TORONTO FIELD NATURALIST

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Tulip Tree Flower. Photo: Rhianon Pulla

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PRESIDENT'S REPORT

It's been a busy summer!

Great News! Our advocacy team, particularly Peter Smith, joined forces with other groups to stop the expansion of Billy Bishop Airport to allow commercial jets. And they won!! To support the fight, Peter worked with Ontario Nature to commission a state-of-the-art GIS map, giving everyone a clear visual representation of how jet noise pollution would impact our cherished lakeshore habitats. You can read about the campaign on page 6 or on our blog at https://tfngo.to/blog.

We've had a few highs and lows with our outings program this summer. Bad news first: we had to cancel a record number of walks due to high heat, flooding, and wildfire smoke (not all at the same time!) making it unsafe for both participants and leaders. But on the positive side: (1) eight people completed our walk leaders training course, (2) Ellen Schwartzel and Jenny Bull led our first toadlet scouting sessions on Toronto Island to document sites used by toads as critical breeding habitat so those sites can be protected from trampling, mowing and other human impacts, and (3) our dedicated outing leaders led 56 walks from April to August!

In July, I was pleased to join Veronika Kosova of Impact Net Zero and Nicole Hercules from the Toronto Nature Stewards for an online panel session exploring the powerful connection between nature, mental well-being, and community action. We were able to share both personal stories and practical insights on how connecting with nature can foster hope, resilience, and a sense of purpose. The recording of the session is available on our YouTube channel: https://youtu.be/_reFnJQE5cA

Personally, this summer I've had fun being both a stewardship team leader at Cottonwood Flats and a walk leader. I had the chance to take a boat trip with Jason Ramsay-Brown to TFN's Helen and Aarne Juhola Nature Reserve (see page 14). And I've met many fellow nature lovers on TFN walks and at outreach events.

My wellness advice for new and old members alike is to make the time to get out into nature. Take advantage of TFN's guided walks, stewardship, sketching events, and photography group as a way of getting out into nature.

Lynn Miller
president@torontofieldnaturalists.org

THE HEALING POWER OF NATURE: WHY TIME OUTDOORS IS GOOD FOR YOUR HEALTH

In our increasingly busy, screen-filled lives, spending time in nature is no longer just a pleasant pastime – it is an important part of maintaining good physical and mental health. Whether it's a nature walk, birding, photography, or stewardship activities, research continues to show that regular contact with nature offers significant benefits for people of all ages.

One of the most immediate effects of being in nature is reduced stress. Studies have found that even short periods outdoors can lower levels of cortisol, the body's primary stress hormone. Natural settings also help reduce blood pressure and heart rate while promoting feelings of calm and relaxation. Unlike the constant stimulation of built environments, natural landscapes provide interesting but non-taxing stimuli, allowing the brain to recover from mental fatigue.

Nature also supports better mental health. Spending time outdoors has been associated with reduced symptoms of anxiety and depression, improved mood, and increased resilience. Exposure to green spaces encourages mindfulness by drawing our attention to birdsong, rustling leaves, or flowing water, helping us focus on the present moment rather than our worries.



Photo by Karuna Dhoundiyal

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LECTURE REPORT

The Role of Toronto's Tree Canopy in Urban Resilience

May 5, 2026

Kim Statham, Director, Urban Forestry, City of Toronto

Kim Statham's lecture provided an overview of the City of Toronto's tree planting and stewardship programs, highlighting key initiatives, pilot projects, and results of recent tree survival studies. She examined the health and maintenance of the urban tree canopy within the context of intensification pressures and competing infrastructure demands. Her presentation also explored the City's approach to native species selection and the use of locally sourced seed stock as part of its long-term strategy for urban forest resilience.

Toronto's trees are vital urban infrastructure. They cool neighbourhoods, improve air quality, support biodiversity and help the city adapt to climate change. Mature trees offer irreplaceable ecological benefits, making their protection essential to achieving Toronto's target of 40 percent canopy cover by 2050. Toronto's urban forest also provides significant environmental and economic value.

Here is a summary from the last tree canopy study conducted in 2018:

- There are 11.5 million trees in Toronto;
- The urban forest has a structural value of $7 billion, the sum required to replace the urban forest were it to disappear;
- They provide $55 million annually in ecological services such as energy savings (thanks to shade), pollution removal and avoided runoff;
- For every dollar spent on annual maintenance, Toronto's urban forest returns between $1.35 - $3.20 worth of benefits and cost savings each year;
- Healthy tree canopy can increase property values by 5 to 10 percent;
- Tree canopy can reduce daytime urban heat in the summer by 9° Celsius depending on location;
- One large tree can provide a day's oxygen for four people.

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HEALING POWER OF NATURE *continued*

According to a Fact Sheet on *The Benefits of Nature* published by The Canadian Psychological Association, research has shown that just a few minutes (1 to 10 minutes) of exposure to nature can boost attention, reduce feelings of stress, and improve your mood. Two hours per week has been linked to better health and well-being, and 20 minutes at a time is ideal for reducing stress hormones in the body.

Perhaps the best news is that you don't need to embark on an epic wilderness adventure to experience these benefits. Regular visits to nearby green spaces, even in urban neighbourhoods, can improve overall health. And Toronto has plenty of green spaces to choose from – most accessible by TTC.

As we look for ways to improve our health and well-being, nature offers an accessible, affordable and enjoyable solution. By making time to step outside, we invest not only in our own health but also in developing a deeper appreciation for the natural world that sustains us.

If you add TFN walks to your schedule immediately when they are announced, you can ensure that you make the time to get out into nature – and enjoy the benefits!

Lynn Miller

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LECTURE REPORT *continued*

The study shows that tree canopy by ward varies significantly across the City. It is no surprise that Toronto's ravines, valleys and natural areas show the highest concentration of trees, which occupy more than 40 percent of the land cover in Don Valley West and Scarborough-Rouge Park, dominated by the Don and Rouge rivers. However, trees occupy less than 20 percent of the land in Davenport and Etobicoke North areas, which are dominated by residential buildings, roads and other impermeable surfaces.

