Halton/North Peel Naturalist Club

# The Esquesing

March - April 2022 Newsletter
Volume 56, Number 4

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## President's Message

With the winter weather easing its grip on the land, it would seem that the season is wrapping up – it is forecast to warm up to 14°C this weekend, after all. Very springy indeed!

It's hard not to get excited about the imminent budding of Crocuses, the silent march to forest pools by Salamanders, and the arrival of northward-bound birds flying up from their winter retreats. Tundra Swans, Killdeer and other early migrants have already been spotted in some places in Southern Ontario.

But don't give up on Ol' Man Winter just yet! The Winter Birding Challenge continues until March 22, 2022. So keep your binoculars handy and see if you don't spot something special before it heads north, or on its way.

Besides getting out birding - or even just savoring the milder weather and longer days - there is the Salamander Soiree to look forward to – so check the details in the newsletter and mark your calendar!

The newsletter also has great articles about a range of fascinating topics: the Dunes of Halton, the Royal Oak of Speyside, Salamanders in Spring and the Dark Side of Deer. There are also updates about various initiatives underway in this region, including the Stop the Sprawl campaign to protect our farmlands from urban sprawl, the Bird-Friendly City campaign, and the Brampton Bird Festival "Big Sit". Then, don't miss the photo quiz, featuring the beautiful photography of Don Scallen.

The speaker at this month's meeting will be David Waltner-Toews, who will be talking to us about the value of insects as food, in his talk "Eat the Beetles". For many of us, this will doubtless be a gripping and novel perspective on our insect friends. Join us on March 8th to hear all about it.

I look forward to seeing you at the meeting!

**Yves Scholten**

# Talks and Walks

## Indoor Events

As you know your executive will continue to hold Zoom meetings online for the time being. Meetings will still begin at 7:30 pm on the second Tuesday of the month. You'll be treated to a captivating presentation as listed below. Zoom login details and information will be sent out closer to each event date. A half hour business meeting, hosted by our president, Yves Scholten, will follow the presentation. We hope you'll join us!

**Note:** If you wish some support from Alexis to ensure your Zoom connection is functioning smoothly, please log in to zoom at 7:20 pm, prior to the meeting, for helpful zoom tips.

**Zoom meeting Tuesday, March 8, 2022 at 7:30 p.m.**
**David Waltner-Toews: Eat the Beetles**
Professor emeritus at the University of Guelph, **David Waltner-Toews** will join us, and will talk about his recent book, **Eat the Beetles**. A deep dive into the ecology of insects, and, not surprisingly, **their utility as food for us**.

## Outdoor Events

**Please Note:** As indicated below, please confirm your participation for each outing so that we can be sure to adhere to the ever changing Covid safety protocols.

**Salamander Soiree**
Join Don Scallen on an evening excursion to view breeding salamanders. This event will take place in late March or early April and will be weather dependent.
It will be limited to a dozen club members. An email will be sent out when a date is selected. At that point please rsvp to Don at dscallen@cogeco.ca

**Brampton Festival of Birds – "Big Sit"**
**Saturday, May 14, 2022 – Rain date Sunday, May 15, 2022 (Time TBA)**
The City of Brampton in association with Birds Canada will be holding a "Big Sit" at two sites along Etobicoke Creek close to Loafers Lake Recreation Centre. The primary date will be Saturday May 14th with the following day as a contingency for rain. Registration will be required prior to the event but there will be some space available for people to drop by. You participate in a "Big Sit" by literally sitting in chairs and recording the birds that you see and hear from that single spot. It gives new birders the opportunity to spend time with more experienced birders and learn more about the local and migratory populations. Chairs and checklists will be provided and there will be a few extra pairs of binoculars. At the present time there will be 20 spots open to Brampton residents but this might change as planning continues. Registration will be open closer to the event date.

The Brampton Library is also hoping to set up a Storybook Walk for families with young children that will have a Nature / Bird theme.

More details should become available in the next month or so. If you have any questions please send an email to Bob at bob_noble@rogers.com

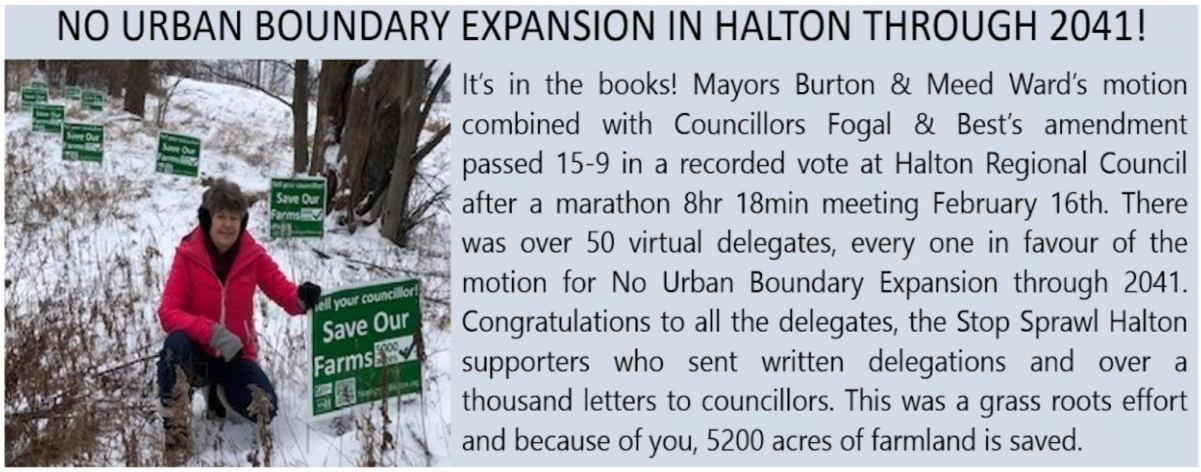
## Masthead Photo…

**Large Tolype Moth** *(Tolype velleda)*
Description and photo by Don Scallen

The **Large Tolype Moth** is the teddy bear of the moth world. Its caterpillars feed on many deciduous trees including birch, elm and oak. Adults come readily to lights in mid to late summer.

