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Newsletter of the Halton / North Peel Naturalist Club

Volume 40, Number 2

November-December 2005

Club Activities

Indoor: Meetings begin at 7:30 p.m. on the second Tuesday of the month from September to June at Georgetown and District High School, Drama Room, 70 Guelph Street (Highway 7/Guelph Street at Albert), unless stated otherwise. **See map page 8.**

Dec. 13: Annual Pot Luck and Members' Night. Limehouse Memorial Hall (beside Scout Hut). Please bring your own plate, mug, cutlery, and a pot luck dish of your choice. If you take nature slides or have other show-and-tell items, please bring some to share with the other members. Doors open at 6:00 p.m.; dinner 6:30.

Jan. 10: Human Impacts on the Environment. Bill McIlveen will give us an appreciation of how human activity impacts the environment.

Feb. 14: TBA – tentative a speaker from the Canadian Wildlife Service on birds

Mar 14: Great Lakes Ecosystem Health. Our presenter will be Murray Charlton a scientist with the National Water Research Institute. This meeting will be held the Halton Hills Cultural Centre.

Outdoor: Trips begin at the Niagara Escarpment Commission (NEC) parking lot at Guelph and Mountainview Road, Georgetown, unless stated otherwise. If you would like to meet the group at the trip site, please speak to the trip leader for confirmation of the location and the directions to the starting point.

Dec. 27: Christmas Bird Count. Each group will have at least one experienced birder, so all participants needn't be birders, just sharp-eyed and keen-eared. There is a \$5.00 fee to participate in the count, to cover the cost of information management and publication of the results. This does not include those who will be counting birds at their feeders – see page 3 for details. If you would like to join the count, call Bill McIlveen at (519) 853-3948 or email wmcilveen@aztec-net.com.

Jan. 15: Terra Cotta Conservation Area. Public outing and nature walk. Meet at 1:00 or 1:20 p.m. at the Terra Cotta parking lot.

Jan. 22: Burlington Waterfowl – Lake Ontario and La Salle Park. Meet at 9:00 or 10:00 a.m. at the Travelodge Hotel on Lakeshore Road, Burlington. In case of inclement weather, check ahead with the trip leaders, Kelly Bowen and Andrew Kellman, (905) 873-7338.

Feb. 19: Wings of Paradise Butterfly Conservatory, Cambridge. Meet trip leaders Andy Kellman and Kelly Bowen at 9:30 a.m. Admission: \$9.00/adult; \$4.28/children (3-12 years)

Mar 18: Annual trip to Long Point. Long Point is a resting and feeding stop for Tundra Swans on the way to their breeding grounds in the far north. Many other species of waterfowl, and some returning songbirds are usually seen too. Meet Ray Blower at 8:00 a.m. Bring lunch or money for lunch, binoculars, and scopes. Call Ray to join the outing at another location (519) 853-0171.

Young Naturalists

Jan. 14: Evergreens. Location of meeting Limehouse Memorial Hall, 1:00-3:00 p.m. Openings available for children; but parent participation required. Contact Andy and Nancy Kovacs (905) 702-1132.

President's Message

As newly elected president of the Halton North Peel Naturalist Club, I would like to welcome back all club members to another exciting year of programs and outdoor activities. I extend a special welcome to any new members who have just joined our club. I would also like to remind those of you who have not yet renewed your membership for 2005/2006; this is the time to do so! The money generated by membership dues is important to allow us to operate effectively. Membership also ensures that you get the most out of the club, such as newsletters and insurance coverage on outings.

For those who missed the elections at the October meeting, our executive has undergone some changes: Our current executive is as follows:

President: Kelly Bowen
Vice President: Andrew Kellman
Acting Secretary: Andy Kovacs
Treasurer: Dave Williams

I'm sure I speak for everyone when I offer a heart-felt thanks to Andy and Nancy Kovacs for all the work they contributed to the executive over the past five years. We are still looking for someone who is interested in taking on the role of secretary. This would allow Andy to effectively serve as Past President, and focus his attention on the Young Naturalist program. That said, I'm sure Andy and Nancy would be more than happy for any additional help they receive for the Young Naturalists. We're also looking for material for future newsletters, so get writing! If you can help with any of these items, please contact any member of the executive.

