



Since 1923

# TORONTO FIELD NATURALIST

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High Park Black Oak Savannah, January 2021. Photo: Charlotte Broome

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## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

We find ourselves in deepest winter – and almost a year into an all-consuming pandemic. Brrrr. Luckily, we have resources, both as Canadians and as naturalists. Canadians deal with winter every year – we're toughened against its howl and bite, and we know it must end eventually, in puddles and birdsong. But as naturalists, slogging through this unprecedented global down-time, we can call on a secret power – our insatiable curiosity. Curiosity, if we nurture it wisely, can guide us through isolation and heal our cabin fever. How do we nurture curiosity? We can begin with books, of course, and more books. We can discuss them with friends and swap them with neighbours. If the books are good, we can review them for this newsletter. Why not become one of our book reviewers, joining folks like Bob Kortright, Anne Purvis, Jennifer Smith and Wendy Rothwell?

Indeed, as Toronto Field Naturalists, we benefit not only from this wonderful newsletter but also from a full menu of resources, volunteer opportunities and worthy projects – all waiting for us to shake off our brain fog and get involved. TFN highlights come to you via our new monthly email blast, *Communications of the TFN*. If you haven't seen it, make sure we have your email address on file by contacting [membership@torontofieldnaturalists.org](mailto:membership@torontofieldnaturalists.org).

Most immediately, we can treat ourselves to the virtual Nature Images Show on February 6, showcasing the creativity of our members and kindly coordinated by Lynn Miller (see page 3). The very next day, February 7, our TFN Zoom lecture will feature the spine-chilling secrets of salamander-eating pitcher plants. And our dedicated lecture team (now ably chaired by Sofia Mihaylova) has lined up more terrific speakers for coming months, so stay tuned.

Of course we all miss our TFN group walks. We miss the charming serendipity of bumping into old buddies or making new acquaintances. Those joys will return when public health rules allow. Meanwhile, thanks to our

wonderful Walks Committee, TFN is on the cusp of launching virtual self-guided walk routes. This exciting project will enable us all to contribute waypoints to a given walk route, such as text snippets, photos, video or audio. The effect will be rather like a self-guided audio tour of a museum. Walkers will be able to enjoy these routes any day they choose, even long after the pandemic is past. Learn more on page 12.

Speaking up for nature is a perpetual role for TFN, and there are always more urgent issues than hours in our day. In recent weeks, TFN cautioned City Hall about road salt impacts on environmentally significant areas and helped quash a plan for water taxi access to the Spit. Of course, TFN also joined the recent storm of protests against Bill 229 at Queen's Park. This bill is now law and threatens to undo decades of progress by conservation authorities in protecting and restoring nature. There will be much more work ahead.

So I'm especially grateful for volunteers willing to step into advocacy roles. For example, Jenny Bull will represent TFN in a City-led Master Plan exercise for the Toronto Islands where vulnerable dune habitats face all kinds of pressures. If you are inclined towards nature advocacy and have capacity beyond signing petitions, contact me. Opportunities are wide-ranging. For example, TFN hopes to link Toronto into the Bird-Friendly City program, coordinated by Nature Canada. So far, we have the start of a bird-friendly planning team who will network with key players at City Hall. They would love help. Similarly, TFN has signed up with Nature Canada's *Nature on the Hill* campaign (Feb. 16-19) to remind federal MPs how keenly Canadians value nature. Whatever your curiosity and appetite for engagement, I believe there is a TFN niche waiting, ready to help you dissipate any February blues.

Ellen Schwartzel  
[president@torontofieldnaturalists.org](mailto:president@torontofieldnaturalists.org)

### TFN Board Nominations Invited

TFN is looking for people with initiative who are willing to devote time to working as members of the Board of Directors.

Please send your suggestions to the Chair of the Nominating Committee, c/o the TFN office (see contact info on page 14).

The Committee's report will be published in the May newsletter.

### WHAT'S NEW ON TFN'S WEBSITE

Visit today and discover:

- Our first Self-Guided Walk: Ecological Restoration in the Don
- Recording of the December Lecture
- Info on our upcoming Nature Arts Show
- New Junior Naturalists' blog posts

Discover all this and more at  
<https://torontofieldnaturalists.org/for-members/>

## TFN OUTINGS

**Alert: Walks have been temporarily suspended.  
See website for up-to-date information.**

Due to COVID-19 we continue our practice of offering “members only” outings posted on our website. To ensure that groups do not exceed allowed maximums and to facilitate contact tracing should the need arise, members who wish to attend a particular walk must RSVP. The RSVP facility for each walk opens on the website at a random time of day, five days before the date of the walk. Walk leaders will have a list of who RSVPed, and only people on the list will be allowed to participate. Before RSVPing, please review all guidelines on the webpage and carefully review walk descriptions for any additional guidelines specific to that walk.

As we are unable to list walks in the newsletter at present, an Archive of Past Walks is being maintained for your enjoyment: <https://torontofieldnaturalists.org/walks/archive-of-past-walks/>

### TO ACCESS OUR WINTER WALKS LIST

Visit the “Members Only” Section  
of our Website

## TFN LECTURES

The TFN Lecture Series is now being conducted through Zoom technology. On the scheduled date of each lecture, members will be welcomed into the virtual space at 2:30 pm. The host will introduce the lecture and then play the speaker's pre-recorded presentation (approximately 45 minutes) with accompanying visual materials. Following this showing the speaker will be available to answer questions from the audience through Zoom.