## *Stop Sprawl Halton* Campaign

Hello fellow club members




Thank you to the club and the members who supported the StopSprawlHalton campaign. Your voice made a difference and helped us secure this great outcome."

With thanks,
Katherine

## From the Web

**Ever wonder about the magic that transpires inside the nest boxes our club puts up?** This video provides some answers. The species is the Eurasian Blue Tit, related to our Black-capped Chickadee.
https://www.facebook.com/100064703636943/videos/115561725519304

**Birders in North America have been thrilled this winter by the presence of a Stellar's Sea Eagle at various sites.** This eagle, native to Russia, Korea and Japan is a stunning creature – larger in all dimensions than a Bald Eagle. First observed in Alaska, it was then found in Texas and later in New Brunswick, Quebec, Nova Scotia and New England. As of press time on February 19th, the eagle remained in Maine. Let's hope that it survives its wanderlust to retrace its improbable journey back home.
https://www.audubon.org/news/inside-amazing-cross-continent-saga-stellers-sea-eagle?ms=digital-eng-social-instagram-x-20220100-nas_eng&utm_source=instagram&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=20220100_nas_eng&utm_content=later-23695548

**Birders have been flocking to Texas over the last few months to lay eyes on the country's first ever recorded bat falcon**, a bird that can normally only be seen in Mexico and Central and South America.
https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/a-bat-falcon-was-spotted-for-the-first-time-in-the-united-states-180979605/

## Nature Canada Bird Friendly City Initiative - Halton Hills

Hello fellow club members,

A local Bird Team has recently been created to work toward achieving Nature Canada's “Bird Friendly City” certification for Halton Hills, and we need your help!

North American bird populations are decreasing at alarming rates. In the last 50 years, North American bird populations have dropped by more than 25% (around 3 billion birds).

Saving bird lives starts with local action! Across Canada, people are coming together to make their cities bird friendly. Nature groups, municipal officials, and other community groups are teaming up with Nature Canada to ensure our urban environments are safe havens for birds rather than a source of threats. From predation by domestic cats, to window and car collisions, cities and towns present many preventable hazards to birds. The Bird Team aims to partner with local government and organizations and target areas such as threat reduction, habitat conservation and restoration, community outreach and education, etc.

The certification recognizes and celebrates contributions municipalities make to save bird lives and would be a great source of community pride.

If you would like to be involved, contact me at aaron.a.keating@hotmail.com and I can connect you with the team and provide more information. The team is currently in preliminary stages and has a 1 hr Zoom meeting every other Wednesday at 7pm.