Ontario Nature (the organization formerly known as the FON) is also looking at boosting their membership this fall. To this end, they are offering a special deal that can benefit both our organizations. By simply having our members sign up only four *new* members to Ontario Nature, our \$75 club membership fee will be waived! Memberships help support Ontario Nature's conservation programs and services to better protect nature across the province. There are four discounted memberships for us to promote:

1. Individual (\$40, save \$5)
2. Student or Senior (\$35, save \$3)
3. School/Library (\$35, save \$3)
4. Family (\$45, save \$5)

Please have each new member fill in an application form with payment and return to me by January 15, 2006. Application forms can be picked up at our upcoming meetings, or from the executive upon request. Remember, gift memberships also count! This Christmas, you can "Give the Gift that Gives Back to Nature"!

Sincerely,
Kelly Bowen

Halton/North Peel Naturalist Club, Box 115, Georgetown, Ontario L7G 4T1

Executive

President: Kelly Bowen (905) 873-7338
Past-President Andy Kovacs (905)702-1132
Vice-President: Andrew Kellman (905) 873-7338
Secretary (Acting): Andy Kovacs (905) 702-1132
Treasurer: David Williams (905) 877-1539

Appointments

Membership: Teresa Rigg (905) 873-0618
Newsletter: Gerda Potzel (905) 702-1681
Ontario Nature Representative: Teresa Rigg
Public Relations: Gerry Doekes (905) 873-0179
Young Naturalists: Nancy Kovacs (905) 702-1132

- Membership for one year: \$20 Single; \$30 Family
- The Halton/North Peel Naturalist Club is an affiliated member of Ontario Nature (Formerly Federation of Ontario Naturalists)

Deadline for the January/February 2006 newsletter: December 23, 2005

Email submissions/questions/concerns to: gpotzel@sympatico.ca



Halton/North Peel Naturalist Club, together with Ontario Nature, are selling a small stuffed barn owl. Money from the sale of this owl may go towards club projects, such as helping fund mosquito screens for the Owl Foundation in Vineland, Ontario. Many of our native owl species are very susceptible to the West Nile Virus. The Owl Foundation, which specializes in rehabilitating and returning injured owls from across Canada to the wild, lost nearly half of their 30 Great Grey Owls this past summer due to West Nile Virus. It costs between \$300 and \$3,000 to mosquito screen an outdoor cage for a recovering owl.

If orders for the owl are placed before December 15, we may be able to get them delivered before Christmas.

Height: 7 inches. Price \$12.00



Christmas Bird Count

Do you watch the birds at your feeder all winter?

The Halton/North Peel Naturalist Club (HNPNC) invites you to help with the Halton Hills 15th Annual Bird Count

The Christmas Bird Count is a North America-wide effort. Last year our club observed 9,255 birds from 55 different species. The most frequently observed birds were Canada Geese, starlings, and Black-capped Chickadees. 3 species of hawks and 3 species of owls were seen. Some of the more interesting birds recorded were a Wood Duck, Great Grey Owl, and 47 Wild Turkeys. For the first time Common Ravens were observed.

The Club would appreciate your assistance in collecting data by recording and reporting the number and species of birds you observe on December 27.

Report **ONLY** birds observed on **December 27**.

- Report the location where you made the observation (Location could be “backyard on Princess Drive” or “Cedarvale Park”)
- If observations were recorded in more than one location, please keep multiple lists (For example, report 3 Blue Jays in Cedarvale, 10 Gold Finches in backyard)
- If you are not certain which bird you have seen don’t guess, do your best to describe it or do not include it.

You may report your observations by **December 31**, in one of two ways:

- E-mail your observations to hnpnc@hotmail.com (If interested in learning the results for our area, please indicate so in your e-mail)
- Or mail you observations to the HNPNC, P.O. Box 115, Georgetown, Ontario L7G 4T1



March 12, 2005 Long Point Swan Outing Report

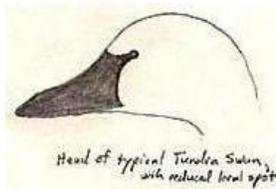
The day began well enough with overcast skies sprinkling light snow through the calm air and a coyote sighted west of Mountainview Road just 6 minutes from the Niagara Escarpment Commission (NEC) parking lot. Our first Red-tailed Hawk was seen a few minutes later on the same road. We were south of Caledonia, however, before we saw the first Kestrel.

After we crossed the Grand River (which was frozen solid) we stopped to scan the bush where a Great Horned Owl was seen nesting in previous years. Unfortunately, this year there were no positive signs.