Initial tree canopy trends are indicated by a comparison of data from the 2008 and 2018 studies. The canopy increased from 26.6 – 28.1 percent in 2008 to 28.4 – 31 percent in 2018. There was also improvement in the condition of Toronto's 614,227 street trees to 74.4 percent and a corresponding decrease in street trees in fair or poor condition, reflecting City council's increase in watering and maintenance budgets. In terms of size classes, the percentage of larger trees, which provide the most ecological services, increased over the 10 years.

In terms of plantable space, there was an increase in impervious land cover over the 10 years, and a decrease of 6.9 percent of pervious space. However, open spaces such as parks increased modestly, reflecting an aggressive effort by the City in this area.

The potential for expanding the urban forest lies primarily on public lands such as parks and on streets and transportation corridors, a total of about 30 percent of Toronto's land cover. The rest is privately owned, with about 45 percent in single family residential ownership. Hence new efforts to influence private landowners will be needed to significantly expand tree canopy.

There are two key challenges facing the City as it tries to expand tree canopy:

1. Development and intensification pressures, including private tree injury and removal; an inability to supersede provincial zoning rights to promote tree planting; and unpermitted removal of City-owned trees as a consequence of construction design, i.e. infractions;

2. The loss of growing space needed for new tree plantings, soil quality to support tree growth, and areas that enhance surface water absorption – the city is losing its sponginess.

Toronto has tree protection bylaws that regulate the removal and injury of trees, and protect trees on city streets, parks and ravines, and trees with a greater than 30 cm diameter at breast height (dbh). The bylaws require compensation trees to be planted where there is loss of canopy. After public consultation, Urban Forestry brought a tree bylaw review report to Council, leading to their approval of the lowering of private tree diameter dbh from 30 to 20 cm and measures to strengthen the department's contravention and enforcement program, such as use of a stump diameter to determine if the tree was bylaw-protected.

In order to implement City Council's direction that Toronto's tree canopy should be increased to 40 percent by 2050, Urban Forestry has developed and implemented a variety of tree planting and stewardship programs.

Accomplishments include:

- Planting of over 130,000 native species and shrubs in 2025 on private and public property;
- Establishment of a robust volunteer tree planting and stewardship program, including a community-led effort with Toronto Nature Stewards;
- Grants and incentive programs that provide free tree giveaways and grants for private land canopy expansion.

Other key initiatives include:

- The prescribed grazing project, which uses 60 goats to graze 3,000 square metre sections of meadow habitat to remove invasive species such as buckthorn;
- Traditional and prescribed burns at High Park for ecosystem management, incorporating Indigenous knowledge;
- The Toronto biochar study, experimenting with charcoal derived from biomass pyrolysis to improve soil health;
- A tree survival study conducting detailed mortality reviews of newly planted trees to identify key factors influencing health; and finally
- A tree seed diversity program collecting seeds from appropriate climactic regions to improve genetic diversity and support an ecosystem more resilient to climate change.

In summary, while urbanization can have a direct negative impact on the City's tree canopy, nature-based solutions being pursued by Urban Forestry are creating the research data, the partnerships in the community, and the multiple programs needed to foster an increasing and healthier urban canopy.

Philip Jessup

Members can listen to the lecture at:
https://tfngo.to/tfnlecturemay2026

TFN OUTINGS INFORMATION

The 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 can download a calendar file (.ics) that will add all walks for a month into your calendar.

You are welcome to bring one non-member guest. Listed below are three September outings you might like to consider. **Please refer to the website for meeting location and other details.**

Sketching Afternoon at the Gardens of Spadina House

Leader: Ellen Schwartzel

Tuesday, September 1, 2 pm

Outing Description: Join other TFNers for an informal afternoon of sketching. You are welcome, whether you sketch daily or have not sketched since grade 3. We'll begin with short warm-up sketches and then each find our preferred subjects.



Casa Loma. Sketch: Mary Cumming

There is much to delight the eye: the grand old mansion set among trees and expansive lawns, the generous flower gardens, the old apple orchard, a picturesque greenhouse and the turrets of Casa Loma beyond a crenelated wall. We'll regroup at 4 pm to share our experiences and sketches.

Outing Details: A 2.5-hr, 1.5 km circular outing on mostly paved surfaces with some steep slopes and stairs. **See TFN website regarding accessibility.**

Seed Collection in The Meadoway

Leader: Sarah Kotsopoulos

Monday, September 21, 10:00 am

Outing Description: Participants will learn about The Meadoway restoration project and help collect seeds from native plants. No experience necessary; participants will be taught species identification and collection methods. Bring secateurs or scissors to deadhead plants. The seed collected will be used on restoration projects or can be taken home for your garden!

Outing Details: A 2.5-hour, 0.5 km circular outing on mostly unpaved but even surfaces. No stairs.

The World of Spiders, Milliken Park

Leader: Richard Schwarz

Friday, September 11, 10:30 am

Outing Description: Join us on a search for spiders and webs. Often a source of fear, spiders are an important part of the ecology as they are major predators of insects. People with arachnid phobia can easily stay back a distance.

Outing Details: A 2-hr, 3-km circular walk on mostly unpaved but even surfaces with some stairs.



Lined Orbweaver Spider.
Photo: Ken Sproule, August 2020



The Meadoway.
Photo: Sarah Kotsopoulos

ADVOCACY SUCCESS – EACH VOICE STILL MATTERS!

A huge environmental win was celebrated this summer by Toronto's nature and waterfront communities. Citing overwhelming public concerns, the Federal government announced July 24 that it was turning down a plan by the Provincial government to expand the Island airport to commercial jets – a plan that would have involved a five-fold increase in air traffic with dire impacts on air, water, and noise levels and also habitat loss. The Federal government, which owns the lands and has decision-making authority, decided that jets are not appropriate for Toronto's waterfront and the project will not proceed.

Over 87,000 people responded to a Transport Canada survey about the airport, with an overwhelming majority of respondents opposing the airport expansion. A celebratory rally and march brought thousands (including many happy TFN members) to Harbour Square Park on July 26, as described in this CBC online article.

Leading up to the decision, TFN and many other groups mobilized social media campaigns to engage Torontonians, with Environmental Defence leading the charge. TFN's important role was to contribute Island biodiversity facts to the debate. We encouraged the nature community to speak up for nature via the Transport Canada survey and to email their federal MPs.

Sincere thanks to everyone who acted. Each voice still matters – a lesson we can take to heart.