Thank you!
Aaron Keating

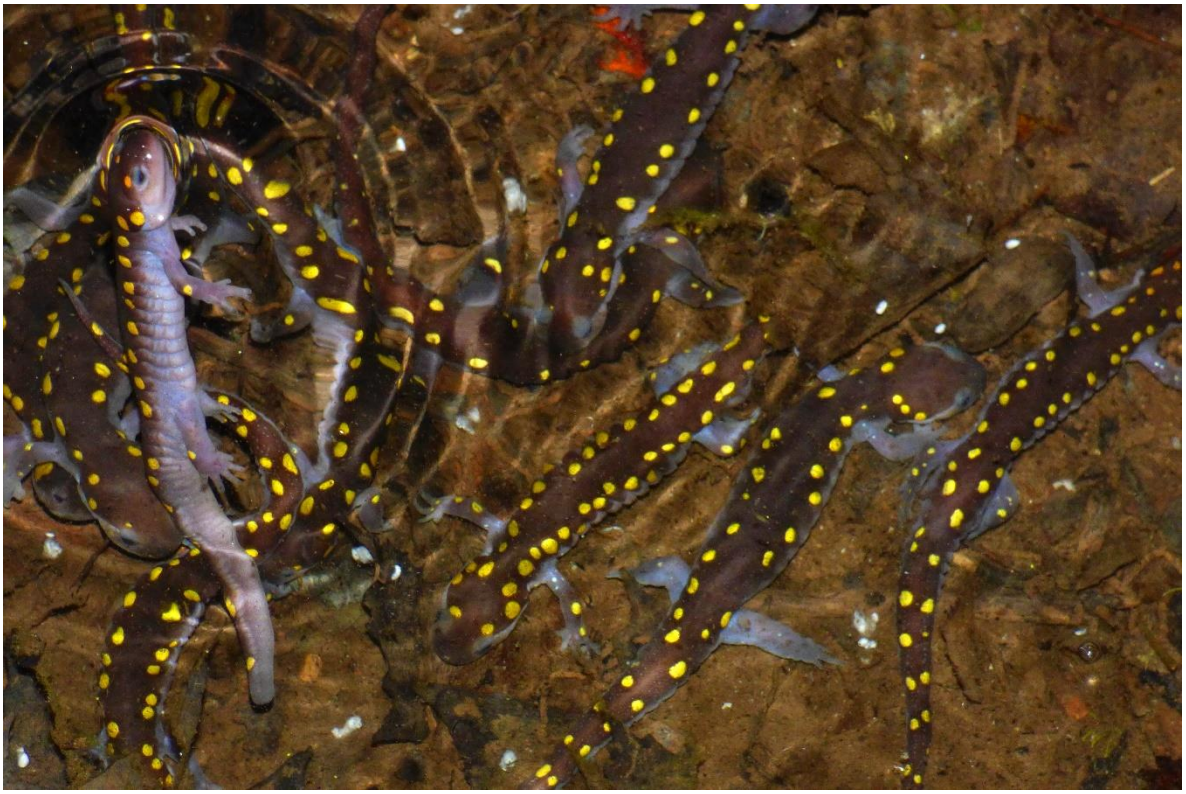
## Salamander Breeding

Article and Photos by Don Scallen

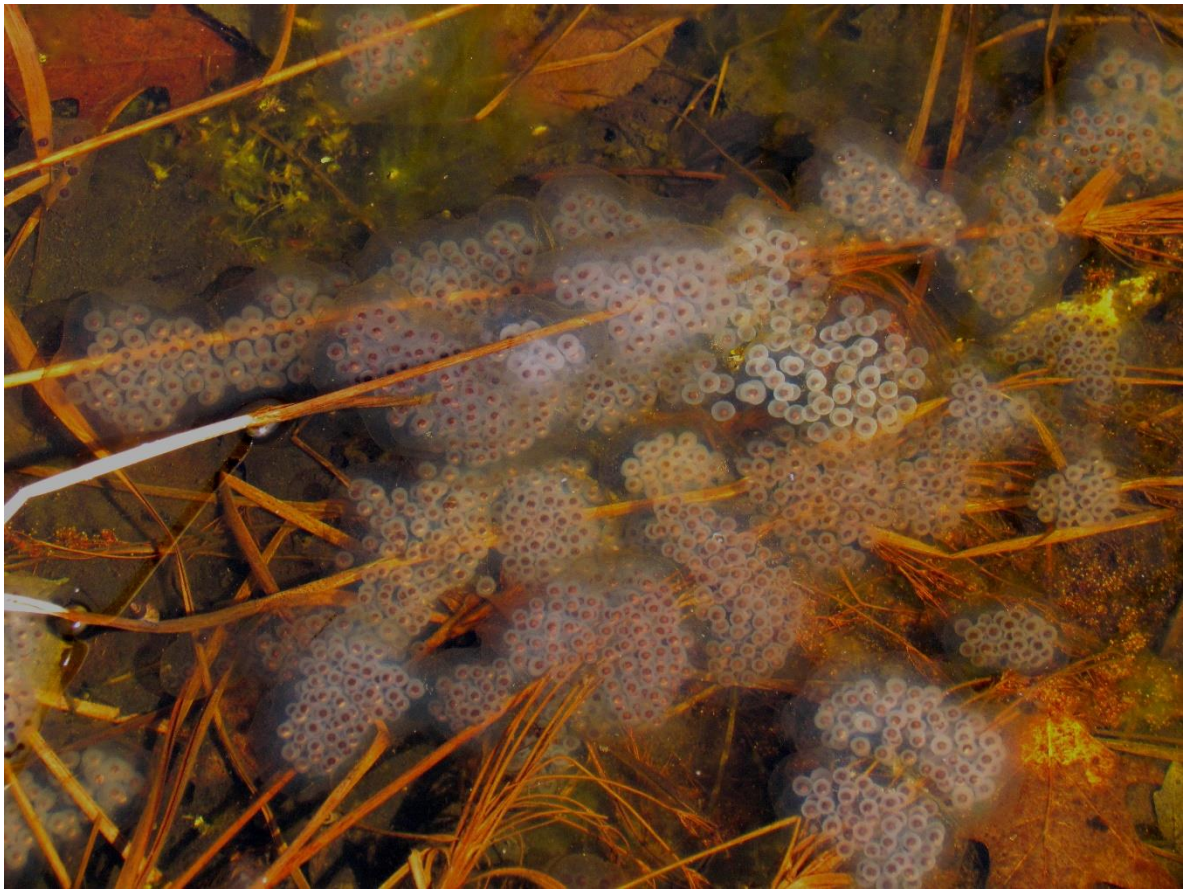
This is the time of year that salamander aficionados pay fevered attention to weather forecasts. Breeding is nigh – if it hasn't already commenced already! Daytime temperatures of 10+ degrees, with the night falling even as low as freezing, will summon salamanders to ponds. A little rain added to the equation will spur even more movement. Snow on the ground? Ice still covering much of a pond? No worries, salamanders are remarkably hardy.

In the spring of 2021, I monitored ten vernal (temporary) pools that contained Spotted Salamander eggs and/or Jefferson Salamander eggs in late March or early April. (See attached chart) I measured the depth of each pond at that time (shortly after ice-out). Then I returned periodically to the ponds to determine how long they remained hydrated. This period of hydration has critical implications for larval salamander survival and recruitment. While salamanders will lay eggs in ponds of various depths – in my study in ponds that with depths as low as 33cm in early spring – deeper ponds provide far more assurance that larvae will have time to develop and successfully metamorphosize. This would seem to support the idea that the relatively few deep ponds on the landscape – those of one metre or more – are of critical importance for salamander recruitment.