At Turkey Point we saw Lake Erie with ice fast along the shore and on the outlet. A Coot was seen flying awkwardly along the edge of some open water and Common Mergansers flew by in pairs. We were able to approach along the break wall 30 metres from a small pool of open water near the outlet light. Here we had good views of Redheads, Greater Scaups, and Goldeneyes diving and flying in and out.

Driving west toward Port Rowan we sighted a few Grackles and Robins and a large flock containing hundreds of Red-winged Blackbirds.

There seemed to be more Horned Larks than usual flying up along the road this year. We pulled over beside one standing very near the other side of the road. It was a beautiful sight with the low, winter sun emphasizing the yellow accents on the lark and the fallen corn stalks. Even the snow appeared a very subtle yellowish white. He was moving between fallen corn stalks and dry clumps of earth protruding from the clean snow. Belly-deep in the snow, he pushed ahead with rapidly churning legs until he reached the next perch. Then that charming little bird would chime out his delightful, tinkling cascade that sounds like a promise that spring will come.

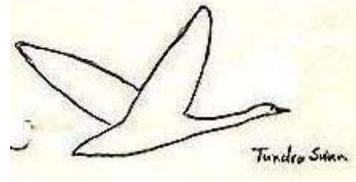


Sketch by Don Roberson

Our first Tundra Swans were seen west of Port Rowan after lunch – 6 individuals flying gracefully toward the west. We drove in the same direction and came to farm fields that, again this year, were blanketed with flocks of hundreds of the huge, white birds. Their intermittent, bugling calls were being

heard both from the large distant flocks on the ground and the small groups that were constantly joining and leaving them.

Our next stop was Lee Brown's. The pond was frozen but a trip up the viewing tower revealed a raccoon shuffling through the field stubble. Further east was a pair of Sandhill Cranes strutting about with heads bobbing, but not quite ready to break into dance.



Sketch by Don Roberson

Later, as we headed south along the causeway, we saw open water in Big Creek crowded with waterfowl. We stopped and counted 75 Canvasbacks, 25 Redheads, and 5 Coots. As we neared the lake we saw a few Red-tailed and Rough-legged hawks and another Sandhill Crane – this one flying. Highlights of a brief walk at the Old Cut Banding Station were a Red-breasted Nuthatch and a pair of Pine Siskins singing their hearts out.

About 4:00 we left Long Point for our other stops. Near the Nanticoke Generating Station we were treated to a couple of immature Bald Eagles roosting in a tall, dead Elm. Near Peacock Point we spotted a small, dark spot moving amongst the large chunks of ice in the frozen lake. Through the scope we saw that it was a male Red Fox energetically marking his territory on the ice blocks. His imperial efforts were sure to be undone in the approaching spring break-up. We estimated he was a kilometer out from the shore.

Now it was time to go to the Fisherville Raptor Preserve before the sun set. As we approached we saw a few Short-eared Owls and Northern Harriers perched here and there or flying about. On a wire fence stretching back from the road we saw dozens of raptors like sentinels on the fence posts. The birds closest to us were Short-eared Owls. Further from the road the line became Harriers, and flying in the fields furthest back were a few Rough-legged Hawks. We also came across a small group of shivering, familiar-looking wildlife photographers who were migrating back to Georgetown after an Ontario Vernal Pools Association meeting in Long Point.

continued on page 5...

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As the sky gradually grew darker the owls became more active. Individuals, one by one, were taking flight to join the aerial owl ballet. One flying bird dropped suddenly to the ground and rose up with a small mammal in its clutches. It flapped its wings a few times and dropped the prey with no further notice. Perhaps it was a bad-tasting shrew?

Eventually the owls had dispersed in all directions and the hawks had roosted for the night. It was then 6:30 and the sky had become quite dark. It had been another long day on the annual swan outing. Once again we added to our growing collection of interesting experiences. We headed for home, tired, but looking forward to sharing our stories with friends.

Ray Blower



Gardening in a more natural way

There is a movement in the gardening world toward a more natural way of doing things. It goes without saying that this is a pesticide-free method but it involves very much more.

Natural gardening echoes nature. In a woodland setting there are 'layers' of plants; a canopy of trees, an under story of shrubs that can withstand some shade and then a carpet of perennials and annuals. This order can be copied in the home garden.

Natural gardening also imitates nature by replicating plant communities that naturally occur together. Grouping plants that belong together, such as alpine plants in a rock garden, ensures that the plant gets the location and care that it needs and has the best chance to thrive.