Ellen Schwartzel

TFN MONITORING PROJECT – TOADS ON TORONTO ISLAND

Toads became the focus of a TFN monitoring project this past summer on Toronto Island. Toads live and breed in several locations on the Island, along with several species of frogs. Any big city park that can support amphibians (not just surviving but actually reproducing) has something to celebrate and to pay attention to so that the good habitat conditions don't deteriorate.

One goal of our monitoring is to inform City Park managers about sites used by toads as critical breeding habitat, so those sites can be protected from trampling, mowing and other human impacts. Our volunteers monitored Ward's wetland, Algonquin lagoon and Franklin Garden pond, where toadlets have emerged in past years.

During the first session, volunteers saw toadlets crossing a hot, sunny, sandy track in the Ward's ESA wetland. They counted a total of 55 toadlets within the 10-minute observation interval. Assuming such migrations may go on for hours, there might be hundreds or thousands of toadlets involved. On the second session, we found many tiny toadlets hopping across paths at Franklin Garden one day after a heavy rain. One volunteer counted 16 toadlets in a 10-minute period; another volunteer, stationed at a key crossing point, counted 80 toadlets over 20 minutes. This suggests that Franklin Garden pond is one of the important breeding sites for toads on the island. Our toad-counting experience also helped illustrate the value of urban nature encounters in an opinion piece published by the *Toronto Star* July 27.

Our early toad observations prompt more questions: What percentage of toadlets survive till autumn? What percentage successfully overwinter, and where do they hibernate? Stay tuned, and consider joining future toad-themed outings next spring and summer.

Ellen Schwartzel

CONGRATULATIONS AND THANKS!

Although no longer actively participating, I am glad to be a long-time member of Toronto Field Naturalists. Congratulations and many thanks to all the dedicated TFN members engaged in projects large and small. TFN's involvement in the Ontario Place Protectors' case at the Supreme Court of Canada helps focus attention on environmental and citizen rights issues that affect all Canadians, as have the many TFN voices speaking up to block jets at Billy Bishop Airport. What a relief the current federal government has listened on that one!

At the opposite end of the spectrum, toadlet counting on Toronto Island by TFN members is a delightful reminder that the tiniest creatures have their roles to play in the web of life, and there's always more for us to learn.

Marilynn Murphy

THE SUMMER LIVES OF BIRDS

In September, our attention turns to fall migration. Before we move fully into that season, let's look back at what unfolded in June and July – the heart of Toronto's breeding season. In spring, we wait for waves of warblers to move through, but for the migratory birds that come here to breed, arrival is only the beginning. Summer is when the purpose of that northward journey unfolds.

These months are almost as thrilling as May. Summer birding is certainly less comfortable. The trees are fully leafed out, the heat can be oppressive and the mosquitoes relentless, yet summer is when we can learn the most. Repeat visits and subtle changes in behaviour reveal the breeding season unfolding, and one of the earliest clues is a bird carrying nesting material.

Both last year and this year, I watched female Baltimore Orioles peel long strands from plants, carry them into the canopy and weave them into the delicate, hammock-like base of a hanging nest. Nearby, the males kept watch as each pair exchanged short contact notes while the female worked. What looked like a brief flight from ground to canopy was one small step in an astonishing construction process, a nest being woven one journey at a time.



Once the eggs hatch, the clues shift from nest-building to food delivery. Though the nest itself may remain hidden, it is often the adults who reveal what is happening.

With the Indigo Buntings in my patch, one of my first clues was a change in the male's behaviour. Instead of singing from his usual exposed perch, he was lower and more concealed, giving short *chip* calls. A female answered from within the vegetation. By listening to their communication and watching from a respectful distance, I gradually began to connect the dots. Later, I saw the female moving through the greenery with an enormous caterpillar held in her bill.



That single sight told me the eggs had hatched and that somewhere within the dense shrubs, nestlings were waiting to be fed. Each time, the female approached indirectly, taking a circuitous route before disappearing into the dense foliage, all in an effort to avoid drawing attention to the next.

Once we recognize these repeated patterns, the summer landscape begins to look different. What is hidden is not necessarily unknowable.

Eventually, the young birds themselves appear beyond the nest. In early July, while looking for Indigo Bunting fledglings, I heard a series of thin buzzy calls I couldn't quite place. The sound was persistent enough that I followed it – and it led me to three young Blue-gray Gnatcatchers crowded together on a branch. They were almost impossibly cute, pressed close against one another. When their father arrived with food, they shifted along the branch to beg, then settled close together again.



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IN THE NEWS: SUMMER 2026 SUCCESS STORIES

ON Nature magazine (Summer 2026) recently cheered the comeback of two rare plants – deerberry and Illinois tick-trefoil – and a culturally significant animal, the Ojibwe horse.

Deerberry: A prescribed burn in 2010 on Georgina Island (part of Thousand Islands National Park) produced ideal post-fire conditions for newly planted deerberry seedlings. Now producing flowers and fruit, this shrub in the blueberry family has been downlisted in Canada from endangered to threatened. The article notes that roughly 95% of the plant's Canadian population grows in and around this park, on the northern edge of its range.
ON Nature magazine - Summer-2026 - Page 12-13



Photo: https://www.ontario.ca/page/deerberry

Illinois tick-trefoil: The discovery near Brantford of a tall purple-flowered plant not only confirmed the presence of this lost species, but also resulted in the protection of its tallgrass prairie habitat. Not seen in the area since 1978, the plant had been declared extirpated; it is now classified as endangered. It was identified by a photo sent to *iNaturalist* in 2018: other specimens have since been seen in the area. It is hoped that other lost species will be discovered through photos submitted to *iNaturalist*.
ON Nature magazine - Summer-2026 - Page 18-19

Ojibwe horse: A rescue mission to save just four surviving Ojibwe horse mares has slowly resulted in a current population of 200. In the 1970s, the Federal government had culled the animals that were regarded as a threat to farmers. Members of La Croix Nation moved the four mares to Minnesota, where they were bred to Spanish horses. In the 1990s, a few horses returned to Canada. Genetic studies proved that the Ojibwe horses are a unique species that had survived after the Ice Age. *ON Nature* magazine - Summer-2026 - Page 16-17

Charlotte Broome

BIRDS *continued*

They had made it beyond the nest, but they had not left family life behind. While fledglings begin to explore the larger world, they still rely heavily on their parents for food and protection. For a brief period, dependence and emerging independence exist side by side.

