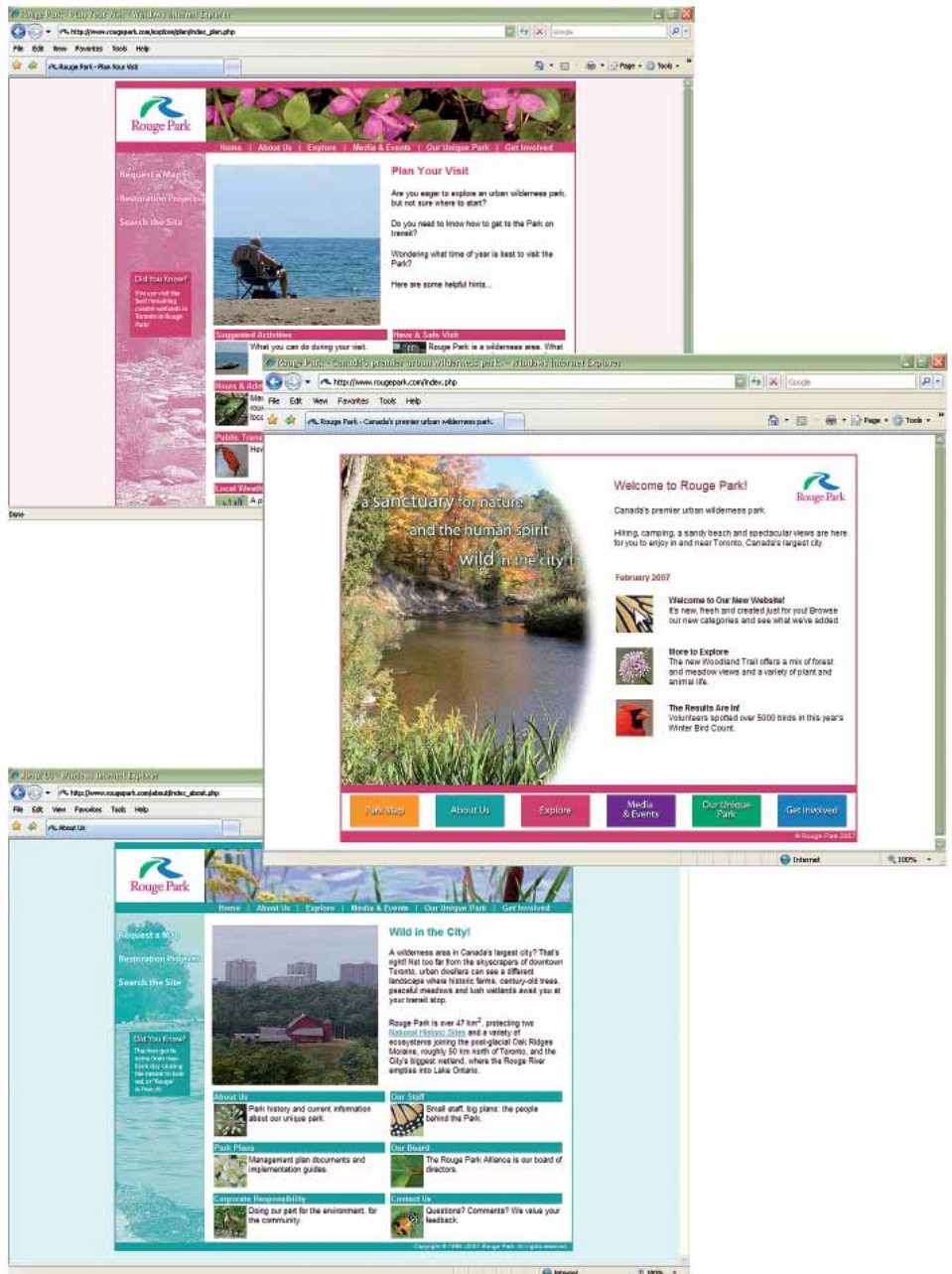
Rouge Park is a beautiful, natural haven in the midst of a bustling cityscape. So it came as no surprise that most people visiting our website were looking for information on spending some time in the Park. We listened to your requests and have developed our new website with that in mind.

In the Explore section of the website there is everything from directions to the Park, trail locations, suggested activities and points of interest. Now you can find tips on spotting animals living in the park, where to have a family picnic, and spend a night camping under the stars. You can even send a postcard to your friends, sharing your Rouge Park experience.

Do you want to learn more about the Park's history? Read our latest news? Discover what makes Rouge Park so unique? Check out previous issues of Connections? With the new website, all of this information is easy to find, and it's all at your finger tips, 24/7!

Drop by today and check it out!
www.rougepark.com

*Michelle Holmes
Communications*



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. Gord Weeden 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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