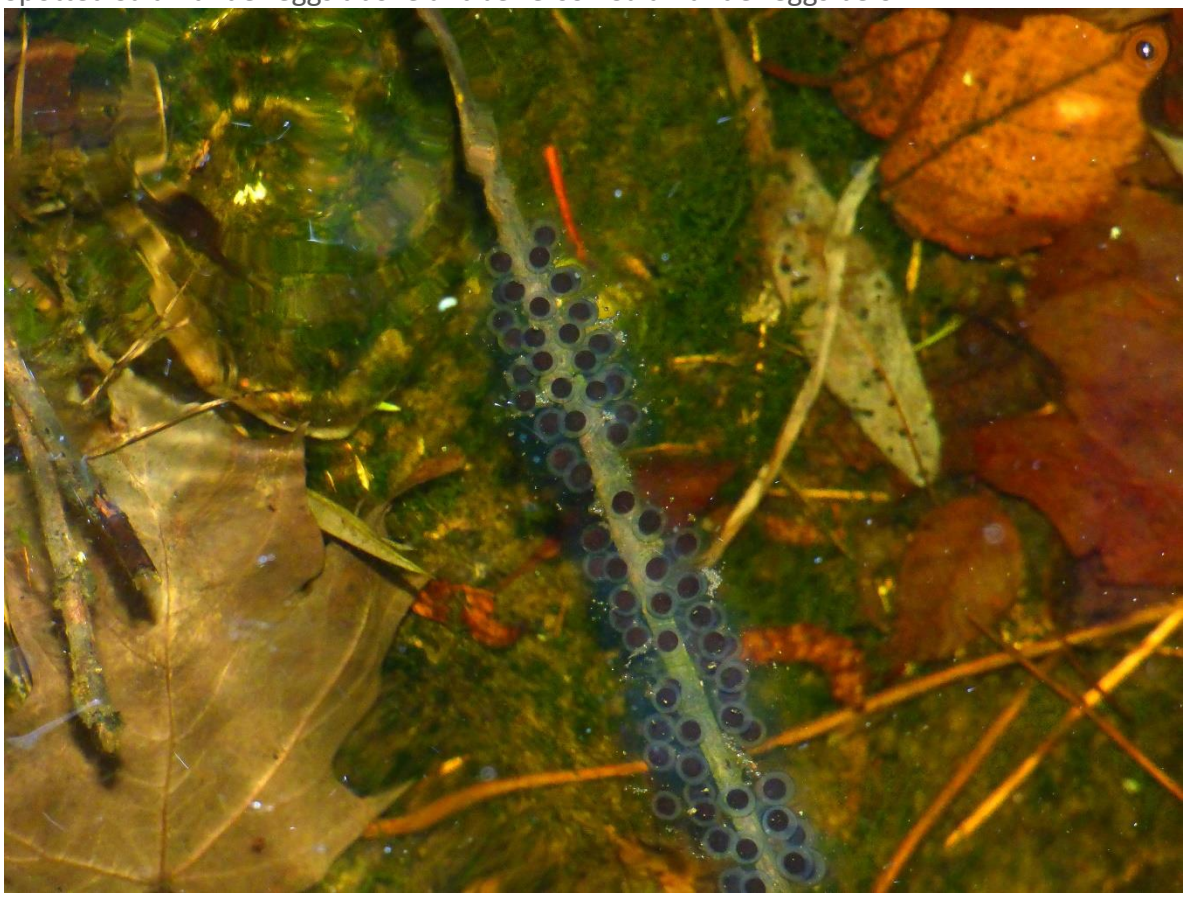
I hope to repeat this study this coming spring.



Spotted Salamander congregation.



Spotted Salamander eggs above and Jefferson Salamander eggs below.



| Vernal Pool | Depth in early spring, 2021 | Dry by… | Salamander Recruitment? |
|---|---|---|---|
| A | March 29<br>104cm | June 21 | Likely considerable. Many didn't make it however. Bodies littered the pond bottom on June 21 |
| B | March 30<br>94cm | Late June | Most larvae likely survived to metamorphosis |
| C | March 31<br>61cm | June 8 | Some larvae from the earliest breeders likely survived to metamorphosis |
| D | March 28<br>114 cm | July 7 | Most larvae likely survived to metamorphosis |
| E | March 28<br>132cm | July 7 | Most larvae likely survived to metamorphosis |
| F | March 29<br>33cm | Dry when checked on June 7 but probably dry long before that | Very unlikely |
| G | March 29<br>51cm | Dry when checked on June 7 but probably dry long before that | Very unlikely |
| H | March 31<br>61cm | Dry when checked June 8, but probably dry before that | Some larvae from the earliest breeders likely survived to metamorphosis |
| I | March 31<br>33cm | Dry when checked on June 8, but probably dry long before that | Very unlikely |
| J | April 13<br>130cm | On August 13 this pond still held 30cm of water | Time for most salamander larvae to go through metamorphosis |
| Permanent Pond | | | On July 11, several large Ambystoma larvae were still present |
| | | | |

Vernal Pool “D”, Townline Road and 15th Sideroad, April 2021

Vernal Pool “A”, Heritage Road Caledon, July 2021

# The Speyside Royal Oak Story

Article and Photos by W.D. McIlveen

Under the Ontario Heritage Act of 1990, a municipal Council has the authority to appropriately designate a property deemed to be of cultural heritage value or interest. As one might expect, most such designations are given to special buildings or other structures within the relevant municipality. On occasion, other items may be given a particular heritage designation. One such designation was given to the 'Speyside Royal Oak' by the Town of Halton Hills under their By-Law 2007-0077 passed on August 13, 2007. The following account is an update of the story of the Speyside Royal Oak.