The breeding season does not progress according to one shared calendar. It overlaps and repeats, filling the landscape with lives at different stages. For many of Toronto's breeding birds, all of this must happen within our short northern summer, with a brief window in which to witness it.

Summer is the living centre of the cycle. Spring lets us celebrate the return of migratory birds; summer lets us witness what their return was for.

This is what birding offers at its deepest. It is not only the excitement of seeing a rarely encountered bird or adding another name to a list. It is the opportunity to follow lives unfolding alongside our own – to witness the marvel of a new generation coming into the world.

The season's most intimate stories are often hidden, but not entirely. Sometimes, all it takes is one strand of nesting material, one caterpillar held in a bill or one unfamiliar call rising from the leaves.

Reflection Prompt: This September, pause and compare the individuals in a flock. Do any look or behave a little differently? Some differences may reflect molt; others may be subtle traces of youth. You don't need to be certain – simply notice. Among them there may be hatch-year birds making their first migration.

Article and photos by Kaliopi Nikitas

You can follow Kaliopi at:
https://www.youtube.com/@BirdingwithKaliopi

INSECT OF THE MONTH: SMALL CARPENTER BEES

Minuscule. Tiny. Petite. These are common descriptors for small carpenter bees (genus *Ceratina*) that, in eastern North America, range in size from 4.5 mm to 8 mm. Comparatively, large carpenter bees (genus *Xylocopa*) that comprise the only other lineage in the Apidae subfamily Xylocopinae, have an average body size of 17 to 23 mm. However, large and small carpenter bees do share some traits: shiny, dark bodies; widespread and abundant throughout North America; active from March through October; polylectic (collecting pollen and nectar from a wide variety of flowering plants); and adults that overwinter in an above-ground nest. (Most other members of the Apidae family are ground-nesters.)

Xylocopa bees nest in dead wood (including human-made structures), chewing the wood with their large mandibles. *Ceratina* bees cannot chew through wood; instead, they nest in pithy stems. In eastern North America, they prefer shrubs such as sumac (*Rhus*), rose (*Rosa*), raspberry (*Rubus*), and elderberry (*Sambucus*). They also nest in the previous years' stems of several herbaceous plants, notably adapting to the introduced species Queen Anne's lace and teasel. *Ceratina* cannot chew through the hardened cuticle and epidermis of these stems; they can only make use of damaged stems where the soft, inner pith is exposed.

A fertilized female *Ceratina* excavates a tunnel in the stem and, starting from the end furthest from the entrance, creates sequential brood cells. In each, she provides a mass of pollen, lays an egg, and seals the cell with pith material. Nesting typically occurs between late May and July. Larvae develop quickly, and adults eclose (emerge from the pupal case) in the same season. However, they remain in the natal nest through fall and winter, with males emerging in early May, and females two weeks later. Mother bees remain at the nest through the year, protecting the entrance from parasites, and regularly opening the brood cells to inspect and clean their offspring. Mothers also continue to forage for and feed their adult offspring to improve their chances of survival over winter. In some species of *Ceratina*, such as *C. calcarata*, a mother bee may produce a "dwarf eldest daughter" who emerges first and takes over foraging and feeding her siblings while the mother remains at the nest.

There are four species of small carpenter bee that may be found in Toronto: *Ceratina calcarata* (spurred ceratina), *C. strenua* (nimble ceratina), *C. dupla* (doubled ceratina), and *C. mikmaqi* (Mi'kmaq little carpenter bee). They are all shiny, metallic green/blue, nearly hairless, with weak scopal hairs on the hind legs and slightly darkened wings.

They can be distinguished from other small bees by the shape of their abdomens: abdominal segments have a bulging appearance, and the abdomen tapers sharply to a point. Distinguishing between *Ceratina* species is more challenging; females within a species vary greatly in appearance, and this range of morphologies can overlap with that of other local species. Males may be more easily identified to species by the presence and size of tooth-like spurs on the hind femurs, ivory markings on the forelegs, and size, shape, and colour (ivory or yellow) of the marking on the clypeus (part of the face).

Article and photos by Lillian Natalizio



Male *Ceratina* on coreopsis



Small carpenter bee



Xylocopina carpenter bee

CFMP TURNS 10

A decade ago, by request of the City of Toronto's Natural Environment and Community Programs section of Urban Forestry, TFN founded an ambitious, long-term ecological monitoring program in the heart of the Don Valley: the Cottonwood Flats Monitoring Project (CFMP). Since then, TFN volunteers have gathered at the Flats more than 60 times to collect data regarding plant and animal biodiversity in the area. These data are used to assess overall trends in species richness and abundance.

With terms like "data" and "trends" thrown about, some might get the impression that our work at the Flats is somewhat clinical. Certainly, there is a specific rigour to our efforts. But, having participated in the project since its very first session, I've come to think of it more like watching a grand story unfold.

Over the years, we've observed plant populations rise and fall. As an example, in the first few years, white sweet-clover (*Melilotus albus*) was prominent everywhere you looked. In time, the population waned and stabilized at much lower densities. This year there's been an explosion of the stuff, taller and more robust than we've seen since the early days of the project.

New species have appeared, only to vanish just as suddenly a few years later. There was some excitement when globe thistle (*Echinops ritro*) suddenly appeared at the Flats around 2020. Spiked balls of indigo swayed above yellow bursts of goldenrod and tansy, their presence so unmistakable it was impossible to believe they'd been around previously and no volunteer had noticed. As this perennial does best in harsh, dry conditions, the Flats seemed like an ideal location for this garden escapee to thrive. Yet specimens flourished and fell in various locations (always outside our plots!) before suddenly disappearing from the scene altogether by 2024. As one might imagine, that dreaded horror, DSV (dog-strangling vine, *Cynanchum rossicum*) was present in a few plots back in 2017. Three years later, virtually every plot had been infiltrated, and the scourge was predicted to become the dominant species in a couple of plots within a handful of years. Thankfully, at least in part because of findings and recommendations outlined in the annual project reports that TFN submits to the City, a series of interventions has since wrangled the DSV problem to significantly less distressing levels.

