



TORONTO FIELD NATURALIST

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American Tree Sparrow, 2023. Photo: Marianne Cruttwell

REGULARS

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PRESIDENT'S REPORT

AGM Recap: Our 2023 AGM was held on November 5th. Thank you to all who attended. As a result of a sufficient number of members attending for quorum, we were able to approve the minutes from the two previous AGMs, the 2023 Financial Statements, the appointment of our Financial Reviewer and the Board of Directors for 2023/2024. The updated list of board members is available on our website at <https://tfngo.to/board>. Our annual year in review video, kindly put together by Jason Ramsay-Brown, will be posted to our public and *Members Only* websites.

Donations: We are very appreciative of all the donations we receive that help us to help nature through education, stewardship and advocacy. When we launched our new *Members Only* website earlier this year, we made a change to the process of how we handle renewals and new sign-ups. Previously you were able to make a donation as part of the payment process for membership fees. However, with the new process this is no longer the case. The primary reason for this change was to streamline how we manage donations. By separating donations from the online sign-up process and exclusively using CanadaHelps for online donations, we are able to reduce our finance volunteers' workload and simplify the process of issuing tax receipts.

So, if you wish to help us to help nature by making a donation, you can do so by visiting: <https://tfngo.to/donate>. By visiting this page you can donate to our General Use fund or our Mailed Newsletter fund. Donations sent in by mail will still be accepted and tax receipts for these will be processed separately. However, online donations are encouraged, as they are easier for our finance team to manage.

Winter walks: One of the many things I love about TFN is that, thanks to the work of our Outings Committee and our wonderful walk leaders who volunteer their time and share their knowledge about nature, we are able to offer outings to members all year round. I thought I would share some

handy resources and tips to make your time on the trails in winter as safe and enjoyable as possible.

How to find open washrooms in our parks: The City of Toronto is making more washrooms accessible in the winter and deploying more portable toilets. You can find more information here: <https://tfngo.to/parkwashrooms>.

Snow clearing and winter trail maintenance: The City of Toronto will provide winter maintenance on selected pathways across the city, enabling residents to enjoy longer

walks during the winter months. The trails are salted and plowed (13.2 km) to make the pavement bare. Plowing is done after receiving 5 cm of snow, and begins 6 to 8 hours after the snowfall has ended. However, the City is not able to maintain all pathways in all parks during the winter due to various factors including the type of surface material and if the pathway is located in an Environmentally Sensitive Area.

Some trails that City workers maintain are:

- Martin Goodman Trail between Windermere Ave and Stadium Rd and off Lake Shore

Bldv from Northern Dancer Blvd to Lower Sherbourne St.

- Humber Bay Shore Trail
- Finch Recreational Trail from Willowdale Ave to where it crosses the Don River: The City has been doing a test project here, laying down a black gravel substance that improves traction on the trail after a snowfall.
- For a list of Winter Walks presented by the City please visit their website: <https://tfngo.to/welcometowinter>

Traction devices such as microspikes or crampons and hiking poles can be handy items for winter walks. You can find these at outdoor equipment retailers and stores selling sporting goods such as [Mountain Equipment Co](#), [Sporting Life](#), [Sportschek](#) or [Canadian Tire](#).

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Winter walk at Wilket Creek, 2016.

Photo: Charles Bruce-Thompson

TFN BOARD APPOINTMENTS

At our recent Annual General Meeting, TFN was happy to welcome two new members to our Board of Directors.



Lam Tran: As an educator and tree enthusiast, Lam is energized by sharing her passion about nature with those around her and supporting others, especially underrepresented communities, through their learning journey. A Master of Forest Conservation alumna and International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) Certified Arborist, Lam has been active in the field of urban forestry since 2016 through a combination of volunteer and working roles with organizations like LEAF and Forests Ontario. As the Education Coordinator at LEAF from 2019 to 2023, she coordinated programs that included, but were not limited to, tree tours and presentations, youth mentorship and training programs for underrepresented communities and the Tree Tenders Training program, and co-led the TCHC Planting and Stewardship Initiative.

Having engaged thousands of residents across the Greater Toronto Area, Lam continues to leverage her knowledge and skills, as a Parks Program Officer at the City of Toronto, to strengthen and implement programs that educate and train community members to protect and enhance the natural environment.

Lynn Short: Lynn has loved the outdoors since, at a very young age, she got into trouble for going out to play in the backyard before her parents were awake. She has always had plants and animals as ‘pets’. Her love of Science and Mathematics attracted her to studies in Laboratory Technology, starting her career in Microbiology at Mount Sinai Hospital. She furthered her studies, obtaining a B.Sc. (Hon) in Biology and Chemistry at the University of Waterloo.

After having three children, she realized the importance of outdoor education for children, so returned to earn a B.Ed. at the University of Toronto and taught for several years. She had a unique assignment as the Environmental Educator, taking students from Kindergarten to Grade 5 outdoors for Nature Adventures in the adjacent Humber Arboretum. She joined Humber College in 2005 as a Nature Educator and soon became a College Professor in Horticulture.



Her connection to the Land and her passion for the outdoors recently led her to become involved in Early Childhood Education at Humber, co-leading a project to develop a Two-Eyed Land Based Play and Co-learning course co-taught by Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Professors. The graduates of this program will develop respectful and reciprocal relationships with the Land that they can share with young children. Lynn has also worked in the Humber Arboretum as the Environmental Stewardship Specialist, coordinating manual control of several species of invasive plants within the property and conducting research.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT *continued*

Volunteer opportunities: We are looking for volunteers for our Outings, Lectures and Outreach Committees and Digital Team. If you are interested in learning more about these opportunities, please visit the Volunteer page on the *Members Only* website or send an email to volunteering@torontofieldnaturalists.org.