The presentation and follow-up question period will subsequently be posted on our website for viewing by all TFN members.

See information about the February lecture on the back page.

### FOR DETAILS ON HOW TO JOIN THE LECTURE

Visit the “Members Only” Section  
of our Website

### TO ACCESS THE "MEMBERS ONLY" SECTION VISIT: <https://torontofieldnaturalists.org/private>

The password was delivered in the email notifying you that the February newsletter is available online. If you have misplaced the password you can request it by emailing [membership@torontofieldnaturalists.org](mailto:membership@torontofieldnaturalists.org).

## Nature Images Show

Saturday, February 6, 2021 from 1:30 to 4 pm

Please join us for our first ever virtual Nature Images show!  
<https://torontofieldnaturalists.org/NatureImages-2021>

### Calling all TFN photographers!

Share your photographs at the Nature Images show!

This virtual event opens up more possibilities for display than our traditional slideshow format. Create a video! Add music! Or stay with the tried and true slideshow. It's up to you.

Because of the nature of this event we can't handle “walk in” participants.

**If you would like to participate, please email Lynn Miller at [volunteering@torontofieldnaturalists.org](mailto:volunteering@torontofieldnaturalists.org) before the end of January.**

## FOR READING

***Hope Matters: Why Changing the Way We Think Is Critical to Solving the Environmental Crisis***  
by Elin Kelsey, 2020

The main messages of this book are that, despite the challenges we face in the nature and climate crises, there are good reasons for hope, and that hope is essential for addressing these crises. Too many messages from environmental organizations and news media are messages of doom and gloom because they attract attention, clicks and donations. But for many, if not most of us, such messages cause hopelessness and tuning out. And messages of doom and gloom, particularly for young people, cause anxiety and depression. Focusing on the many things we can do to solve sustainability crises is much more likely to generate the activity we need, and is also more humane.

Without dismissing the seriousness of the nature and climate crises, this book relates many examples where progress is being made. Having read it, I have resolved to stop making gloomy pronouncements about environmental problems without tempering them with hope and focusing on what we can do to solve them.

Bob Kortright

***A Life on Our Planet – My Witness Statement and a Vision for the Future***  
by David Attenborough, 2020

As one of the many people who have enjoyed watching David Attenborough's nature programs on TV since the 1950s, I am pleased that he has written this book. He is in a unique position, having spent seven decades exploring some of the most remote and fascinating natural areas of the world, to speak from personal experience about the disturbing loss of biodiversity that has occurred and continues to occur. And because he is so well-known and respected, his message is likely to reach a wide audience.

In the Introduction, he says, "The natural world is fading. The evidence is all around. It has happened during my lifetime. I have seen it with my own eyes. ... This book is the story of how we came to make this, our greatest mistake, and how, if we act now, we can yet put it right."

He begins by bearing witness to what he observed between 1954 and the present day, as the world's population grew, the amount of carbon in the atmosphere increased and the remaining wilderness diminished. He then forecasts *What Lies Ahead* if we continue along our current path – the Earth's sixth mass extinction. In his *Vision for the Future* he describes ways we can avert this catastrophe by "rewilding the world." He tells positive stories of actions being taken and successes being

achieved, demonstrating that there are things we can do if we have the will to act.

He concludes on a hopeful note – *Our Greatest Opportunity*. "The advent of the Anthropocene [the time of humans] could yet mark the beginning of a new and sustainable relationship between ourselves and with the planet. It could be a time in which we learn how to work with nature rather than against it, a time in which there would no longer be any great distinction between the natural and the managed, for we would become the attentive stewards of the entire Earth, calling upon nature's extraordinary resilience to help us bring its biodiversity back from the brink."

Wendy Rothwell

***Accidental Wilderness: The Origins and Ecology of Toronto's Tommy Thompson Park***  
by W H Kehm and R Burley, 2020

This beautiful and informative book about the history and ecology of Toronto's Leslie Street Spit contains chapters about the history of planning, construction, ecology, advocacy, restoration projects and use of this five-km-long, 250-hectare, vehicle-free, dog-free wilderness of rubble, excavated material and dredged sand, and the flora and fauna that found their way there, a scant four kilometers as the crow flies from the heart of downtown Toronto.

There are excellent chapters on plants and natural succession and on birds and birding, a lovely poem by Chief Laforme of the Mississaugas of the New Credit, and an appendix of aerial photos of 12 famous large urban parks overlaid with an outline of Tommy Thompson Park (TTP) extending beyond any of them. Most of the 63 wonderful photos by Robert Burley (also responsible for *An Enduring Wilderness: Toronto's Natural Parklands, 2017*) have nearby captions. The Image Key (p.178) is necessary to identify those that do not. It is accompanied by a map showing the locations of most of the photos. The somewhat fanciful shoreline details in the map do not detract from its usefulness.