We've spotted various species of birds once and then never again. We've seen crises unfold, like the illegal rave held in 2024 that significantly damaged vegetation in the majority of our plots. We watched a nearly perfect circle of crown vetch expand for years before fragmenting, and quickly thereafter infest nearby plots. There was one summer, in 2019, where we witnessed the spontaneous "pinkening" of flowers of both Queen Anne's lace and crown vetch. We even got to see global issues reflected by the landscape with the guerrilla painting of "slab city" (Plot 7) by bored Torontonians during the pandemic.

The founding of the Community Stewardship Program (CSP) team at the Flats in 2022, for which TFN actively serves as Team Leaders, started a new chapter in the story of the Flats. Coinciding with the establishment of a schedule of professional interventions ordered by the City of Toronto, active management by volunteers, contractors and TRCA staff has added new, dynamic influences to this wonderful patch of Toronto's wilds.

One specific that I'm deeply invested in is the ongoing war being waged against Japanese knotweed (*Reynoutria japonica*) by CSP volunteers. Every steward has a "nemesis plant", the one invasive that boils your blood

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Photo: Charles Bruce-Thompson, 2020



Photo: Jason Ramsay-Brown, 2024

CFMP *continued*

more than all the others. Mine, without a doubt, is this one. So my delight was palpable when stewards began experiments to suppress the colony slowly taking over Plot 7 by cutting it back to ground level each and every month. The results have been impressive, with not only a significant reduction in colony size and biomass, but also the return of white snakeroot, black raspberry, and purple-flowering raspberry where once only knotweed stood. Better still, TFN's very own Lynn Short has since established a unique experiment very nearby, meant to compare a variety of alternative methods that stewards can use to deal with this species!

All across the Flats, new species are being introduced by CSP volunteers. Recent CFMP records reflect their fantastic efforts, documenting starry false Solomon's seal, lance-leaved coreopsis, Virginia mountain mint, wild bergamot, and many others making an appearance for the very first time since the project began. It will be fascinating to observe the impact of this work in the coming years, seeing what survives, what thrives, and what disappears over the march of time.

If the last 10 years have taught us anything, it's that nature provides its most precious treasures slowly, in measured moments missed if there's no one there to witness them. Perhaps, in remote locations where natural succession is the primary driver of ecological change, checking in every few years is sufficient to truly appreciate the progress. But in a deeply urban environment, where virtually every hour may deliver hundreds of people (and their dogs) to an area, change works by a different schedule. A fulsome appreciation of this just isn't possible with a few hours spent every few years. It demands an intimacy nourished through multiple interactions, year after year after year.

Others have taken this lesson to heart. It's a privilege to say that the protocols and approaches we have developed for CFMP have helped inspire more than a few other monitoring projects. In 2023, the City approached TFN to develop a monitoring program for CSP sites, designed from lessons learned through CFMP. Every CSP site now supports a monitoring plot, and CSP volunteers are actively engaged in data collection as a part of routine stewardship sessions. The influence of CFMP can even be felt as far away as Huron County where, earlier this year, volunteers with Hay Swamp Stewards founded their own CFMP-style monitoring program.

The data collected by CFMP and similar monitoring programs are not just of immediate value to specific sites. TFN's century of experience demonstrates that these data will likely prove useful in many unforeseen ways, far into the future. It's easy to imagine the meaningful contribution such observations could make to a PhD student's thesis. Museums and similar institutes may find value in such historic records to service everything from exhibit displays to independent research. In a world increasingly empowered by AI and similar tools, data like these are a literal gold mine for knowledge-workers.

What makes the project most special, for me and for many other volunteers, has nothing to do with protocols, data, or reports. CFMP offers a unique opportunity to connect with others in our community, to learn from one another, and to forge friendships. To everyone who has participated in the project to date, here's to an enjoyable and successful decade of volunteering together! And to everyone else, here's hoping we'll meet at the Flats sometime soon.

For more information on the Cottonwood Flats Monitoring Project, please visit https://tfngo.to/cfmp.

Jason Ramsay-Brown



Photo: Jason Ramsay-Brown, 2017



Photo: Anna Waldvogel, 2024

YOUR LIBRARY CARD: AN INVITATION TO BIRDING

Along with books, magazines, audio and e-books, DVDs, film streaming and even recording studios, your Toronto Public Library card lets you check out a **Birding Backpack!**

Meant to introduce inexperienced birders to the joys of finding and identifying local birds, the kit is available at the Runnymede Library branch reference desk on a first-come, first-served basis for a three-week loan.

The smart medium-sized black and royal blue backpack trimmed with the *Birds Canada / Oiseaux Canada* logo contains

- a pair of Vortex 8x42 Crossfire HD binoculars in a padded case
- a photocopied map of suggested birding sites in Toronto
- a more detailed fold-out birding map briefly describing thirteen local sites and highlighting which birds could be found there
- a foldout guide *Sibley's Backyard Birds of Ontario and Quebec.*

A label on the binoculars links to Birds Canada's free online lessons through the *Birds at the Library* program. These show how to set up and use the binoculars, and give specific tips for birding in Toronto.



Article and photo by Charlotte Broome

UPCOMING JUNIOR NATURALISTS' EVENTS

We're looking forward to more exciting programs for Toronto Field Naturalist Juniors (aged 6-14 yrs). We hope many of you can join us on Saturday mornings, most often from 10 am until noon. An adult must remain with their children for the duration of the program. Once registered, you will receive invitations to our events with detailed instructions on the location and activities. Register at: https://tfngo.to/join-juniors

Sept 12: Discover the fall birds and butterflies at Todmorden Mills and Crothers Woods.

Oct 3: Experience the Hawk Watch and explore the oak savannh and Grenadier Pond at High Park.

Nov 14: Find the bones inside an owl pellet and reconstruct its rodent prey.

JUNIOR NATURALISTS

BIRD NESTS

In September, the Junior Field Naturalists will be visiting Todmorden Mills in the Don Valley to learn more about Toronto's birds. Autumn is a great time to search for birds' nests, as they become more visible with the falling leaves, and there is less chance of disturbing nesting birds.

Toronto is home to over 140 species of birds that build some form of nest to incubate their eggs.

The most common nest type is the cup shape, made with mud, twigs and grasses, generally built on a tree fork or branch. This is the type of nest created by American Robins.