I look forward to meeting more members at our upcoming events and/or on our Centennial Walks. Let's get outside, enjoy nature, and remember to speak up for nature when the opportunity arises so that we can preserve its beauty for all to enjoy.

Zunaid Khan

LECTURE REPORT

Nature's Cleanup Crew: Opossums in Canada

November 5, 2023

Dr. Suzanne E. MacDonald, Professor, Department of Psychology, York University, appointed to the Graduate Programs in both Psychology and Biology

Opossums don't 'play' dead; they actually go completely unconscious in response to perceived threat, sometimes for a long time. They are not vicious or aggressive towards humans or most other animals, despite having 50 teeth and fearsome looking fangs. In fact they are very shy. They are immune to snake bites. And no, we do not have possums, and our residents are not named after Australian possums. We have opossums, and the Australian inhabitants are actually named after ours (properly known as *Didelphis virginiana*).

Dr. MacDonald shared these and many other interesting facts about our only North American marsupial, which is moving north with climate change. At present the majority of opossums in Canada are found in southern Ontario, with a concentration in the GTA, but there have also been sightings around Montreal. As well, opossums are now found in southern BC and there is even a population on Hornby Island (the latter population introduced by humans). Wildlife cameras installed by Dr. MacDonald as part of her field studies are likely to yield evidence of their further dispersion in Canada in the coming years.

Opossums are evolutionarily ancient creatures with some very unusual physiological characteristics. Males have bifurcated penises, and the females have bifurcated uteri and lateral vaginal canals. The females give birth after 12 days of gestation and can have up to 20 joeys, as they are called, but only 13 will survive as the mother has only 13 nipples. The joeys can increase their weight tenfold in a week. Once the joeys are too large for the pouch they travel around on the mother's back until they are ready for independence, weaning at around five months of age. Two to three litters can be produced in a year. The mothers make a clicking vocalization if separated from the joeys, and the joeys respond with a 'sneeze' sound. Vocalizations are also made during mating.



Opossums have prehensile tails and opposable 'thumbs' on their feet. Dr. MacDonald shared photos and video of her resident opossum, Virginia, including a photo of her with her tail wrapped firmly around a bundle of leaves, taking them to her den site (under Dr. MacDonald's front steps, a space shared with the resident skunk). Opossums don't make their own dens, but rather inhabit spaces made by other animals. While there is no current evidence that they live up to the social media hype of eating up to 5000 ticks in a season, they do eat a lot of different things including ticks. They are opportunistic scavengers but are generally not predators. When 'dead' they emit a distinctive odour of death that deters other animals. Unlike rats and raccoons, they are not destructive to property, they don't get rabies, and there are no known public health issues. They do not hibernate, and if they gain enough fat they can make it through our winters, although they cannot survive extended

cold and snow. They can develop frostbite on their ears and hairless toes, and can die from this.

In conjunction with Parth Shah, a design student from OCAD, Dr. MacDonald has been trialing winter shelters made from plastic storage containers. From the observations so far, opossums appear to prefer larger shelters with movable

substrate (leaves or straw) positioned where the back is against something so they feel safe.

Dr. MacDonald closed her talk with a discussion of opossums' public image, and how it can be improved. She emphasized that, although they are invasive, there is no present evidence that they do any harm and they should not be seen as pests. As 'newcomers' to our country, they appear to coexist well with other aspects of our natural environment. Citing a TFN Newsletter article by Theresa Moore (Give Opossums a Chance, February 2022) and a poem by Lynn Simmons (*Opossum by Moonlight*) published in our November 2023 newsletter, as well as recent starring roles as a mascot in social media, Dr. MacDonald urged us to spread the word that opossums are here to stay and that we should welcome them as new neighbours in our nature community.

Michele Macartney-Filgate

This lecture can be viewed on the *Members Only* website: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4ST6g4RWI18>.

TFN OUTINGS INFORMATION

A list of walks available to members is posted at the beginning of each month on the walks page of our *Members Only* website (<https://tfngo.to/memberswalks>) and can be downloaded or printed. You are welcome to bring one non-member guest. Listed below are two December outings you might like to consider.

Woodbine Park in Winter

Leader: Joanne Doucette

Saturday, December 9, 11:00 am

Meeting Point: Southeast corner of Coxwell Ave and Eastern Ave.

Walk Details: A 90-minute, 6 km circular walk over mostly unpaved but even surfaces with a few gentle slopes.

Walk Description: We will be watching for the ways that urban plants and animals adapt to winter, identifying species as we go, and generally enjoying a slow walk through a great park. Afterwards, there is a fast food restaurant nearby with some healthy options where we can warm up and have a coffee.

TTC: Bus #22 southbound from Coxwell subway station, or any of the streetcars running along Queen St. (Free parking is limited.)

Washrooms: Available at the start.

What to bring: Binoculars, a guide book if desired.



Gray squirrel caching a nut. Photo: Wendy Rothwell

Thomson Memorial Park Pioneer Walk

Leader: Linda McCaffrey

Thursday, December 14, 10:00 am

Meeting Point: Thomson Memorial Park main parking lot, 1005 Brimley Rd.