Peter del Tredici's chapter (Spontaneous Ecology of TTP) is disappointing. He gets facts wrong and misleads: e.g. "380 species of birds" (p.168) – actually 325; "cormorants are eating too many fish" (p.116) – actually they eat mostly alewives which used to pile up in stinking mounds on the beaches every year, and fish communities around the spit are getting healthier. It is implied (p.97) that black locust stands have replaced aspen and cottonwood eliminated by beaver. In fact, many if not most poplar

*continued on page 13*

## LECTURE REPORT

## Rethinking Beauty: Inspiring Gardeners in a Changing World

December 6, 2020

Paul Zammit, Professor of Horticulture, Niagara College

Paul Zammit has an extensive background in horticulture, having served as Director of Horticulture at the Toronto Botanical Garden for ten years and, prior to that, working for 20 years at Plant World – at that time a prominent family-owned Toronto garden centre. For over 25 years he has been delivering presentations across Canada, throughout the US and in countries such as Switzerland, Germany, Bermuda and South Africa.

Paul gave an enthusiastic presentation on the benefits of home gardening. Those of us fortunate to have a garden truly appreciate its power, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Gardening gives us a sense of purpose; it reduces stress; and medical evidence shows that being connected to earth and plants improves quality of life.

In his job at the garden centre, marketing campaigns and Paul's beautiful flower displays equated to sales. People were always in a rush, talking on their cell phones, and



Paul dug deep under his front lawn to create this beautiful natural garden.

were looking for plants they could just feed and forget. In his next job at Toronto Botanical Garden he developed eco-friendly gardening practices, such as planting drought-tolerant plants, and provided education to the public. He found it rewarding to see people in the garden, including children and seniors, taking pictures of the beautiful plants and of the goldfinches, hawks, butterflies and other insects the plants attracted.

Paul is continually learning and questioning past theories. He told a story of how a discussion with his wise uncle helped him rethink beauty. While visiting his uncle in Malta when he was a second-year university student, Paul noticed that the citrus trees had bugs and scale, and told his uncle they needed to be sprayed. The wise uncle told Paul to listen. Paul said all he could hear were the birds. That was precisely the point his uncle was trying to make. In the past when he had sprayed to have perfect trees, many dead birds were found. Although the trees now had scale and bugs, the fruit was delicious.

Many gardeners around the world are rethinking what to plant in order to create more biodiversity. The Great Dixter property in England now mixes formal and informal gardens, including extensive areas of meadows rich in wildflowers. Other places like Chicago, Ireland and Toronto are also planting more natural public gardens. Well-manicured lawns do not provide the same life as a meadow and they use enormous amounts of toxic pesticides and fertilizers. If you were to run a net over a mowed lawn you would get nothing. If you run a net in a wild meadow you will find lots of critters.

Corridors are required for creatures to safely connect with other spaces. The practice of planting grass within cemeteries, housing developments and parks needs to be examined to see if a more natural solution could be implemented. An additional bonus is that meadows and natural settings require less maintenance and watering.

*continued on page 6*

### Book Recommendation: *Nature's Best Hope*, D. Tallamy, 2020

Tallamy's *Bringing Nature Home* (2009) showed how native plants are necessary to sustain wildlife in our gardens. In *Nature's Best Hope* he extends that theme by showing how much potential there is for homeowners to make a big difference by turning their yards into conservation corridors that provide wildlife habitats and bring joy. This mostly involves replacing grass with native trees, shrubs and wildflowers. He cites numerous examples of how this has worked so far. He also provides specific suggestions that homeowners can incorporate into their own yards.

Bob Kortright

## TORONTO WILDFLOWERS: MEADOWRUES

Meadowrues (genus *Thalictrum*) are members of the Ranunculaceae family. According to the Oxford Dictionary, the family name comes from a Latin diminutive of *rana* (frog).

Many species of genus *Ranunculus* occur in wet places. Other genera of this large and very diverse family were discussed in the TFN newsletters of 2010 May, 2010 December, 2016 April, 2016 September, 2018 October, 2019 March.

Toronto's meadowrue species are *Thalictrum dioicum* (early meadowrue) and *T. pubescens* (tall meadowrue). Both are common locally. *The ROM Field Guide to Wildflowers of Ontario*, 2004, noted that *T. dioicum* has male and female flowers on separate plants, hence *dioicum*, from *di* (two) and the Greek *eikos* (housed). I have seen but been unable to get a good photograph of the female flowers (illustrated in *The ROM Field Guide*, page 361). These have purple stigmas whereas male flowers have many dangling yellow



From top: Early meadowrue (*Thalictrum dioicum*)  
Tall meadowrue (*T. pubescens*)

stamens. The flowers, clustered in a panicle, have purple or green sepals. As they are wind pollinated and do not need to attract insects, they lack petals. They are about 2 mm across. This is a forest species, up to 70 cm tall, which blooms in April or May. It occurs throughout the southern half of Ontario. Its full range is Ontario, Quebec, and most of the eastern half of the US (US Department of Agriculture database).

*T. pubescens* is up to 3 m tall. Its flowers, with numerous tiny but conspicuous stamens up to 1.5 mm long, occur in large clusters. This is a moist meadow summer-blooming species. Its range is eastern North America.

These species call for the use of a good hand lens to examine their flowers. Photography can be a challenge, especially of female *T. dioicum* flowers that are not trembling, as they do in even the slightest breezes.

Article and photos  
by Peter Money

### LECTURE REPORT *continued*

In the past people didn't like bees, but marketing campaigns have raised awareness of the importance of bees. A third of human food crops and 90% of flowering plants depend on pollinators. Bees are just part of a healthy ecosystem, with spiders, wasps and other insects also playing key roles. When gardening, we need to think more about what plants will attract them. It's not necessarily the biggest or most colourful flowers that provide good food sources. One of Paul's favourite plants is parsley – a great food source for swallowtail butterfly larvae. Paul loves to see leaves with holes in them because this indicates they are being eaten.