Some birds like Baltimore Orioles weave deep pouches made out of grasses and other plant material, that are suspended from tree branches.

Other birds are cavity nesters, building their nests in holes they find in older trees. These birds will either excavate their own nests out of rotting wood, or take over older cavities that have been abandoned. Woodpeckers, chickadees and wood ducks are a few examples of birds that like cavity nests.

Ground-nesting birds like killdeer create nests called scrapes, which are shallow indentations in the ground. The eggshells of these birds are coloured to help camouflage them.

Other ground-nesting birds build dome-shaped nests out of leaves, twigs and grasses, which can look a bit like a small toaster oven, sitting on the ground. These distinctive nests gave the Oven Bird its name.

Red-tailed Hawks, and other birds of prey, often build platform nests – flattish nests of sticks and branches, typically found at the top of trees.

Belted Kingfishers dig horizontal burrows into steep sandy banks along rivers to raise their young.

So as always, when you are out and about in the city, keep your eyes open and see if you can notice any of these. And if you are able, consider adding native plants and grasses to your garden, which will help birds find natural nesting materials!

Article and photos by Vanessa McMain



Cup-shaped nest



Nesting American Robin



Pouch nest of Baltimore Oriole

NATURE RESERVES UPDATE

We've been very busy at our reserves since the snow melted!

The most exciting news to report is likely our May 16 trip to TFN's most remote property, the Helen and Aarne Juhola Nature Reserve. This 30 hectare wetland was last visited in 2007, as it is inaccessible by land (except during winter) and visits require navigating Uxbridge Creek by watercraft. A small, sturdy, inflatable boat was purchased last year to facilitate access and allow for more regular visits. The reserve seems to have benefitted from its isolation, with habitat appearing in good health and the land showing no evidence of misuse. A more robust accounting of the visit is available via our Members Blog at https://tfngo.to/hajnr2026.



Above: Helen and Aarne Juhola Nature Reserve.
Below: Inflatable boat.
Photos: Jason Ramsay-Brown



As we have done for the last few years, trail cams were deployed at several locations in both our Emily Hamilton and Jim Baillie Nature Reserves. Due to volunteer time constraints, we were unable to deploy any cameras at Charles Fell this year, but will work to ensure this happens in 2027. Cameras will be collected in mid-October, so members can expect photos to be published on our Blog shortly thereafter.

Jim Baillie Nature Reserve (JBNR) remains the epicentre of many of TFN's stewardship and citizen science activities.

Urban Forest Associates Inc. has been at JBNR again this year to conclude their work on addressing the reserve's infestation of invasive phragmites (*Phragmites australis subsp. australis*). They have also begun tackling dog-strangling vine (*Cynanchum rossicum*), with treatments expected to continue into next year. Both of these species were of particular and urgent concern as they were starting to severely encroach on meaningful populations of two provincially-endangered species found at JBNR: black ash (*Fraxinus nigra*) and butternut (*Juglans cinerea*). TFN Stewardship is currently working on planting plans so we will be able to best steward the affected areas post-treatment.

Ongoing discussions with the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority (LSRCA) came to fruition at the start of summer. JBNR now contributes to their forest health monitoring program by playing host to one of their networks of monitoring plots. LSRCA ecologists will visit the plot every few years to collect data on long-term changes in forest composition. Data will be shared with TFN, granting us enhanced insight into the habitat under our care and protection.

On July 30, TFN submitted our second year of acoustic recordings to Birds Canada's Forest Bird Monitoring Program. Recordings were made at JBNR during spring migration using three Song Meter Mini 2 recorders, devices specifically designed to capture bird songs during extended field deployments. Last year, our submissions documented the presence of 32 species at the reserve, including Blackpoll Warbler, Bay-breasted Warbler, Ruffed Grouse, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Brown Creeper, and Northern Waterthrush. We're looking forward to receiving the 2026 transcriptions from Birds Canada in a few months, and will publish the findings on the Blog.

Finally, huge thanks go out to all of this year's Trails Task Force volunteers who have generously donated their time and labour to help maintain JBNR's trail network! Branches were snipped, treefalls sawed, markers refreshed, and new sections of boardwalk laid – all critical activities that help protect this remarkable bit of nature and keep our official trails safe and accessible for all to enjoy.

Jason Ramsay-Brown

EXTRACTS FROM OUTINGS LEADERS' REPORTS

Lambton Park - Old Growth and Rejuvenation, April 16. Leader: Lillian Natalizio. The sun broke through the clouds briefly at the start of the walk, and we saw a small kettle of Turkey Vultures moving upstream over the Humber River as we entered the savannah trails. Grasses and sedges were greening up, trout lily and Virginia waterleaf foliage had emerged, and small patches of bloodroot were in flower. Before the rain started, we saw a small garter snake basking on a fallen oak leaf. Despite the rain, numerous honey bees and a few cellophane bees were busy feeding on the numerous willows in flower. We also spotted a few warblers (likely Pine Warblers), chickadees and Brown Creeper, and heard a Blue Jay and Red-bellied Woodpecker.



Bloodroot. Photo: Lillian Natalizio

Spring Clean-up at Hanlan's Point, Toronto Island, April 24. Leaders: Ellen Schwartzel, Jenny Bull
Six brave volunteers turned out on a cold, blustery morning to walk Hanlan's Point from the ferry landing to Gibraltar Point and contribute to Toronto's spring clean-up.

During a scouting visit just days earlier, the hedgerows alongside the airport had harboured flickers and sparrows, including a Field Sparrow. There had also been upwards of 30 Black-crowned Night Herons roosting at Forestry Island. No such luck on the morning of the walk; the wind likely induced birds to stay under cover.

We collected several bags of litter along the sandy south shoreline before fierce onshore winds persuaded us to get back to the ferry. We were glad to see Common Terns wheeling and calling overhead; they had just returned to the nesting platforms floating on the Trout Pond. We also saw a pair of Ring-necked Ducks, scaup and Long-tailed Ducks, as well as several Great Egrets.