Well-chosen, well placed plants on a lean diet are healthier than artificially pampered plants in overly fertilized, lush conditions. A healthy, happy plant is resistant to pests and diseases - a case of 'survival of the fittest'.

Maintenance in a garden of this type focuses on adopting the least toxic solution to any garden problem. Perhaps picking off slugs or tomato horn worms rather than reaching for a can of pesticide.

Plants that attract beneficial insects and pollinators, such as those in the daisy family, contribute not only to the attractive appearance of the garden but also provide food for wildlife even through the winter.

Consider choosing plants for their year-round performance rather than for a single season of showy flowers. Beautiful and healthy foliage, interesting seed heads and striking bark can make just as much contribution to the overall enjoyment of the garden as flowers do.

Maintenance and pesticide issues can be moderated by limiting the size of lawns, planting groundcovers instead of grass in shady areas and in hard-to-mow areas.

Care of the soil is also important. Healthy soil gives plants a better chance of absorbing necessary nutrients and promotes the ability to develop healthy roots. To help maintain healthy soil try to protect soil communities of micro organisms. This is best done by minimizing soil disturbance. Dig as little as possible. Use of compost mulches helps replenish organic materials in the soil and reduces the need to water, fertilize and prune overgrowth caused by excessive nutrients.

Diana Pooke

Terra Cotta Silver Creek Management Plan

Credit Valley Conservation is about to create a new management plan for Terra Cotta and Silver Creek Conservation Areas. You can help make sure that the management plan includes the activities you want, while excluding inappropriate activities, by filling out the survey before December 9, 2006 at <http://www.creditvalleycons.com/enjoying/tcsc.htm>

There was a large lobby group for mountain bikes at the public meeting, and several comment forms have requested motorized vehicle access for dirt bikes (yikes!) as well.

Make sure your opinion is heard.

Teresa Rigg

Coping With Drought (or 'How I lived without the garden hose attached to my hip')

Well, there it is. Another summer of record dry, 2005 proved to be as dry as 2002, the year that we had 78 days in a row with no rain on the property. And believe me; if you rely on well water, you count the days.

After the drought summer of 2002 we had a drought autumn, winter, spring, summer, autumn, etc. Only the wet summer of 2004 provided any relief from several seasons of abnormally low moisture. So I began to shift the garden to drought tolerant plants. And I have been asked to share with you the results in this little article.

The first point that I would like to make is this; I think we need to be more conscious of the water that we use in our gardens. Every indicator out there points to more and more extreme weather conditions, particularly drought in this area. Water in Georgetown is all well-based; even if you live in the populated areas...you are just served by a larger well than mine.

Gone are the days of frequent watering and hosing down the driveway. We can now expect water rates to go higher and water bans/restrictions to be part of summer gardening. So take heed of the following things that I have learned from the past dry seasons, and remember "if it's not worth complaining about, it's not gardening!"

- ❖ **Mulch, mulch, and then mulch some more.** Regardless of the type of garden that you grow, a good layer of mulch will reduce the amount of work that you do. Mulch (I use shredded pine, but there are lots of options) solves several of the work-related issues in a garden. The most important thing good mulch does is reduce the need for watering. Mulch shades the surface of the soil from the baking sun and actually moderates the soil temperature. When the rains do come, the mulch acts like a sponge, absorbing moisture and passing it slowly to the soil. Mulch also is an excellent weed suppressant. Many weed seeds just won't germinate in mulch, and those that do will not have a good grip in the mulch so are easier to pull out.



- ❖ **Site plants properly in the garden.** Don't try to grow *Hostas* in a full-sun sand bed or cactus under the maple tree. Plants in the correct place in your garden will reduce the amount of watering that you need to do and they will also be stress-free which ultimately means less disease and insect damage. Take heart, there are plants for ALL CONDITIONS. You just may have to search a bit more for the right plant. For example, dry shade (an extremely difficult site) can be filled with perennial foxgloves, *Epemediums*, *Pulmonarias*, *Campanula punctata*, and even our native Solomon's Seal - *Polygonatum*.



- ❖ **Not all native plants tolerate drought.** While there is a big move to grow more native species, plants must be chosen carefully. Some natives prefer oak savannah, light woodlands and water's edge. Remember, most gardens are in artificial environments.
- ❖ **Try to plant early or late in the season.** May, June and September are the best planting times. Plants can establish themselves before the extreme heat and dry.
- ❖ **Plant close together.** Grouped plants can shade the roots for their neighbours.
- ❖ **Plant in part shade.** Even sun-lovers benefit from some shade in the hot and dry summer months.