Paul gave many other gardening suggestions including:

- Growing roses to attract leaf-cutter bees;
- Leaving dead trees, as they provide homes for insects and nutrients for plant life when they break down;

- Instead of dead-heading flowers, letting them go to seed to provide food for the birds;
- Retaining dead plants with hollow stems to provide nesting sites for native bees;
- Instead of raking fallen leaves, leaving them on the ground, as they provide food for the woolly bear caterpillar and other insects;
- Sharing plants and knowledge with other gardeners.

Paul's passion for plants made us reconsider how we define a beautiful garden and think seriously about our impact on the environment.

Laura Thompson

You can watch Paul's lecture at:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4bT\\_1ZSX\\_fY&feature=youtu.be&ab\\_channel=TorontoFieldNaturalists](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4bT_1ZSX_fY&feature=youtu.be&ab_channel=TorontoFieldNaturalists)

## TREE OF THE MONTH: PAPERBARK MAPLE (*ACER GRISEUM*)

One of the pleasures of a winter landscape is the way tree trunks are set off against the snow. Paperbark maple is one of the most attractive trees in this context, its variably cinnamon-coloured bark flaking, peeling and curling in paper-thin sheets and patches. The bark begins to crack and peel beginning in the second year of the twigs (including the tree's leader) and continues to do so for decades. As a result, even on the main trunk, you can find bare patches of the thinnest layer of bark imaginable next to others where the peeling layers are holding on in ragged, thicker aggregations. No native tree, not even white or yellow birch (*Betula papyrifera* or *B. alleghaniensis*) or black cherry (*Prunus serotina*), comes close to the peeling propensities of paperbark maple, though river birch (*B. nigra*), introduced from south of the border, approaches it.

Paperbark maple is native to eastern Asia and is the only member of its taxonomic group of 3-leafleted maples you are likely to find here. Despite often being described as the handsomest maple in cultivation, it is much less common here than two other unrelated Old World species, Norway maple (*A. platanoides*) and Amur maple (*A. tataricum*), both of which are invasive species in southern Ontario.

Paperbark maple does not seem to be at all invasive, although a few seedlings sometimes appear in garden beds in the vicinity of mature trees. It is somewhat notorious in the opposite direction, commercial growers citing the extremely low viability of the seeds even in years with bumper crops of its fruits. The tree is parthenocarpic, so fruits develop even when the seeds have not been fertilized. This is an unusual trait among flowering plants which typically sense and abort flowers with too few fertilized seeds to justify maturing an expensive fruit for them.

Whether the body of the fruit is filled with a seed or not, it is very plump and hard, like sugar maple (*A. saccharum*) and black maple (*A. nigrum*) in plumpness, but noticeably larger and densely hairy (unlike any of our other familiar maples). In fact, with these hairy fruit bodies, paperbark maple edges out native black maple as our fuzziest maple species, both otherwise sharing softly downy pedicels, peduncles, petioles and leaf undersides. These undersides, silvery grey with both hairs and a waxy (glaucous) coating on the surface, give the tree its scientific name (grey in Latin).

The leaves are the smallest among all our maples, though only a little smaller than those of field or hedge maple (*A. campestre*). The coarsely toothed leaflets are remarkably reminiscent of those of poison ivy (*Rhus radicans*) in shape, though tiny in comparison and without the varnished sheen of the latter. They turn a fine rich dark red in autumn, which is often somewhat irregularly expressed, with some parts of the crown firing up well before others, creating a patchwork of green, red and fallen leaves. The fruits hang on after the leaves are shed, the halves gradually splitting asunder and dropping but remaining conspicuous well into the winter, especially during a heavy fruiting (masting) year.

James Eckenwalder



Top: Fall foliage. Photo: James Eckenwalder  
 Left: Bark against the snow, Toronto Botanical Garden, Dec 2020  
 Right: Foliage and hairy twigs, petioles and fruits, TBG, Sept 2020  
 Photos: Ron Dengler

## WHAT IS A TREE?

Many of us have shelves full of field guides for species identification. For animals, these encompass natural groups of related species such as birds, mammals or butterflies. There is no field guide for “animals with tails” that includes squirrels, trout, newts, and blue jays.

But what about for plants? The most common plant field guides are for trees and wildflowers. But the booklet *Trees, Shrubs and Vines of Toronto* (TSVT, p6) states “...trees are not a distinct group of closely related organisms in the way that fishes, butterflies, spiders or mosses are. For example, apple trees are more closely related to strawberry plants than they are to oak trees.” A discussion of tree identification during a summer walk in High Park therefore led to the question “What is a tree?”

As described in TSVT, “All trees belong to the dominant group of plants known as vascular plants, which have specialized cells that carry water and dissolved mineral nutrients from their roots to their leaves, and carry products of photosynthesis (sugars) from the leaves to other parts of the plant.” Remember xylem and phloem from high school biology?

TSVT explains that, while all vascular plants grow from the tips of their branches and roots (called *primary growth*), the trees we encounter in Toronto's temperate climate also grow wider by “adding new *vascular tissue* by means of *secondary growth*.” This process forms wood and provides the plants that have secondary growth with both strong support for tall growth *and* a reliable means of raising quantities of water to great heights. (Read about how secondary growth comes about in TSVT, p.6).