Ring-necked Ducks, 2018.
Photo: Ken Sproule

Guild Inn and Gardens. May 2. Leaders: Jim and Jane Goad. Fabulous! Such a supportive group, so social. We walked slowly, learning about the history of the site, the formation of the Scarborough Bluffs, and the use of two excellent apps, *Merlin* and *iNaturalist.* We wondered at the amazing woodland flowers: trout lilies, lesser celandine, and especially the trilliums and marsh marigolds, which were outstanding. Anecdotes and stories enriched our understanding of the Guild's heritage buildings and its military connections with the Wrens, War Horse and Vimy Ridge oaks.

Wonderful walk!



Marsh marigolds, 2023.
Photo: Marianne Cruttwell

Spring Migrants: Birding at Col. Sam Smith Park, May 21. Leader: David Creelman. Among the interesting things seen:

- A female Baltimore Oriole stripping useful fibres from a dog-strangling vine for her nest. Bruce commented "Finally, something dog-strangling vine is good for."
- Great views of a Red-tailed Hawk lunching on a squirrel.
- Common Terns (nesting on the nearby water treatment plant) were numerous on the shoreline, often giving close views of them flying and perching.



Red-tailed Hawk devouring a squirrel.
Photo: Richard Longley

- Warblers, including Magnolia, Yellow, and American Redstart. Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, Eastern Warbling Vireos, and many other common local breeders.
- Tree Swallows and Barn Swallows were very active. Col. Sam's is a great place to see these species, as well as Northern Rough–winged Swallows and Chimney Swifts.
- On the water, Red-necked Grebes beginning to nest on the man-made platforms provided and a few remaining Long-tailed Ducks in their strange-looking breeding plumage.

Continued on next page

FOR VIEWING

"For how many years did I wander slowly through the forest.
What wonder and glory would I have missed had I ever been in a hurry!"
From *Leaves and Blossoms Along the Way* by Mary Oliver

I really opened up to the writer Mary Oliver while working towards my Environmental Management certificate in 2023. Spending a great deal of time reading technical journal articles for courses, I found myself seeking out writing that offered reflection and contemplation on the natural world and our relationship to it.

The documentary *Mary Oliver: Saved by the Beauty of the World* strikes a balance between an intimate portrait of her life, told through interviews, personal photos, and home videos, and an exploration of the content and impact of her published works. I was struck by two facts: first, that her rise to becoming a household name didn't come until she was nearly 50, after a lifetime of consistent writing; and second, that in her early 20s she lived in Greenwich Village, NY, far removed from the natural settings that captivated her imagination. She had grown up in Ohio and would later move to Provincetown, MA, where she lived for 40 years with her partner.

I went into the film knowing only what Oliver carefully selected to reveal about herself through her writing, and left knowing more about the widely read and studied artist's wild and precious life, as shared by close friends, scholars, and fans. Her way of observing life created beauty out of the ordinary, and in this planetary moment, humans may benefit from connecting with natural spaces through writing and in person.

The 2026 documentary *Mary Oliver: Saved by the Beauty of the World* (Sasha Waters, USA, 91 minutes), is currently available to purchase or rent from Apple TV.

Katrina McGuire

EXTRACTS *continued*

After most of the group had left we heard and saw Whimbrels, so six of us proceeded to Whimbrel Point where we had great views of flying Whimbrels. It's always an exciting, even moving sight – large droop-billed shorebirds calling constantly in their unique voice. We talked with Whimbrel Watch leader Peter Sproule and noted expert on shorebirds Jean Iron. Some saw Dunlin on the beach on our walk back.



Whimbrels. Photo: Susan Blaney

Spring Joys at Todmorden Wetland, May 22. Leader: Ellen Schwartzel. We caught up with volunteers of the Todmorden Mills Wildflower Preserve, busy digging up garlic mustard as part of a multi-year plan to re-naturalize wooded slopes. We learned that garlic mustard must be dug up in the second year of growth before it sets seed. We talked briefly about the long success story of this stewardship project, with origins going back to Charles Sauriol in the 1990s and TFN advocacy in the 1970s.

At the bridge, we observed Red-winged Blackbirds nesting. The nest and nestlings were well-camouflaged, but the gaping red mouths of the hungry babies gave them away. We observed many spring ephemerals, such as trout lily – already re-entering dormancy – as well as other big-leafed specialists of the forest floor like may-apple and bloodroot. Other native plants blooming included wild geranium, choke cherry, false Solomon's seal and marsh marigold. Abundant horsetails and several fern species grew in the damper spots, and broadleaf arrowhead was emerging from the pond.



Wild Geranium.
Photo: Lillian Natalizio

Other bird sightings included a shy egret at the pond; a Downy Woodpecker; a soaring Turkey Vulture and a flock of Cedar Waxwings. We noted that site volunteers maintain brush piles on wooded slopes to support wildlife needing tangled undergrowth, such as Carolina Wrens.

The Todmorden stewardship team meets on-site every Monday and Friday morning starting at 9:00 am, and very much welcomes new participants, even on an occasional or one-time basis.

FOUR EXCITING DAYS AT POINT PELEE IN MAY 2026

In early May, I spent four days at Point Pelee National Park. It was easy to see why it is considered one of the best birding destinations in Canada. May is peak migration time, when the park's location and geography make it a strategic stopover for countless birds moving north. The annual *Festival of Birds* adds to the excitement with guided activities, sightings, and a shared sense of celebration among visitors.

Point Pelee is a small but ecologically important peninsula that extends into Lake Erie, creating a narrow funnel of land that concentrates migrating birds. For birds arriving after long overwater flights, the park offers one of the first safe landfalls for rest and feeding. Its combination of shoreline, forest, marsh, and tip habitats makes it a uniquely important staging area during spring migration.

The park has a deep human history. Before European settlement, the area was part of the homeland and seasonal use landscape of Indigenous peoples who lived in and traveled through the region. After Europeans arrived, the land was gradually cleared and altered for farming, hunting and logging. Settlement expanded until conservation efforts eventually led to its protection and, in 1918, its designation as Canada's smallest national park. That transition from working landscape to protected natural area is part of what makes the park's story so meaningful today.

My own experience was extraordinary. Over the course of the visit, I observed nearly 100 different bird species, 21 of them personal life listers, and including two local rarities: the Prothonotary and Yellow-throated Warblers. Each day brought new surprises, and the variety of birds was matched by the sense of discovery that filled the park.