**The Origin of the Speyside Royal Oak**

In 1937, King George VI, father of our current Queen Elizabeth II, became the King of England. His coronation was planned to be particularly spectacular. In addition to the very impressive parade and ceremony of the coronation, it was decided that acorns from Windsor Park in England (Fig.1) would be distributed to various places around the Commonwealth. Three acorns were allocated to Esquesing Township. It is not clear how the Dublin Public School located on Sideroad 22 west of Highway 25 was selected but that school was given one of the acorns from England. In a community celebration arranged by the teacher Emily Young (later Wallace), the acorn was planted at the school in the spring of 1937 [Rowe]. By good fortune, the acorn sprouted and thanks to good care and watering by the students, it grew to be a young tree. Considering its source, the tree was in fact an English Oak (*Quercus robur*). The survival and fate of the other two acorns is unknown.

Fig. 1. Painting of Windsor Forest by James Stark 1794-1859

About 40 years later, it was agreed that the one-room schools throughout Esquesing and other areas were too crowded and no longer served the needs of the community. At this time, there were five such one-room schools in the general Speyside area. These were SS #5 Waterloo, SS #8 Dublin, SS #10 Dufferin, SS #12 Lorn and SS #16 Mount Pleasant. They were effectively replaced by the construction of the Speyside Public School which officially

opened in December 1960. The school was located on the northeast corner of Highway 25 and Sideroad 17 a short distance north of the hamlet of Speyside.

When the new Speyside School opened, the then 20-foot-high oak tree was moved from the Dublin schoolhouse to its new home beside the gymnasium of the new school. The tree has continued to grow in that location and the 2007 heritage assessment report indicated it had a diameter of 79 cm. It had attained a diameter of 84.5 cm when it was last measured in March of 2015 (Fig. 2) indicating that it was still growing fairly well. Although it is reasonably vigorous, it does have some signs of dieback but is expected survive for many more years yet.

Fig. 2. Royal Oak at the former Speyside School, 2021

Fig. 3. Signage for Speyside Royal Oak

In 1966, former teacher Emily Wallace had a commemorative bronze plaque prepared to celebrate the history of the tree. It was first placed beside the tree then the plaque was reportedly moved to the wall of the gymnasium. The Speyside school operated until 1986 when it was closed as a public school and the students were dispersed to other local schools. The school then served students from the Bishop Reding Catholic Secondary School until October 1988. Later, in 1992, the building was used for the Teacher Education programme of York University. Shortly after this, the building had deteriorated to the point that it could no longer be used without significant upgrades.

Owing to the interesting history of the tree, it was selected and designated as a heritage tree by the Town of Halton Hills in 2007 (Fig. 3). This designation ensures that the tree will remain protected against any changes at the site of the school. The date at which the 'Royal' epithet was first applied is uncertain but it could have happened at any time between the original planting and the official heritage designation.

To complete this part of the story, after it closed, the old Dublin school was converted to a residence and was used in that manner for many years. Unfortunately, the building was destroyed by fire in November, 1989. A new residence has been built in its place.

**The Cousin Oaks**

When the Speyside School closed in 1986, acorns were obtained to plant "cousin" oak trees at the new schools to which the Speyside students were sent. The recipient schools included Brookville, Limehouse, Pineview and Stewarttown. Conflicting information has been reported regarding the precise source of the acorns. Leckie [2008] states that the Royal Oak

at Speyside was the parent of the acorns. She was a student at the Speyside School. Another source [Anonymous] indicates that the extra acorns were brought from England. It would seem though that the Speyside tree was the probable parent to the additional acorns simply to enhance the connection among the trees and students. In 2021, the schools were visited to determine the status of the Royal cousins. Candidate English Oak trees have been observed at all four schools (Table 1). In three cases, the trees were planted near the front of the buildings whereas the Brookville specimen was placed within the inner courtyard. Diameters in 2021 ranged from 34 to 45 cm as indicated in the table below. These trees are shown in the following photographs (Figs. 4 to 7). The tree at Pineview is surrounded by other trees which partially obscure it in the photo. In all cases, the trees appeared to be quite healthy and growing well.

Table 2. Status of Royal Oak cousin trees, 2021

| School Site | Address | Diameter (cm) |
|---|---|---|
| Limehouse P.S. | 11139 22 Side Road | 41.2 |
| Pineview P.S. | 13070 5 Sideroad | 40.5 |
| Stewarttown Middle | 13068 Sideroad 15 | 45.8 |
| Brookville P.S. | 11325 Guelph Line | 34.0 |