Walk Details: a 2-hour, 3 km circular walk over mostly paved, flat surfaces with a few gentle slopes.

Walk Description: The west branch of Highland Creek wends its way through Thomson Memorial Park. Mary and David Thomson were the first pioneers to settle in Scarborough. We will wander through the park, crossing Highland Creek several times, then exit to St. Andrews Presbyterian Church and Cemetery. The Thomsons gifted the land for the church and cemetery. Their memorial stones have been preserved. This tiny cemetery memorializes many Thomsons and McCowans and early Scottish settlers. At the end of the walk people can explore the tiny pioneer village. Cornell House, the McCowan cabin and the carriage works will be open. There is a memorial plaque to Rachel, mother of 37 children. Admission is free.

TTC: take the #21C bus from Kennedy subway station.

Washrooms: Available at the end.

What to bring: Binoculars. Warm clothing and sensible footwear both recommended.



Thomson Memorial Park Cabin, 1998.

Drawing: Mary Cumming

THEN AND NOW – MOORE PARK RAVINE WALK

Moore Park ravine is a scenic ravine trail located near Mount Pleasant Rd and Moore Ave. In preparing for the Then & Now photo exhibition our volunteers were not able to duplicate this photo, but we hope to do so during the winter.

So I have selected this location to be the subject of my third special president's walk.

I look forward to seeing you on this walk.

Zunaid Khan

Moore Park Ravine Then & Now 100th Anniversary – Nature and Heritage

Tuesday, December 12th at 1 pm

Walk Leader: Zunaid Khan

Meeting point: 205 Moore Ave

Walk Description: A 2 hour circular walk along mostly even and unpaved surfaces with gentle slopes.

Walk Details: We will walk into the ravine, then follow the trail towards the Brick Works exploring all that nature has to offer along the way. When we get to the Brick Works, there are multiple routes available should people not wish to return to the starting point.



Photo: Moore Park Ravine, 1957, by Mel Whiteside

TTC: From St Clair subway station, take either the #74A Mount Pleasant bus to Mount Pleasant Rd and Moore Ave. (walk five minutes east to meeting point) or the #88 South Leaside bus to Moore Avenue and Brendan Rd (walk two minutes west to meeting point).

Washrooms: At the Brick Works.

What to bring: Water, snacks, binoculars and/or camera. Bring traction devices such as microspikes or crampons just in case. Dress for the weather.

Walk Leader's Cell Number: 416-716-6464

IN THE NEWS: ENGLISH BIRD NAMES INITIATIVE

Since 1886, the American Ornithological Society (AOS) and its predecessor have maintained a list of official English-language names for birds in North America. These names are widely used by the English-speaking public worldwide and are updated as scientists discover new information about the ecology and evolution of the birds.

Recently it has been recognized that exclusionary naming conventions developed in the 1800s are sometimes clouded by racism and misogyny, and there has been a desire to transform the process and redirect the focus to the birds themselves. After several years of conversation about this issue, on November 1, 2023 the AOS committed to changing all English-language names of birds within its geographic jurisdiction that are named directly after people, along with

other names deemed offensive and exclusionary, focusing first on the 70 to 80 species that occur primarily within the U.S. or Canada.



Cooper's Hawk at Leslie Street Spit, 2010. Photo: Ken Sproule

This work will be undertaken by a new committee including a diverse representation of individuals with expertise in the social sciences, communications, ornithology and taxonomy, and the public will be actively involved in the process of selecting new English bird names. The intention is to address past wrongs and to engage more people in the study, protection, conservation and enjoyment of birds. Scientific names will not be changed as part of this initiative.

For more detailed information, see <https://tfngo.to/aosenglishbirdnames>

Wendy Rothwell

TORONTO'S 2023 RAVINE SYMPOSIUM – IN CASE YOU MISSED IT

In the big hall at the Toronto Botanical Garden (TBG), pent-up energy was palpable. Handsome arrangements of native fall perennials and grasses graced the round tables. The place was packed, with perhaps as many as 150 attendees, all happy to be at the 2023 Ravine Symposium in early November. Thanks to TBG organizers, Toronto's ravine researchers, restorers and friends could once again gather, after several years of pandemic-enforced hiatus. Ravine care has clearly become a mainstream concern for Toronto's green community, as shown by the numerous young faces and visible diversity of the crowd.

Setting the day's tone, the first key-note speaker, Carolynne Crawley, invited all to reflect with gratitude on the gifts of nature. Carolynne, who is Mi'kmaw, Black and Irish and has called Toronto home for 50 years, is on a mission to reconnect people with each other, and with the land and waters. She led the entire audience out into TBG's leafy courtyard on a multi-sensory exercise to see, hear and breathe in the energy of a breezy autumn day.

Jacqueline Scott, a researcher on the links between race and nature, spoke next. She highlighted the ongoing inequity in accessing Toronto's urban nature. Poorer neighbourhoods with higher proportions of racialized groups have less access to parks and greenspaces. Those neighbourhoods also get less public funding for maintenance and restoration of local greenspaces. She also stressed that many ravine access points lack welcoming signs or wayfinding maps, in effect keeping ravine trails a secret for those in the know. TFN members will remember Jacqueline Scott as our recent guest speaker; for a refresher on her talk, see page 4 of TFN's May 2021 newsletter: <https://tfngo.to/may2021newsletter>.