What made the visit even more memorable were the people I met. Visitors came from across Canada, the United States, and even Europe. They ranged from experienced birders to the newly interested, from first-time visitors to 40-year regulars, and from ornithologists to photographers to those simply enjoying a day in nature. Everyone was warm, friendly, and eager to share sightings. On every path, passing strangers would exchange reports of recent observations and where these birds might still be found. More than once, as I lifted my camera someone would wander by and ask, "what do you see?" Like kids in a candy shop, guides and visitors alike ran wide-eyed and enthusiastic through the park chasing the latest reported sightings.

The more experienced birders were especially generous in helping rookies find birds that were difficult to see in natural settings. They would point out movement in the canopy, help locate a hidden warbler by sound, and guide less experienced observers toward the right tree, shrub or patch of foliage. That spirit of patience and shared excitement made the whole park feel welcoming.

The park naturalists also played an important role in that experience. They led walks, posted updates about interesting sightings and where they had been seen within the park, and maintained a large whiteboard map where visitors could post the locations of their own finds. That system helped everyone stay connected to the action and encouraged a real sense of community among birders.

Point Pelee in May feels alive with movement and expectation. Birds drop in after long journeys, observers gather across the park, and news of each new sighting travels quickly along the trails. Geography, migration, and community all converge in a way that makes every day feel active and unpredictable and makes a visit here such a joy.

Article and photos by Gerry Zeit



Yellow-throated Warbler

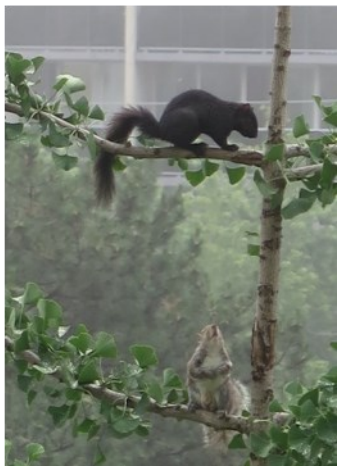


Nashville Warbler

SHARING NATURE ENCOUNTERS

Continuing Saga in the Ginkgo Tree!





In last year's September newsletter I shared the story of an amorous robin displaying in the ginkgo tree near my apartment. On a misty morning in late June 2026, I witnessed another fascinating animal behaviour in the same tree.

It started when I noticed a black morph gray squirrel nibbling leaves on a branch. As I watched I could hear familiar squirrel vocalizations that were not coming from the squirrel in view. After a while I became aware of a tawny grey morph squirrel on a lower branch. It approached the black one. Rather than aggressively shooing the newcomer away, as I would have expected, the black just ignored him and continued nibbling. I kept taking photos which later revealed all sorts of antics on the part of the grey, trying to attract the black's attention by showing off his magnificent bushy tail. It became clear that this was mating behaviour – he trying to make a good impression and she either not interested or playing hard to get. Happily, they eventually scampered down the tree together.

I did a little online research and learned that June-July is the second of two mating seasons for squirrels; that the vocalizations I had heard could be used to attract a mate; and that female squirrels choose a mate from among possible suitors. I feel privileged to have this ginkgo tree near my balcony, revealing interesting behaviours of birds and mammals.

Wendy Rothwell

WEATHER THIS TIME LAST YEAR

September, 2025

September was fairly warm but similar in pattern to the past few years. The short but noticeable droughty period that began earlier in the summer ended late in the month, with monthly precipitation totals slightly above normal.

The monthly mean temperature was 18.8˚ downtown (0.5˚ above the average of the past 30 years) and 18.5˚ at Pearson Airport (0.9˚ above average). There was little variation through the month, with Pearson ranging from 27.2˚ on the 8th to 29.9˚ on the 18th. The prevailing conditions were sunny with moderately warm conditions. It was more humid on the 13th, 18th, and 22nd-26th.

The first three weeks of September were very dry aside from localized heavy showers on the 4th. However, a moist flow from the Gulf of Mexico brought heavier rains on the 21st-25th that accounted for the majority of the month's rainfall. These rains affected most of southern and central Ontario, and brought the monthly total to 82.1 mm downtown and 105.9 mm at Pearson, well above the normal of around 70 mm. Flooding was minimal due to the antecedent dry ground.

Gavin Miller

Straddling two seasons,

Summer lazes into fall –

Unique September

Haiku by Charlotte Broome

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

Submissions deadline for October: September 1

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TFN LECTURES

Each year TFN offers eight free talks (from September to May) by noted experts, exploring everything from nature in the city to global environmental issues. Starting in March 2026, these talks will be presented Tuesday evenings at 7 pm. They 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 this month's lecture on the back page.

You may join the September lecture via Zoom. The 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: 1 780 666 0144 Meeting ID: 846 0888 8711 Passcode: 765043

FOCUS ON NATURE – WHITE

The July challenge for TFN's Photography Group was White. This stunning image of a cabbage white butterfly was contributed by Marianne Cruttwell.



I tried all month to capture a picture of a cabbage white butterfly for our photography group's white challenge. I had been out on several nature walks, seen several butterflies and taken many photos without success. Finally, on the morning of our photography group meeting, I was at Morningside Park and spotted a cabbage white that landed on a plant and stayed still for a few seconds. Standing a fair distance back I used my Coolpix 60x zoom point-and-shoot camera and snapped a picture just before it flew away.

Frequent walks in nature, patience, persistence, being in the right place at the right time and luck helped me get this picture of the butterfly.

Marianne Cruttwell

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

TFN LECTURE

Tuesday, September 8, 7 pm - via Zoom. See page 19 for information

The Wild is Calling – Reconnecting to Nature, Right Where We Live



Dr. Nadina Galle, a Dutch-Canadian ecological engineer, National Geographic Explorer, and author of the bestselling book *The Nature of Our Cities* (HarperCollins), will explore three vital forms of connection we must restore in cities: to place, to species, and to purpose. From citizen-led biodiversity mapping to tweeting trees and AI insect sensors, she will share real-world examples of how emerging tools are helping urban residents rediscover the wild right outside their door.

Upcoming Lectures:

Tues, Oct 6, 7 pm	A New Home for Nature Along Toronto's Waterfront: Monitoring Results for Flora and Fauna in Ookwemin Minising (The Portlands). Speakers: Dell Tune and Brian Ford
Tues, Nov 3, 7 pm	TFN's Reserves. Speaker: TFN President, Lynn Miller