Fig. 4. English Oak at Limehouse Public School 2021

Fig. 5. English Oak Stewarttown School 2021

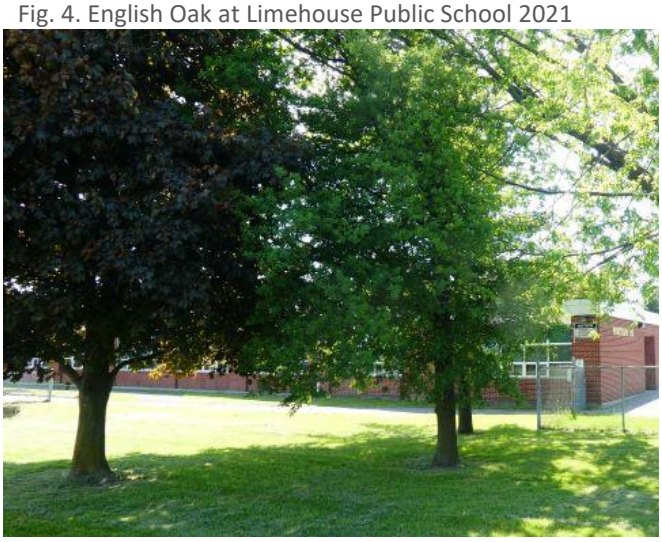


Fig. 6. English Oak at Pineview School, 2021

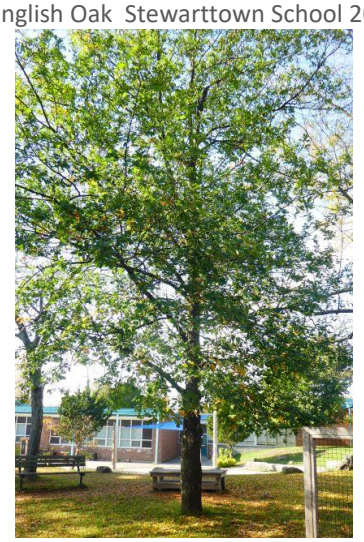


Fig. 7. English Oak at Brookville School, 2021

**More Offspring of the Royal Oak**

Several years ago, community members collected additional acorns from the Royal Oak at Speyside (Fig. 8). The intent was to help in preserving the legacy of the original tree. With the assistance of the Parks staff of the Town, a plan was developed whereby several local user groups could "adopt a Royal Oak baby" to be planted in various locations (Fig.9). With the participation of Sheridan Nurseries, the acorns were used to produce a number of young trees for planting at five locations in 2018. The status of the trees was checked by the author in the summer of 2021. The results of that survey are indicated in the table below. Trees were found at three of the five sites listed (Table 2.). The trees observed were seen to be in a healthy state. The trees were photographed at the time they were checked and the relevant pictures are provided below (Figs. 10 to 12).

A dozen acorns from the Royal Oak tree growing beside the old Speyside School were turned over to Sheridan Nurseries at their Norval farm, to have Sheridan propagate the acorns. On hand to present the acorns were (from left) Pat Farley and Moya Johnson of Heritage Halton Hills, Sheridan Nurseries Perennial and Nature Propagator Gopy Krishmankutty, John Day and Jim Waldbusser of Heritage Halton Hills and Sheridan Nurseries Propagation Manager Mary Jane Ash. *Photo by Ted Brown*

**Sheridan Nurseries becomes midwife to Royal Oak acorns**

Fig. 8. Halton Hills IFP, April 11, 2013 and Fig. 9. Planting Royal Oak seedling at Norval Manse, May 2018

Figs. 10-12. English Oak seedlings at Acton Legion, Georgetown Remembrance Park & HH Town hall

| Table 2. Status of second-generation Royal Oak seedlings, 2021. | | |
|---|---|---|
| Location | User Group | Status 2021 |
| Acton Legion | Acton Legion | Growing well and signed |
| Acton Library | Library Staff | Not found |
| Halton Hills Town Hall | Sustainability Committee | Two trees along entrance road |
| Norval Manse | Lucy Maud Montgomery Heritage Society | Disappeared after planting |
| Remembrance Park | Georgetown BIA | Growing well |

**Arnprior Tree**

The tree at Speyside is not the only Royal Oak in Ontario. In 2016, a tree growing at the Galilee Retreat Centre in Arnprior has been recognized as a heritage tree under Trees Ontario's Ontario Heritage Tree Program. It can legitimately be called a Royal Oak because it was officially planted by the young Prince of Wales, eldest son of Queen Victoria, who later became Edward VII, on his tour of North America in 1860. As a sapling in that year, it is obviously now much older than the Speyside example. With the assistance of members of the Macnamara Field Naturalists, the species of oak at Arnprior has been determined as Bur Oak (*Quercus macrocarpa*) which makes that one a native species.

**Acknowledgements**

Several people have provided different forms of assistance or factual information that have been incorporated into this account. Thanks are extended to all that contributed in some way. The people who assisted include Alexis Buset, Lisa Cain, Owen Clarkin, Sherry Farago, Kathy Gastle, Kathleen MacNamara, Kevin Okimi, Mark Rowe, Karen Runtz, and Laura Weihs. A much longer list of mostly unknown community members that played some role in the entire history of the different trees is acknowledged as well.

**References**:

Anonymous. 2015. The Royal Oak of Speyside - Hiking the GTA. The Royal Oak of Speyside - Hiking the GTA

Leckie, S. 2008 The Royal Oak. https://seabrookeleckie.com › 2008/07/25 › the-royal-oak

Rowe, J. M. 2007. Speyside Royal Oak. Heritage Halton Hills Designation Report. 8 pp. plus appendices.

## Bambi's Dark Side

Article by Don Scallen & Photo by Yves Scholten

Deer pull at our heartstrings with their grace and beauty – peaceful herbivores living lightly on the landscape, deserving of admiration and protection.

A cherished childhood memory of mine was hand-feeding a deer (I think we gave it digestive cookies) along the highway 60 corridor in Algonquin Park in the late sixties. My brothers and I were thrilled, if a trifle ignorant of a deer's dietary needs.

But Bambi has a dark side. And, with apologies to deer lovers, it's worth exploring. Consider, for example, that parasitic worms live in deer brains. Having evolved with deer, these brain worms seldom hurt them, but they kill moose.

When deer were common in Algonquin Park – the 1960's for example – these brain worms, brought to the park by deer, decimated the moose population.

Deer are considered an invasive species in Algonquin, having arrived in the 20th century because of land clearing and because we shot, trapped and poisoned their wolf predators.

Fortunately, wolves have rebounded in Algonquin, and they are again fulfilling their ecological roles which includes killing deer. The larger, stronger moose, better able to fend off hungry wolves, are once again common in the park.