Technical gremlins attended the conference too, forcing multiple speakers to perform with garbled visuals, but a cheerful attitude prevailed. Carolynne Crawley, for example, deserved a "grace under pressure" award for serenely engaging her audience, despite being deprived of her slide deck.

A special pleasure for TFN attendees was seeing our flagship Cottonwood Flats restoration work showcased, thanks to co-presenters Lynn Miller (long-time TFN board member and lead steward), together with Emily Heidendahl, Coordinator of the Community Stewardship Program for the City of Toronto. In a short, effective talk during the lunch session, Lynn and Emily revealed the "special sauce" ingredients of the partnership between the City and TFN: well-designed citizen science protocols, good reporting, a large and enthusiastic community of volunteers and most importantly, a shared trust built on good, open communication among the leadership team.



Taylor Creek planting 2016. TFN photo library

As always, the ravine symposium offered food for thought and spurred new lines of questions. Two examples can illustrate:

- Wendy Strickland, Project Manager for the City's Ravine Strategy, told attendees that Toronto has doubled investment in ravines (presumably compared to a pre-strategy baseline funding number), and that approximately 1,300 hectares of ravine land have been restored so far. What was missing, however, was context on the scale of the restoration

challenge; the public needs to know what *percentage* of Toronto's degraded ravine lands are actively cared for by City or TRCA staff, or by volunteer stewardship projects. Also, one can't help wondering how the City defines "restored" ravine lands. Those who have volunteered at a garlic mustard pull, or have helped hack away Japanese knotweed know only too well that invasive plant species tend to come back. Long-term vigilance is key.

- Danijela Puric-Mladenovic, a researcher at the University of Toronto, leads a team carrying out long-term monitoring of ravine sites. In her talk, Danijela estimated that over 100 groups are helping to manage ravine landscapes in the Toronto area, with inevitable overlaps and competition for resources. In her view, overall coordination is needed. What would that coordination look like? How would priorities be set?

A stated overall goal of the 2023 Ravine Symposium was "to start a conversation." By all means, let's talk!

Ellen Schwartzel

TFN Past President and lead of TFN's Advocacy team

REMEMBERING MELANIE MILANICH

We were saddened to hear that long-time TFN member Melanie Milanich passed away on October 16th, 2023 at the age of 77.

Melanie cared deeply about environmental issues and was an active member of TFN's Environmental Group from its inception in 1978. During the early 1980s, she wrote detailed reports for the Newsletter about their meetings featuring speakers on such subjects as the management of Toronto's forest stands, identifying high-quality natural areas for preservation, recycling, and Toronto area watershed management. She served on the TFN Board from 1988 until 1991 and was involved in Promoting TFN.

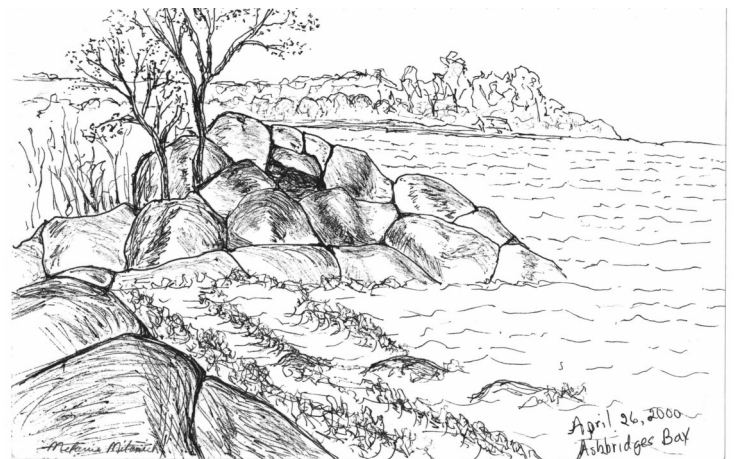
Melanie also served on the Outings Committee. She led Nature Arts outings and frequently led walks in Taylor Creek Park with a particular focus on wildflowers. This excerpt from her report of an August outing shows what a pleasure it must have been for those who participated in her walks: *"... because the group was not large and all promised to step tenderly, we headed a short distance toward the fen where we enjoyed the sight of the delicate hooded ladies' tresses ... along the hydro path we saw the woodland sunflowers that had just come out two days before and the fields of wild bergamot still in full flower. The area was lush with native rushes, sedges, boneset, Joe-pye-weed and narrow-leaved goldenrod ..."*

Being employed as a librarian in one of Metro Toronto's Public Libraries, it is not surprising that she liked to read about all aspects of natural science. She donated many books to TFN's library and, in more recent years, wrote book reviews for the newsletter.

Joanne Doucette has shared these personal memories:

"Melanie was a good friend. My best memories of her revolve around our many walks in Taylor Creek Park and the scrambles up and down the steep ravine slopes and along the abandoned rail line looking for plants. We shared a passionate love of art and colour, and her capacity to be awestruck by autumn colours and the vivid greens of new growth in spring will stay with me as long as I live. After she became disabled with arthritis, she called me, often daily, and sent me wonderful letters in envelopes stuffed with pictures clipped from magazines (nature, Indigenous studies, the Maritimes). We would laugh over tea and sorrow over the ecocide devastating the Earth.

Goodbye, dear friend and fellow traveller where the wild things are."