- ❖ **Plant bulbs, corms and tubers.** These plants just love the hot and dry and will flower better in the year following a dry season.
- ❖ **Seed production may suffer in drought.** Some plants will not produce viable seed in a season of drought so when collecting seeds plants, particularly in the composite family (daisies) save extra seed.
- ❖ **Some plants will go dormant.** Some of the perennials will just go dormant early. Don't despair. Remove the deadened tops. Most will return next year and some might even put on a little foliage in the fall when the rains do come again. Notable in this group are the *Primulas*, some *Campanulas*, early flowering *Thalictrums*, *Papavers* and woodlanders.

continued on page 8

Crozier Tract Natural Inventory – Monitoring Ecosystems in the Midst of Change

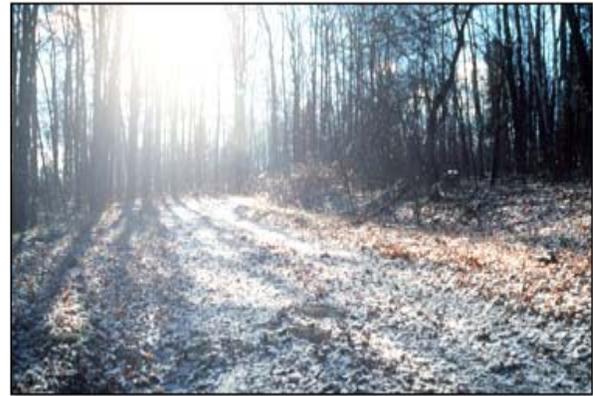
To better fulfill our stewardship role, the HNPNC began a natural inventory of the Crozier Nature Reserve in 2004. This Ontario Nature property is beside the Bruce Trail near Speyside, which is just off Regional Road 25 and St. Helena's Road. In the fall of 2004, we selected the area within the Crozier for our inventory. Each of these was a 20m x 20m plot. We staked out one set in the regenerating meadow area of the reserve, and the second set in the young hardwood forest near the escarpment edge.

Our second effort took place in mid-April 2005, when several club volunteers worked under the leadership of Bill McIlveen and Jennifer Baker from Ontario Nature. After finding the corner stakes of each plot (a task made easier by the fact that the trees had not leafed out yet), tape measures were laid along two edges. Within the plot, the diameter of each tree was measured and those greater than 5 cm were marked with a numbered metal tag. Each tree was identified as to species and its general health and position within the plot noted. Throughout this process, we were quite grateful that the local populations of mosquitoes had not yet earned their wings. However, the presence of ill-placed hawthorns tried to take their place in the blood-letting role.

Overall, the meadow plots proceeded fairly quickly due to the lack of trees over our size limit. Not surprisingly, most of these were regenerating white ash. One of our more interesting specimens was a wonderfully huge serviceberry coveted by all. After deciding that there was no way to ethically, legally, or logistically move it to anyone's front yard with a tree spade, we resigned ourselves to tagging and measuring its ten or so trunks. Once the meadow plots were complete, we moved into the more challenging forested plots at the cliff edge. We soon learned that these were dominated by ironwood – a LOT of small ironwood. There were also a number of maple, beech and red oak for good measure. These plots proceeded much more slowly, and we decided the rest would have to wait until the fall.

Our shrinking monitoring group reconvened on November 13, when both the biting bugs and the leaves had subsided for the season. Despite the growing winds that threatened to drop the branches of their subjects down on their heads, Bill, Andrew Kellman, and Marg Wilkes plodded through the ironwoods once again. One conclusion drawn from

the day – trail clean-up is a commendable activity, but not when it involves removing the corner stake and flagging tape marking one of our plots. I guess that's one danger of locating a plot too close to the thousands of marching feet on the Bruce Trail... Despite this setback, the small group made some good progress. However, one more day of tree tagging and measuring will be required, likely in the early spring. Additional flora and fauna surveys will hopefully follow, with herbaceous plants the most obvious choice.



Crozier Nature Reserve in the winter, photograph
by Graham Bryan

Now that a year has elapsed, we might wonder what we gain from this activity. The abundance of ash trees in the re-growth areas begs the question: What will happen to the natural patterns of forest succession if and when the emerald ash borer arrives? How will climate change influence our forests, especially in the microclimates of the escarpment edge? How will the Crozier respond to increased human presence and deteriorating air quality as the Greater Toronto Area's population explodes? It is looming ecological changes such as these that make these monitoring efforts interesting and worthwhile. It is too late to gain valuable baseline data on our ecosystems once the impacts have occurred. One can only think of the giant deciduous trees that once covered much of this region to realize the huge environmental transformations that have already occurred in the last two centuries.