Another example of the dark side of deer takes us to Anticosti Island in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. When deer were introduced to this big island over a century ago, they found it happily absent of wolves.

In response, deer numbers ballooned and led to a surprising consequence: the decline, and then the extinction, of the resident bear population. The deer ate the berry bushes that supplied the fruit the bears depended on to bulk up for winter.

People feed deer, sometimes leaving bales of hay for them to eat in winter – well-intentioned but misguided.

This unnecessary feeding supports an already overabundant deer population, especially here in southern Ontario where wolves, as on Anticosti Island, don't exist. This exacts a toll on our wildflowers and baby trees.

Bambi is precious and beguiling, but too many Bambis can spoil the ecological broth.

This story appeared originally in https://www.inthehills.ca/2022/02/bambi-has-a-dark-side/

# The Sand Dunes of Halton Region

Article and Photos W.D. McIlveen

Most people would not likely associate Halton Region with sand dunes. Instead, a more-likely pairing would be dunes with sea shores or dunes with deserts. Such pairings simply don't occur in Halton. But if one looks at the geological features, it will be seen that the former glaciers that were present here up until about 12,000 years ago left moderate deposits of sand and gravel upon their departure. At least the raw materials needed to build a dune are present in the area. There is no clear evidence that winds ever rearranged the sand into definitive dunes. There are several places where the materials deposited by the glaciers occur in rounded hills. These are mainly regarded as various moraines. No doubt, these deposits have been shaped to some degree by wind and rain but these rounded hills are not real dunes. It is likely that these mounds were quickly covered by vegetation which reduced the influence of the wind.

A relic of the post-glacial time period is the former shore of Lake Iroquois. That lake generally occupied the same basin as present Lake Ontario but the water levels were about 30 meters higher. It lasted from about 9300 years before present until 8600 years before present at which time the water level suddenly dropped. With higher water levels, the shorelines of Lake Iroquois were naturally further inland than the current lake shore. The shorelines of the earlier lake included certain areas with sand deposits that were re-worked beach areas within the glacial deposits. There is no great evidence that these produced any notable sand dune formations over the 700 years of Lake Iroquois' history. Human activity, particularly urban development, has largely obscured most sandy deposits within Halton.

**Sand Dunes at Burlington Beach**

There are two instances where we can see where the lake action has produced notable deposits at the western end of Lake Ontario. In chronological order, a significant sand bar was created in Lake Iroquois at the location between what we now recognize as Coote's Paradise and Burlington Bay. It is a ridge about 30 meters high which would have been near the water level of Lake Iroquois (Fig. 1.). There is a break in the bar where the drainage from the Dundas Valley would have reached the Lake. That bar has now been utilized as the route for several streets, highways (Hwy 403) and railroad lines.

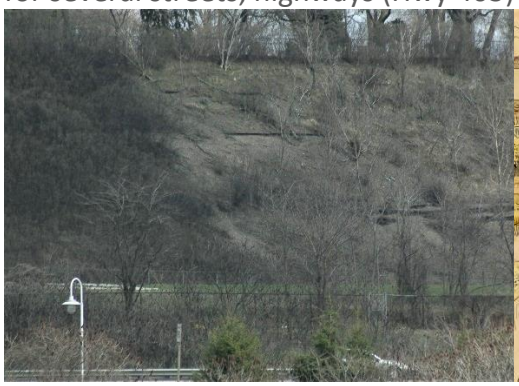


Fig. 1. View of sand bar at Princess Point

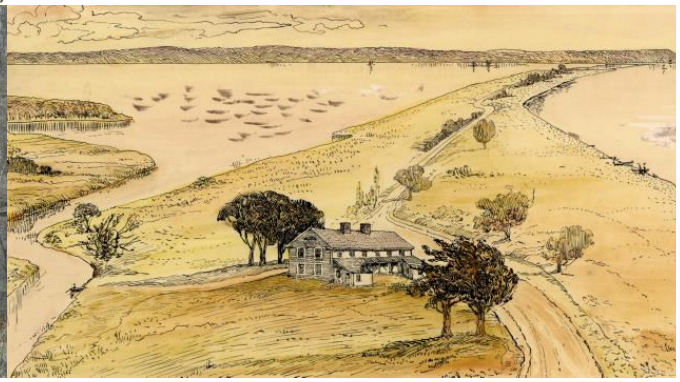


Fig. 2. Early painting of King's Head Inn on Burlington Beach

The second sand bar is present as Burlington Beach. It separates Lake Ontario from Burlington Bay and rises only a few meters higher than the level of Lake Ontario. It was obviously created after Lake Ontario reached its current level. The bar has had about 8600 years to be created by water currents generally sweeping east to west in western Lake Ontario. There is an outlet from Burlington Bay into Lake Ontario now represented by the Burlington Canal but that is in a different position than the original outlet. The sand bar is currently occupied by two bridges for the QEW and a ground level road. At one point, a railroad also crossed the bar. The current appearance of the bar is vastly different from what it looked like when Europeans appeared in the area. The early but undated painting illustrating the King's Head Inn shows a building on a recognizable sand bar with hardly any trees and limited amounts of vegetation and no evidence of sand dunes being present (Fig. 2). Now, that bar has numerous trees on landscaped residential lots in addition to the roads and major highways.