Ashbridge's Bay. Drawing: Melanie Milanich

UPCOMING JUNIOR NATURALISTS' EVENTS

Please join us for the TFN Juniors program with children/grandchildren aged 6-14 yrs. We meet one Saturday each month from 10 am to 12 noon. An adult must remain with their children for the duration of the program. Once registered, you will receive invitations to our monthly events with detailed instructions on the location and activities. Register here: juniortfn@torontofieldnaturalists.org

Events for Winter 2024 include:

- | | |
|-------------|--|
| January 6 | Come and welcome our Arctic-nesting ducks at Colonel Sam Smith Park – and maybe try some skating afterwards! |
| February 10 | Learn Winter Survival skills from an expert at Earl Bales Park |
| March 16 | Identify evergreens and investigate last year's nests in the East Don Parklands |

The Decomposers and the Pioneers: Turkey Tail Bracket Fungus and Brachythecium Moss

In November, colours are muted in Toronto's parks and ravines but there are still lots of cool shapes, intricate seedpods and branching patterns of trees to observe. As naturalists, however, we start to talk like gardeners. We say things have 'died back'. In fact, the cool wet weather of November is a time when many of the Decomposers (the fungi) come into their own. This log is covered with turkey tail fungus. Each fruiting body feels like velvet to the touch and is striped like a turkey's tail.

The log looks fairly big and heavy, but when you lift it, it is remarkably light. The fruiting bodies are part of a very large organism that is, in fact, eating the log. The log is like a bowl of cereal that is gradually being slurped down or, as we say, metabolized. The log is being emptied of nutrients and getting lighter in weight.

When we slice a small piece of wood off the log we see an unnaturally white layer under the surface of the wood. This is the hidden part of the fungus — the hyphae. The hyphae are made of the stiff material called chitin that insect and crustacean exoskeletons are made of. They are a network of rigid tubes that are pushing into the wood. They cannot stretch to absorb large molecules.

To solve this dilemma, they excrete enzymes that break down large molecules into smaller ones. They can then absorb these. Our bodies do this too, but the enzymes that break down our food are inside our body, in our mouth and stomach. And remarkably, a brachythecium moss is taking advantage of this now nutrient-rich environment to get established on the log. If the fungi are Decomposers, the mosses are Pioneers.

When we flip over one of the fruiting bodies, we can see the underside is covered with tiny tubes. The inner lining of each tube is covered with microscopic clubs, each



Wild turkey from which the fungus gets its name. Photo: Paul Tessler (Adobe Stock)



From top: Turkey tail fungus on dead wood;
brachythecium moss growing on log;
underside of fruiting body.

Photos: Anne Purvis

bearing four spores. Each spore carries one set of genes and will sprout into a new mass of hyphae when it arrives on another piece of wood. It could be carried by wind or eaten by an animal, or a tree branch might crash and bring lots of new dead wood into the vicinity.

Despite the advancing season, the Decomposers and the Pioneers are still making the most of the remaining moist and sunny days in our forests.

Anne Purvis

TREE OF THE MONTH: ALASKA YELLOW-CEDAR (*CUPRESSUS NOOTKATENSIS*)

Naturalists, gardeners, and other non-specialists often deplore changes in scientific names of plants that follow taxonomic research. While the boundaries and names of conifer genera used by different authors sometimes vary, no conifer has been assigned to more genera over the course of the last fifteen years than has Alaska yellow-cedar.

Of the six generic names that have been used for it, *Cupressus*, *Callitropsis*, *Xanthocyparis*, *Hesperocyparis*, *Neocupressus*, and *Chamaecyparis*, only the last two are always wrong. *Neocupressus* has the same type species as *Hesperocyparis* and the two names were in press at the same time in 2009 but *Hesperocyparis* was published earlier and thus makes *Neocupressus* what is referred to as nomenclaturally superfluous and unusable.

Chamaecyparis is more interesting, perhaps, because this is the genus with which Alaska yellow-cedar has long been affiliated and which you are most likely to find being used for it in the nursery trade, in botanical gardens, and in most tree books, both horticultural and botanical. The usage is understandable because Alaska yellow-cedars seem to share small globular seed cones and frond-like foliage sprays with the five other species assigned to *Chamaecyparis*, like Port-Orford, hinoki, and sawara cedars. Unfortunately, the resemblance is misleading and Alaska yellow-cedar is simply not related to these other species, though they all belong to the same family, the cypress and redwood family, Cupressaceae.

As a conifer taxonomist, I would love to go into detail about usage of the other four names, but I won't and will simply point out that each of them can be correct for Alaska yellow-cedar, depending on what other cypress species are included with it in the same genus. Here, I have chosen to use a broad concept of the cypress genus *Cupressus* that includes both old and new world species, including Alaska yellow-cedar, as I did in *Conifers of the World* and *A Field Guide to Trees of Ontario*.

Native to far western North America, from southern Alaska to northernmost California, usually within 200 km of the Pacific coast, Alaska yellow-cedar is the only tree from that temperate rainforest region that is thoroughly hardy here. It is reasonably common in our cultivated landscapes, appreciated as a densely foliaged, satisfyingly symmetrical, weeping spire, our only conifer with quite this appearance. Compared to other cedars grown here, including true *Chamaecyparis* species and arborvitae like our native northern white-cedar (*Thuja occidentalis*), the foliage sprays are conspicuously longer and much more

flexible, explaining their droopy posture. Our specimens are often grown under cultivar names, like 'Pendula', but they aren't really much different from many wild-grown trees.