As the trunk of a tree grows wider year by year, the older cells in the centre eventually clog up and no longer conduct water. However, the wood formed by this now-dead vascular tissue, called heartwood, still “contributes to the strength of a tree.” But a tree “can still live if its heartwood rots away, as long as the cells in the outer part of the trunk, collectively the sapwood, are still

functioning.” Mostly unnoticed year by year, the accumulation of wood is obvious over time and can usually be seen as individual tree rings when a tree is cut down.

And what about shrubs? Instead of a single trunk, shrubs “have multiple stems branching low to the ground that are

replaced over time, as one stem dies off and new ones sprout from the root. However some species may be shrubby under some conditions but grow with a single stem under others. Other species that are clearly trees may have multiple rather than single trunks. Thus, we use terms like multi-stemmed tree, shrubby tree or tree-like shrub. Trees are often separated from shrubs by minimum height. However, there is little agreement on what that height should be, and the height of a tree or shrub can vary depending on growing conditions.” (TSVT, p.8) Large shrubs are therefore often included in tree field guides.

Wildflower field guides, on the other hand, typically consist of annual and perennial herbaceous plants but may include many small shrubs. Unless you look closely, small shrubs appear no different from the other “wildflowers” in the field guide.

Secondary growth is found in conifers (such as the pine family) and many flowering plant families, some of which consist *only* of trees and shrubs (such as the beech family of which oak is a member). Other families have both woody and herbaceous species (like apple tree and strawberry in the rose family, or black locust tree and sweet clover in the pea family). Other families have no woody species.

The wood formed by secondary growth is sometimes called “true” wood. In warmer climates, there are also trees that do not have secondary growth or “true” wood. These

*If you examine the flowers of strawberry, apple and oak, you will notice the similarity of strawberry and apple (both in the rose family) and the difference of the oak flower (in the beech family). But flowers and other characteristics are relatively small and aren't visible year round.*



Photos: Wendy Rothwell, Jenny Bull, Baye Hunter

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## VOLUNTEER PROFILE: JENNIFER SMITH

Growing up outside the city, Jennifer lived in houses with large yards on quiet streets. “These environments allowed me to play outside a lot,” she says, “to explore the way kids do when they can just go off on their own.” She contrasts this with the reality of many kids growing up today in the city and in mid- to high-density residential areas. “I’ve become more concerned about the lack of places for kids to play just on their own.” Children need to experience free play: that unstructured, spontaneous play that they initiate based on their own curiosity and enthusiasm. “If a parent has to take you to a park, how often is that realistically going to happen throughout the day?”

Jennifer moved to Toronto after completing her bachelor’s degree and taught elementary school for 28 years. She shared her love of nature by taking her students on neighbourhood walks and to outdoor education centres, by including them in school garden tasks, and through various classroom activities. “I wanted my students to develop a love of and respect for nature and to feel the benefits of being outdoors.”

In the mid-2000s, Jennifer saw advertisements for group nature walks. The idea of joining a group of like-minded people to explore natural areas that she either didn’t know of or may not have gone to on her own appealed to her. Jennifer became a member of the TFN in 2007. “It’s just wonderful to see the wide variety of intelligent and well-



informed people in this organization. It’s phenomenal that so many policy makers, professors, botanists, engineers, and others join this group and then share their knowledge as walk leaders.”

Jennifer gradually became more involved with the organization as a volunteer. From 2016 to 2019, she was TFN’s Outreach Coordinator, organizing volunteers to represent the TFN at events throughout the City. She highlights events at the Toronto Botanical Garden as well as the TFN’s annual nature photography show, held every February. “I found it really interesting to talk with different people, to hear about their backgrounds and relationships with nature. Some people would be so excited about a particular animal or event. Others would bring their children to our display and discuss the photographs and natural items on our table.”

“It can be harder than one initially thinks to find a suitable volunteer position,” she says. “It can be hit and miss in terms of matching transferable skills and time commitment.” Jennifer points out that you may be surprised where your skills come in handy. “When I was the Outreach Coordinator, I was pleased to realize that many of the skills I had acquired while teaching were very useful in this position.” For the last few years, Jennifer has been volunteering as a proof-reader with the newsletter editing team. She finds this role is a great fit. “I love working with words” and, she adds, “the newsletter is one way I keep informed.”

Agneta Szabo

trees “are formed by a double process of *primary* growth in which the thickness of the stem is established by the young plant before it increases in height. The diameter of the trunk in these species is the same from base to tip.” (*TSVT*, p.7) Examples are palms (in the flowering plants group) and tree ferns.

In answer to “What is a Tree?” *TSVT* concludes that “It’s not easy to precisely define a tree.” But while we obviously don’t need a field guide for “animals with tails,” a field guide for plants with a thick rigid woody stem that tower above us – whatever family or larger group they are

part of – makes use of a very recognizable and useful field character that’s visible year round.