Kelly Bowen and Andrew Kellman

Bird report from Upper Canada College (UCC)

On November 7, three Pine Grosbeaks flew over the UCC property, calling with their two-note musical tone. This seems early for these birds to arrive. Other years, and this fall already, Evening Grosbeaks have just stopped for a short visit and passed on again migrating further south, and sometimes I don't see them until late March again. In other years, Pine Grosbeaks have showed up in mid-winter.

On November 18, a Red-bellied Woodpecker was seen at the feeder.

We all enjoy seeing them when they arrive, adding to the variety of wintering birds here in Southern Ontario.

Gerry Doekes

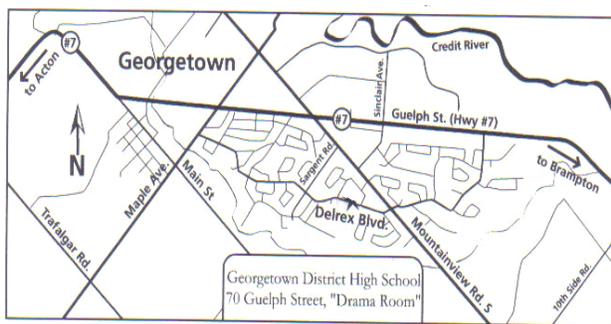


Young Naturalists Revived

Andy and Nancy Kovacs are pleased to announce that the club's Young Naturalist program has started up again. The program is geared toward children 6 to 10 years old, and is intended to expose them to many aspects of the natural environment through walks, demonstrations, first-hand observation, and activities. Membership will be limited to no more than 20 children.

The first meeting took place on Saturday, November 19th, at Willow Park Ecology Centre. The next meeting will be on January 15, at Limehouse Memorial Hall. There will be no December meeting.

At the time of writing, there was still space for more children, so if you know of anyone who might be interested, have them call Nancy and Andy at 905-702-1132.



Map showing Georgetown and District High School - the new location for monthly meetings

Summary of November 24 Executive Meeting

Activities: In addition to producing the November newsletter and finalizing upcoming outings and speakers, the executive is working on a new pamphlet to promote the club. A new version of the Christmas Bird Count flyer will also be available at the next meeting.

Financial: The liability insurance policy offered by Ontario Nature has been renewed. Rental cost for Limehouse Memorial Hall is \$50 per night (September and December meetings). HNPNC received a \$1,500 donation from TD Canada Trust Friends of the Environment fund for the 16 Mile Creek Project. This is to be forwarded to Conservation Halton as outlined in the grant agreement.

...continued from page 6

Here are some plants that do well in the drought seasons:

Trees - Larch, Bur Oak, Colorado Blue Spruce, green ash, Douglas fir, Amur maple, Mountain ash, Red pine, Austrian, Pine, Eastern red cedar

Shrubs - Wayfaring tree, *Mahonia*, *Caragana*, *Potentilla*, *Spirea*, *Hypericum*

Perennials - *Agastache* sp., *Artemesia*, *Aster novae-angliae*, *Astrantia*, *Baptisia*, *Cassia*, *Camassia*, some *Campanula*, *Lathyrus* (perennial sweet pea), *Digitalis*, *Eryngium*, *Eremerus*, *Euphorbia* sp., *Eriophyllum*, *Globularia*, *Helleborus*, *Hemerocallis*, *Hesperis*, *Linum*, *Oenothera*, *Onosma*, *Opuntia*, *Papaver*, *Penstemon*, *Phlomis*, *Salvia*, *Scutellaria*, *Sedums*, *Serratula*, *Thermopsis*, and *Verbascum*.

Ornamental grasses - *Miscanthus* (once established) will tolerate drought but will not grow as tall, *Andropogon* (native), *Chasmanthium* (native), blue oat grass, fescues, *Pennisetum*, *Spodiopogon* and some sedges.

When shopping for drought tolerant plants, look for grey or silver foliage, fuzzy or hairy foliage, fragrant foliage, waxy foliage and long thin leaves. All of these traits will suggest a plant well-suited to a dry site!!!

Belinda Gallagher