To me, the feel and texture of the foliage is much more like lizard or snake skin than in any of the other cupressaceous cedars. This is partly because alternating pairs of leaves are more similar in size and shape than they are in other cedars. Thus, even though the foliage sprays are flattened into a plane, the individual fine branchlets that make them up are nearly cylindrical, rather than at least partially flattened top to bottom as they are in other cedars.

Foliage often extends all the way to the ground in the relatively young trees growing here, but where you can see the bark, weathering dark grey with age, it is obviously of the reddish brown, strippy, fibrous type typical of most Cupressaceae. As in many other members of the family, the

wood inside the bark is decay-resistant and pleasantly and persistently fragrant, which is why the common name cedar was applied to these trees, despite their being unrelated to the original holder of the name, the cedar of Lebanon (*Cedrus libani*), a member of the pine family (Pinaceae). Unlike most other cypress family members, the heartwood of Alaska yellow-cedar has a yellowish cast, rather than reddish, pink, or brown, explaining its common name.



Above: Dense, symmetrical, weeping growth habit.

Below: Flexible, droopy foliage sprays.

Photos: Ken Sproule



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EXTRACTS FROM OUTINGS REPORTS

Leslie Street Spit – Photography, Oct 5. Leader: Zunaid Khan. We enjoyed great views of the lake and the city skyline, along with fall colours. Bird sightings included: Great Egret, Great Blue Heron, Belted Kingfisher, Common Tern, Killdeer, Mallards, Wood Ducks, Song Sparrow, Trumpeter Swan, Yellow-rumped and Black-throated Blue Warblers, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Northern Pintail, Hooded Mergansers, American Goldfinches and Northern Mockingbird. We also saw monarch and viceroy butterflies, American mink and turtles.



Great Egret at Leslie Street Spit.
Photo: Bill Cruttwell



American Mink at Leslie Street Spit.
Photo: Susan Blayney

Chorley Park Switchback, Oct 7. Leaders: Elizabeth Reid and Alexander Cappell. A plaque in North Rosedale's Chorley Park commemorates the magnificent mansion which served as the official residence of Ontario's Lieutenant Governor from 1915 to 1937. It was bought by the City of Toronto in 1960 and demolished the following year to create this city park. On the edge of the ravine there used to be a steep narrow dirt path and crumbling staircase

providing inconvenient access to the Beltline Trail below. Now, five years later, it is interesting to see the results of the planting in new soils of native trees, shrubs and

herbaceous plants along the whole route. We walked slowly down the switchback surrounded by lovely fall colours, in particular the bright reds of the staghorn sumacs.

Humber – Hurricane Hazel Anniversary walk, Oct 14.

Leader: Madeleine McDowell. We saw the Provincial Plaque commemorating the October 1954 flood disaster and the mark on the Humber Bridge showing the height of the flood crest. We had photos from October 16th, 1954 showing the washed out Old Mill Bridge from the vantage point where we stood and shared anecdotes from 1954 with more pictures along the route. There had been some rain, so the Humber River was flowing well. We saw herons, egrets and lots of cormorants, Turkey Vultures, and salmon leaping. Our walk finished at Lambton House where we saw the

Wildflower Specimen Garden established with a grant from the TFN.

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TREE *continued*

The small globular seed cones are about the same size as those of *Chamaecyparis* species but are much simpler in structure. They have only two pairs of seed bearing cone scales, which open up like a cup to reveal a pyramidal central point, whereas those of *Chamaecyparis* species usually have four or five fertile pairs of scales and the cone is tipped by one or two much reduced pairs of sterile scales. In a good seed year, the foliage may be festooned with seed cones. Just before spreading open to release their two-winged seeds, they are about one centimetre in diameter, often purplish in colour and shiny beneath a conspicuous, dulling film of pale bluish wax. Since the seed cones take two growing seasons to reach maturity (like other *Cupressus* species and unlike all *Chamaecyparis* species, which mature in a single one), you can often see much smaller, mace-head-like first-year cones scattered among the mature ones.

Pollen cones are basically similar to those of most other Cupressaceae and, like them, are shed by the time the seed cones mature. A handsome and striking tree, you can find fine, mature specimens in many places in the city, including High Park, Mount Pleasant Cemetery, Toronto Islands, and Toronto Botanical Garden.

James Eckenwalder



From top: Mature and first year seed cones, pollen cones and cylindrical branchlets. Photos: Ken Sproule

EXTRACTS *continued***Upper Beach – Miles Hearn memorial walk, Oct 15.**

Leader: Bob Kortright. From Danforth to Gerrard along the main street of what was the town of East Toronto before it was annexed by Toronto, we saw many plants that survive and spread despite adverse conditions: ailanthus, Siberian elm, Manitoba maple, mulberry, galinsoga, black and woody nightshades, lambs quarters, thistles, doorweed and other smartweeds. In and around Norwood Park we passed many red and white oaks, Kentucky yellowwood, silver, sugar, Norway, and Japanese maples, one each of bur and swamp white oak, and Amur corktree. Highlights on Glen Davis Crescent included tamarack, field maple, eastern red cedar, white fir, and views of the expanse of forest on the southwest facing slope above the houses which is one of Toronto's ESAs. From the intersection of Glen Davis Cres with Love Cres we followed the course of the Serpentine as closely as we could without trespassing along Glenmount Park Rd, Corley Ave, Woodbine Ave, the cemetery of St John's Norway, Kingston Rd, Dundas St E, Orchard Park Blvd and Queen St E. Highlights included climbing false buckwheat, katsura, black walnut, hops, English walnut and dawn redwood.

snake basking on the trail. Discussions centred around changes to the area and TFN members' involvement in environmental stewardship as we made our way down Beechwood Dr to the Beechwood Wetlands stewardship, and then over to Cottonwood Flats. There we were met by Jason Ramsay-Brown and members of the stewardship team who were prepping an area for a fall planting. Jason gave us a terrific tour of the Community Stewardship site, sharing some of the history, progress, challenges and vision for Cottonwood Flats. The morning finished with a walk around the somewhat older restoration site of Sun Valley, and we returned to the starting point along the Middle Mill site.