Jenny Bull

*Trees, Shrubs and Vines of Toronto*, part of the City of Toronto’s Biodiversity Series, is available free at Toronto Public Libraries or at: [www.toronto.ca/explore-enjoy/parks-gardens-beaches/ravines-natural-parklands/biodiversity-in-the-city/](http://www.toronto.ca/explore-enjoy/parks-gardens-beaches/ravines-natural-parklands/biodiversity-in-the-city/)

Further reading: *The Tree: a natural history of what trees are, how they live, and why they matter* by Colin Tudge

## JUNIOR NATURALISTS

Junior Naturalists usually have a winter event on the Toronto waterfront to celebrate the arrival of our migrant ducks (unfortunately not in 2020 due to COVID). One year we visited Humber Bay Park and in 2019 we took the ferry across to Ward's Island. On both occasions we had fun performing this skit, listening in on a dialogue between Ms. Buff and Mr. Goldeneye — two ducks hanging out on the shores of Lake Ontario till the ice goes out in the Arctic and they can return home to have a family for the first time. Try performing this skit with your family.

To learn even more cool stuff about Buff and Goldie, check out Bufflehead and Common Golden-eye at <https://www.allaboutbirds.org/>



Female Bufflehead



Male Common Golden-eye

Photos: Ken Sproule

### Buff and Goldie: A skit by Anne Purvis

Goldie the Goldeneye is wearing golden sunglasses and a white cheek patch. Ms. Buff the Bufflehead is wearing a white kerchief.

**Ms. Buff:** Hi Goldie. I'm Ms. Buff. It is so exciting to be back down here on Lake Ontario. This is my second winter, and I'm old enough to find a mate and have my own kids.

**Goldie:** That's me too. Do you want to see how I get the girls' attention? I stretch my neck back till my head almost touches my tail — like this! (demos this). What do you think? The Goldeneye girls seem to like it!

**Ms. Buff:** Well, the Bufflehead boys do a little head-bobbing dance too (demos this), but they have another cool move. The boys dive over us girls and then skid to a halt right in front of us. We get a good view of their white stomachs, but it's a little scary! It's actually a hard trick. We are diving ducks, like you guys. We have to run along the surface to get airborne, so what if they don't get the timing right? Ouch!!

- Goldie:** So what will happen when you get to the Boreal Forest with your mate?
- Ms. Buff:** We will search for a woodpecker hole — a Northern Flicker hole in a dead tree. We're a small duck, and these are perfect for us. I will lay 10 eggs or so and start sitting on them to keep them warm. There isn't much for my mate to do, so he will go off to a place where we moult — get rid of these worn out feathers and get a fresh set.
- Goldie:** We'll look for a hole in a tree too, but we need one way bigger than yours. We like the ones made by Pileated Woodpeckers.
- Goldie:** Do you remember what it was like leaving the tree when we were babies? We were just one day old. We loved being all together in the warm nest and jumping all over each other. Then all of sudden mother climbed up to the opening and jumped out! We heard her at the bottom of the tree calling to us and telling us to jump out too! We were forty feet up! I remember getting to the opening, and suddenly seeing unimaginable stuff — trees, sky, the lake for the first time. Everyone was squawking behind me, so I just had to get going. I stretched my wings, and what do you know, I sailed down like a parachute. What a feeling! I've loved flying ever since. When we were all down, mother shuffled us to the water — another new thing. And swimming was just like flying. We were made to do it, and we were good at it right away.
- Ms. Buff:** We weren't much trouble to mother. We all knew how to find our own food right from the get-go, too. All she had to do was protect us from water snakes, snapping turtles, big fish and foxes. Actually, wow, did she ever do a good job! How did we survive at all?
- Goldie:** And now it's our turn. Hey, good luck, Buff. You're a really cute Bufflehead and you'll be a great Mom.
- Ms. Buff:** And you're solid gold, Goldie. You'll be a great Dad!

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## UPCOMING JUNIOR NATURALISTS ACTIVITIES

Junior Naturalists are looking forward to resuming in-person events as soon as COVID permits. In the meantime, we'll continue to make monthly blogposts which feature photos, drawings, stories or anything else the Juniors submit from their own nature adventures. The blogposts also contain interesting resources that are out there to help us become better Naturalists! Watch for the Juniors' contributions to the Nature Images Show on February 6th. We are hoping to be able to offer another series of Zoom nature classes in April. Watch for the notice and be sure to sign up!

Anne Purvis

## EXTRACTS FROM OUTINGS LEADERS' REPORTS

### **Birds, Waterfront Trail, Oct 31. Leader: Zunaïd**

**Khan.** On a sunny morning with beautiful fall colours, we did a circular walk starting in Coronation Park, through Trillium Park and Ontario Place. We had great views of the lake and observed a wide variety of birds including a Bufflehead, Long-tailed Ducks, Red-breasted Mergansers, Canada Geese, Mallards, Mute Swans, Snow Buntings, Double-crested Cormorants, Ring-billed Gulls, Golden-crowned Kinglets, Dark-eyed Juncos and Chipping Sparrows. We also saw a mink.

### **Humber Bay Park East, Nov 3. Leader: David M**

**Creelman.** We made a circle of Humber Bay Park East noting bird species with some helpful comments on flora from participants. It was a crisp fall day filled with lovely autumn browns and yellows in the open woodland setting. November is not the 'birdiest' month, but we saw quite a few species including Red-breasted and Hooded Mergansers, Long-tailed Duck, Gadwall, Mallard, Canada Goose, Mute Swan and Bufflehead on the water. Land birds seen included Yellow-rumped Warbler, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Downy Woodpecker, American Tree Sparrow, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Song Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow and White-throated Sparrow.