American hornbeam at Corktown Common.
Photo: Ellen Schwartzel



Jason Ramsay-Brown leading a tour of Cottonwood Flats.
Photo: Lillian Natalizio.

Cottonwood Flats - 100th Anniversary Walk, Oct 17.

Leaders: Charles Bruce-Thompson and Lillian Natalizio. We had an ideal morning for a fall nature walk: sunny and warm enough for a few bees, wasps, dragonflies, grasshoppers, and a late-flying duskywing butterfly still to be active among the remaining late fall bloomers. We saw an Indigo Bunting, White-throated Sparrows, Golden-crowned and Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Blue Jays and American Goldfinches, as well as one garter

Corktown Common, Oct 20. Leader: Ellen Schwartzel. On a mild October morning, with intermittent showers, we strolled through the Distillery District, past tourists savouring morning coffees. Along Mill Street's boulevard, we noticed plantings of good-sized oaks and other native trees. We also saw frit-patterned windows to deter bird collisions, evidence of Toronto's bird-friendly policies translating into real change. At Corktown Common, though the spectacle of fall blooming asters was long past, we appreciated scattered late bloomers including New England asters, white snakeroot, evening primrose and golden Alexander. Among the many native tree species, the brilliant red fall colouring of American hornbeam stood out. The small wetland was thickly edged with cattails, winterberry holly, buttonbush and black chokecherry. A healthy patch of pickerel weed emerged from the water. Corktown Common is now Toronto's top destination, hands down, for encountering a maximum diversity of Carolinian native forbs and trees within a minimum footprint.

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WEATHER (THIS TIME LAST YEAR)

December 2022

December was a changeable and wet month: it was the fourth wettest on record downtown, which has data for over 180 years.

Until a few days before Christmas, temperatures hovered near or slightly above normal most days, with frequent rains and snows. The boundary between rain and snow was usually very close to or just north of Toronto, resulting in much more snowfall in outlying areas. Downtown Toronto had just seven days with snow on the ground, while a short distance to the north in King, there were 16 such days.

A major storm system pushed through just before Christmas with high winds and falling temperatures. The impacts of this system were much more severe in the United States, with Buffalo having one of its worst lake-effect storms on record, and freezes extending into Florida and southern Texas. This was the result of the main cold air track being west of us, from Yukon through the Prairie Provinces, and to the Gulf of Mexico via the Mississippi

valley. In Toronto, winds of over 90 km/h along the waterfront on December 23rd-24th were combined with temperatures as low as -15° to produce nasty wind chills. Pearson recorded -14.8° on the 24th.

Thereafter came a strong warming trend that persisted into the New Year. Temperatures rose above 10° by the 30th, with Pearson Airport attaining 13.1° .

Overall, December was slightly warmer than normal with a mean temperature of 0.6° downtown (30-year average is 0.1°). Pearson Airport had a mean temperature of -0.6° (30-year average -1.3°).

As noted, December was wet. Downtown had 127.9 mm of total precipitation, largely rain. This is more than twice the average of 60.8 mm. Systems brought over 30 mm on the 15th-16th, 22nd-23rd, and 30th-31st. Only 1852, 1990, and 1979 were wetter. Pearson Airport was not quite as wet, with 95.2 mm of total precipitation. This was still the highest total since 2008. Although rain made up most of Pearson's total, 22.0 cm of snow fell there, just below the long-term average of 24.1 cm.

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EXTRACTS *continued*

High Park, Oct 21. Leader: Paul Overy. We explored the courses of Spring and Wendigo Creeks, which helped shape High Park. We also explored the history and presence of the Laurentian Channel, one of the remaining ancient rivers in southern Ontario, which continues to flow today and informs us about how High Park and much of the Toronto region evolved. We also spoke about some of the natural features of the park as well as Indigenous and settler human history of the area. A few participants were surprised to see so many wood ducks (perhaps 20 over the course of the walk, both in Spring Creek and Grenadier Pond). Notable also was a solitary heron close to the edge of the drained Spring Creek Pond, being photographed by many impressed onlookers. It was disheartening to see the return of phragmites to many of the shoreline areas of Grenadier Pond, which had been cleared of it a few years ago. Clearly, phragmites management is a difficult challenge.

Earl Bales Park, Oct 24. Leader: Zunaid Khan. On a beautiful fall morning we observed the fall colours and two Red-tailed Hawks circling above. At an observation point overlooking the pond shared with the golf course we stopped to discuss the proposed multi-use year-round trail



Phragmites by Grenadier Pond in High Park. Nov. 2023.