### **Lynde Shores Conservation Area, Whitby, Nov 12.**

**Leader: Stephen Kamnitzer.** We observed 25 species of birds including Cedar Waxwing, American Robin, Ruby-crowned and Golden-crowned Kinglets, American Tree Sparrow, Fox Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Barred Owl, Northern Harrier, Black-capped Chickadee,

American Goldfinch, Mourning Dove, Northern Cardinal, Blue Jay, White-breasted Nuthatch, Red-winged Blackbird, raven, crow, Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers, Great Blue Heron, Northern Shoveler, and many Mallards and Canada Geese. We also saw a Wild Turkey and white-tailed deer. The botany highlights were nodding beggarticks and high-bush cranberry.

Sadly, TFN outings were interrupted at this point due to COVID-19 restrictions.



Barred Owl roosting in cedars at Lynde Shores  
Photo: Janet Patterson

Hey, smarty pants! Contribute your waypoints to our

### SELF-GUIDED WALKS PROJECT

Our members know a million things about a million different places in Toronto, and TFN would like to share those stories with the world! Know of a really old pine tree that's worth a visit? The perfect place to enjoy cup plants in bloom? An interesting piece of artwork along the shoreline? A great vista in the Rouge? The history of an old bridge? Don't be selfish, share! Your waypoints will be used to develop new and exciting self-guided walks for all Torontonians to enjoy for years to come.

Check out our first Self-Guided Walk: *Ecological Restoration in the Don* and learn how you can contribute your waypoints to the project.

Just visit the "Members Only" section of our website (see instructions on page 3).

## Great Backyard Bird Count February 12-15, 2021

A fun and useful activity you can do from your own home!

The GBBC is an annual four-day event that engages bird-watchers of all ages across North America in counting birds to create a real-time snapshot of where the birds are. Anyone can participate, from beginners to experts. You can count for as little as 15 minutes on a single day, or for as long as you like each day of the event.

It's free, fun and easy, and it helps the birds!

To register and obtain more information, visit their new website:  
<https://www.birdcount.org/>

## WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN NATURE EACH MONTH

Response to a good suggestion from the Newsletter Survey

If you'd like to know what plants and animals to look out for each month, the City's biodiversity booklets all have suggestions. Booklets are available free through Toronto Public Library, or can be accessed online at <https://www.toronto.ca/explore-enjoy/parks-gardens-beaches/ravines-natural-parklands/biodiversity-in-the-city/> Available so far are:

### PLANTS

A Chronology of the Toronto Tree Year: pages 56 – 57

### FUNGI

A Chronology of the Toronto Mushroom Year: page 64 – 65

### INVERTEBRATES

A Chronology of the Toronto Butterfly Year: pages 42 - 43

A Chronology of the Toronto Bee Year: page 48 - 50

A Chronology of the Toronto Spider Year: pages 36 - 37

### VERTEBRATES

A Chronology of Toronto's Mammals: pages 46 - 47 (in Part 2)

A Chronology of the Toronto Reptile and Amphibian Year: pages 54 - 55

Birding by Month: pages 54 - 57

Spawning Calendar: page 42 (Fishes, Part 2)

## FOR READING *continued from page 4*

(aspen and cottonwood) cut by beaver grow back from the stump. Most “elimination” of poplar has been by cormorants, and black locust stands result from black locust seeds brought in with fill and then spread from existing stands, both by seed and vegetatively. The same paragraph incorrectly labels our red cedar as non-native. He states (p.117) “with the growth of the poplar trees, an enormous increase in the black cormorant population has appeared.” The trees did not cause the increase, as implied. Cormorant populations increased due to the expansion of fish farming in the Mississippi Valley and reduced DDT concentrations in fish. Some of these cormorants found the Spit an attractive place to nest because of its relative isolation and proximity to massive alewife populations.

Most egregiously, he states “the traditional dichotomy between native and non-native species has little meaning. In building our cities, people have wiped out most of the native vegetation...” This perspective legitimizes the ongoing wholesale importation of non-native species by the horticultural trade that continues to devastate native

ecosystems. In fact, while nature in the city is much fragmented, and invaded by non-native species, it still exists in ravines, on parts of the Toronto Islands and in pockets of the Scarborough Bluffs. Native species do a much better job than non-native species in supporting insect populations that coevolved with them, and therefore in supporting the birds that depend on those proteinaceous insect populations to raise their young. (Ref: D.Tallamy, *Nature's Best Hope*, 2020 (see page 5 of this newsletter) or *Bringing Nature Home*, 2009)

It is unfortunate that the bird species list is simply a reproduction of the 2014 checklist with a note at the end concerning the ten new species that have been found since. Also, taxonomy changes have considerably altered the order of families and some species since 2014 (ref *Birds of Toronto*, 2019, p.48). For both the bird and plant checklists, I would prefer higher clades such as order to be added where not redundant so as to show relationships among families.

Bob Kortright.