Photo: Wendy Rothwell

connecting Earl Bales Park and York Mills subway station via the Don Valley golf course. Additional bird sightings included a Great Blue Heron, Mallards, House Sparrows, a crow, White-breasted Nuthatches and Song Sparrows. A very enjoyable walk with lively discussions about nature, protecting and restoring our green spaces, and how these spaces are managed by the City of Toronto and the TRCA.

WEATHER *continued***Year 2022 in Review:**

This rounds out a year that overall was slightly milder and drier than normal. Most months were near to slightly warmer than normal, though January was fairly cold and August rather warm. There were no persistent or unusual hot or cold periods, unlike some other parts of the world. Downtown's annual mean for 2022 was 9.8° (normal is 9.7°) and Pearson's mean was 9.0° (normal is 8.7°).

Dryness, however, was persistent in the spring and early summer, and again in the mid-to-late fall. This more than offset scattered mid-to-late summer thunderstorms and December's storminess, so the annual precipitation was the lowest since 2016. Downtown recorded 728.9 mm in 2022 (normal is 800.0) and Pearson recorded 672.0 mm (normal is 786.3).

January 2023

The surge of mild air that began after Christmas continued through almost all of January as a storm track that brought drought-breaking rain and snow to California cut straight across North America and prevented Arctic air from making incursions southward. Simultaneously, the storm track also tended to pull warm, moist air north from the Gulf of Mexico. The result was the mildest January since 2006. Downtown's 0.2° ranked 7th mildest on record since

1840. Meanwhile it was the 4th mildest in Pearson's shorter record (going back to 1938), with a monthly average of -0.9°.

It was also a fairly wet month with rainfall (and surprisingly, snowfall) above average. Downtown had 75.8 mm total precipitation, while Pearson had 77.4 mm. These values are about 10 to 15 mm above normal. Pearson's snowfall was 36.2 cm (the average is 30.0 cm). There were two significant snowfalls on the 13th-14th and on the 25th. Snow cover was sporadic, with measurable snow on the ground on 11 days, most being near the end of the month.

Although we haven't had sunshine records for a number of years now, January was certainly very cloudy, with only a couple of minutes of sunshine between the 1st and the 14th. It was again cloudy from the 17th to 30th.

The mild weather involved few temperature extremes, with temperatures straying little. The highest temperature for the month was 6.2° (downtown). One would expect a higher monthly maximum for such an anomalously warm month. The lowest temperature was -14.0° on the 31st at Pearson. The difference between the average daily max and min was only 4.2° (downtown). This was due to the constant cloud cover and the lack of strong fronts that bring temperature swings.

Gavin Miller

WILDFLOWERS IN WINTER



Canadian tick-trefoil (*Desmodium canadense*). Segmented seed pods covered with hooked hairs that cling to clothing.



Pale-leaved sunflower (*Helianthus strumosus*). Head bearing numerous fruits (achenes) each containing a single seed.



Common evening-primrose (*Oenothera biennis*). Fruits are four-chambered cylindrical capsules from which numerous tiny seeds have been released.

Photos: Wendy Rothwell

ABOUT TFN

TFN is a volunteer-run non-profit nature conservation organization. We connect people with nature in the Toronto area, helping them to understand, enjoy, and protect Toronto's green spaces and the species that inhabit them.

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NEWSLETTER

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TFN LECTURES

Each year TFN offers eight free talks by noted experts, exploring everything from nature in the city to global environmental issues. They are presented Sunday afternoons at 2:30 pm, from September to December and February to May. Talks are usually 45 minutes in length followed by discussion. Visitors are always welcome. TFN Members have access to recordings of past lectures via our *Members Only* website.

Learn about the December lecture on the back page. The Zoom link will be posted on the Lectures page of TFN's *Members Only* and public websites. If you prefer, you can dial in to the lecture by phone:

Dial in: 1 647 558 0588 Meeting ID: 844 4291 6344 Passcode: 343484

Correction to October Lecture Report on Old Growth Trees in Ontario

The oldest forests in Algonquin are actually west of Cayuga Lake. Conservationist Aldo Leopold described "passenger pigeons as 'a living wind' that shook the trees."

Readers can use the iNaturalist information previously provided to get to the beech bark disease project.

Nancy Dengler

FOCUS ON NATURE

The October challenge for TFN's Photography Group was Autumn Colours. This image entitled *First Leaves to Turn* submitted by Lynn Miller artistically portrays the theme.

I was doing some stewardship work in a beautiful natural area of the Don Valley, just north of Northline Rd, when I noticed that the black maple leaves had turned colour before the other trees. This leaf in particular caught my eye as it has green, yellow and red mixed through it. I didn't have my DSLR camera with me, but I was able to capture the beauty of the leaf with my iPhone.

The Northline section of the ravine has very few human visitors, but lots of deer. If anyone is interested in helping me with stewardship of the area, they can contact me at volunteering@torontofieldnaturalists.org.

Lynn Miller



If you would like to join the Photography Group, email photography@torontofieldnaturalists.org.

TFN LECTURE

Sunday, December 3 at 2:30 pm

Via Zoom. See page 15 for information

Wildlife research in the Canadian Arctic: Arctic fox, Arctic hare, Arctic biodiversity



Adult Arctic hare. Photo: Nicolas Bradette

Dr. Dominique Berteaux, Professor of Ecology and Canada Research Chair on Northern Biodiversity at the Université du Québec à Rimouski, will share interesting frontiers of knowledge regarding biodiversity and climate change in the far North illustrated by findings from his research into Arctic foxes and Arctic hares.