## WEATHER (THIS TIME LAST YEAR)

### February 2020

The general “positive Arctic Oscillation” (see January’s description of this mild-winter phenomenon in the December newsletter) continued through February, and indeed reached record intensity at times. In Toronto the month was mild but not dramatically so. Cold air intrusions did occur. The mean temperature was  $-3.1^{\circ}$  at Pearson Airport and  $-1.9^{\circ}$  downtown. This is about  $1^{\circ}$  above the 30-year average which now runs from 1991-2020. Meteorological winter, defined as December to February, was the 10th warmest on record downtown (the record goes back to 1840-41) and the 6th warmest on record at Pearson. However, many of the winters warmer than this one were very recent: 2001-2002, 2011-2012, and 2015-2016. Persistence was the hallmark of 2019-2020.

We did get one true Arctic blast and managed to dip into the -20s on Valentine’s Day, at least away from the city centre. Pearson Airport had a low of  $-20.6^{\circ}$ , while

Markham Buttonville Airport and the North York Environment Canada office both reached  $-22.0^{\circ}$ . Downtown dropped to  $-19.1^{\circ}$  (this is still below the old zero Fahrenheit).

February was very snowy. Pearson Airport had a total of 53.4 cm, which is almost twice the 30-year average of 27.8 cm. It was the snowiest February since 2013. Rainfall was well below normal (1.0 mm). This made for a strange month with mild temperatures but a huge preponderance of snow over rain. There was a measurable snow pack most of the month. Total precipitation was near normal with 52.0 mm at Pearson Airport and 62.0 mm downtown.

The sun finally put in a bit more of an appearance, the 6-day period February 19th-24th being almost completely sunny.

Gavin Miller

## ABOUT TFN

TFN is a charitable, non-profit organization.

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### NEWSLETTER

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Members are encouraged to contribute letters, short articles and digital images. Please email to: [newsletter@torontofieldnaturalists.org](mailto:newsletter@torontofieldnaturalists.org)

**Submissions deadline for Mar. issue: Feb 1**

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See email addresses for specific queries at: <https://torontofieldnaturalists.org/about-tfn/contact-us/>

Address: 2 – 2449 Yonge St, Toronto M4P 2E7. The office is normally open 9:30 am to noon on Fridays.

**Note:** If you wish to drop by on Friday, please phone first to ensure that someone will be there.

## KEEPING IN TOUCH

Lynn Pady shared this experience at the end of a delightful day driving in the country on December 29.

The sun was setting when I got home, so I watched off the balcony and, sure enough, the Christmas Star was visible again as it had been for perhaps 15 minutes the night before. We hadn't been able to see it since the 18th – the last 'clear sky' night – Jupiter and Saturn in conjunction for the first time in 800 years. I am awestruck every time I see it far far to the southwest and never for very long. Each sighting is a gift. My little camera can't handle this sort of image but here they are – Jupiter the brightest and Saturn below in last night's photo, and the picture from the 18th shows them in reverse with the paler star above. Things are ever-changing in the night sky – when we can actually see them. The Full 'Cold' Moon is up now – lovely in the cold sky last night, true to its name.



I was walking in James Gardens in Etobicoke on January 3rd. There is a section where birds are attracted by seeds, provided I presume by park users. I was able to take a photograph of this Downy Woodpecker. At first I thought the white area in the bark of the tree was a collection of snow caught in a groove on this very snowy day. However, when I look at my picture, I believe that a park user has inserted suet into the groove of the tree. The unique placement of the suet also allowed me to take this well-aligned photo with my camera that has a limited zoom!

Myrna Markovich

### Good news!

TFN members have been eagerly following efforts to protect a historic red oak in North York, presumed to be over 250 years old. Happily, thanks to Edith George's untiring efforts over 14 years and those of many citizens involved in the campaign, including TFN members, success has been achieved. Toronto City Council voted on November 26 to purchase the property on condition that the public continue to fundraise to reimburse the City for a shortfall in the targeted amount. The plan is to knock down the adjoining house and convert the property into a parkette. There is still an opportunity for you to contribute to this cause.

For a detailed account, see <https://www.canadiangeographic.ca/article/toronto-city-council-votes-save-historic-red-oak>

### High Park Christmas Bird Count Results

The annual High Park Christmas Bird Count (CBC), held on December 20, 2020, resulted in one of their more exceptional counts ever. The 51 species spotted included some great finds such as Orange-crowned Warblers, Common Loon and "best bird of the CBC", a Slaty-backed Gull.

For more details, see Bob Yukich's report at <https://highparknature.org/high-park-nature/high-park-christmas-bird-count-2020-results/>

**Toronto Field Naturalists**  
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Toronto, Ontario, M4P 2E7

**Publications Mail**  
Registration No. 40049590

## TFN LECTURE

Sunday, February 7 at 2:30 pm

See page 3 for information about lectures via Zoom

Nature's Pitfall Trap: Salamanders as rich prey  
for carnivorous plants in a nutrient-poor bog ecosystem

*Patrick Moldowan, a PhD Candidate at the University of Toronto and board member for the Algonquin Wildlife Research Station and Canadian Herpetological Society, will share findings of research into the relationship between pitcher plants and salamanders.*



### Upcoming lectures:

- Mar 7: Plastic Waste used by Nest-building Cormorants at Leslie Street Spit, Melina Damian, professor, Centennial College and communications coordinator, Ontario Nature
- Apr 11: Making Nature and the Outdoors More Welcoming for Black People and Recent Immigrants, Jacqueline Scott and Ambika Tenneti, University of Toronto PhD students
- May 2: Toronto's Water, Energy and Waste Systems: Where does it all come from? Where does it all go? Mariko Uda, PhD