It is not known how the relocation of the outlet from Burlington Bay on the west might have affected the development of the bar. The original bar had a fairly shallow outlet. The new outlet was made much deeper to allow for the passage of large freighters and a pier structure was added alongside the canal. This might have altered the lake currents to some degree. Those currents are predominantly from east to west in the western end of Lake Ontario so sands carried to Lake Ontario from such rivers as Bronte Creek, Sixteen Mile Creek and the Credit would have been swept towards Burlington. It must be remembered that the lake bottom was mostly limestone rock that facilitated the stone-hooking industry for many years. Regardless of the timing and the precise depositional process, the end product here is the formation of a linear dune system on the Lake Ontario side of the sand bar cutting off Burlington Bay.

Over the years, the sand bar at Burlington has seen many human pressures with many kinds of housing and amusement operations. To their credit, the Region of Halton and the City of Burlington have taken measures to return the beach to a natural area to the extent possible [EDA, Axon]. This includes protection of the dune system which attempts to reduce the number of trails across the dune. The EDA report lists 249 plant species that have been reported. Including a couple of taxonomic naming issues, the list includes 142 (57%) non-native species with only one native species that is listed as rare in Ontario. That one is Narrow-leaved Puccoon (*Lithospermum incisum*). The beach area though has a number of plant species that are not found anywhere else in Halton so such species would be regarded as regionally rare [EDA]. A short visit in September 2021 added several species new to the area listed in the following table. In addition, a plant in the genus Cucurbita (gourd and melon family) was noted but without fruit it was not possible determine the species.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Ailanthus altissima* | Tree-of-Heaven | *Gaillardia x grandiflora* | Blanket-flower |
| *Andropogon gerardii* | Big Bluestem | *Ligustrum vulgare* | European Privet |
| *Bidens tripartita* | Three-parted Beggarticks | *Lonicera maackii* | Maack's Honeysuckle |
| *Cannabis sativa* | Hemp | *Solanum emulans* | Eastern Black Nightshade |
| *Celastrus orbiculatus* | Oriental Bittersweet | *Solanum lycopersicum* | Garden Tomato |
| *Desmodium canadense* | Canada Tick-trefoil | *Tussilago farfara* | Coltsfoot |

The beach area is currently bare sand partly due to wave action and also to the apparent frequent mechanical removal of debris. It is relatively flat in contrast to the dunes which form a linear mound that rises to two or possibly three meters above the beach. The dunes are rendered fairly inconspicuous by the abundant vegetation. The vegetation includes trees, shrubs and vines along with scattered herbaceous species. The vegetation cover is dominated by trees and large shrubs like Manitoba Maple, Eastern Cottonwood, and European Buckthorn, with vines like Riverbank and One-seed Burr Cucumber draped over them. Various herbaceous plants are sprinkled among the woody species. A fairly large patch of American Beachgrass (*Calamagrostis breviligulata*) was planted not far from the canal in an attempt to stabilize the sand in 1994 (Fig. 3).

**Sand Dunes at Fairy Lake**

It must be admitted that the sand dunes at Fairy Lake in Acton are not natural in origin. They were created artificially from material dredged from the lake bottom in 1967 and 1968. That excavated material was deposited in a sizable area north and west of the lake between the end of Elmore Drive and Dublin Line. The boundaries of the deposit are not known but they extend for at least 150 by 75 meters. The depth of the deposit is uncertain but appears to be at least 5 meters deep in the deepest portion. Although the exact volumes involved are not known, the amount of sand making up the dunes is very roughly equivalent to the deeper water areas in the central basin of the lake (AECON). The water quality report prepared by AECON indicated that the lake is quite shallow at just over one metre in average depth. A few places reach a depth of seven meters. Overall, the lake is regarded as very shallow and suffering from excessive aquatic weed growth and contamination by excretions from Canada Geese. The current status of the lake may reflect the efforts of the management from over 50 years ago but this has limited bearing on the central concerns of the current article which is about the fate of the excavated materials.

Over their lifetime, the sand deposits have been smoothed into rounded hills. In that 50 years, some vegetation has encroached onto the sandy terrain but there are still extensive patches without any plant cover (Fig. 4). The sand would be prone to dry very quickly and, even without possible inherent nutrients from the sediments that would have been present at the bottom of the lake, the deposits would not be ideal sites for many plants to grow.

Fig. 3. Beach Grass on dunes, Burlington Beach, 2021 and Fig. 4. Dunes at Fairy, 2021

A quick inventory of the area in 2021 provided a list of at least 51 vascular plant species. No doubt a more-detailed search would have added to the list; however, the list does give an indication of the main types present. Overall, the list has one fern, seven graminoids, thirty-

three herbs, three shrubs and seven tree species. Of this list, 24 species, or just under half, are alien species. Many species on the list are represented by only a few plants or a small colony of an individual species. Most species are those well-adapted to growing on dry sites. The higher and drier elevations on the site have relatively few species present whereas some of the lower sites near the lakeshore have a greater diversity of species, likely owing to the greater supply of water there. As well, the edge areas on the east and southwest parts of the deposit have more species growing on a more-shallow deposit of sand. The edges of the deposit are close to some stands of remnant woodlands and these appear to be gradually encroaching onto the thinner sand deposit. The dominant tree species is Balsam Poplar (*Populus balsamifera*) which seems to spread via underground roots. Four of the seven tree species are not native. These include the highly invasive Glossy Buckthorn (*Frangula alnus)* and Norway Maple (*Acer platanoides*), the less-invasive Weeping Birch (*Betula pendula*), and the unexpected Lombardy Poplar (*Populus nigra* var. *italica*). A dominant species on the wettest site is the highly-invasive Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*).

During a visit to the Fairy Lake dunes in June 2004, it was noted that a fire had occurred there shortly before the visit. No fresh growth had taken place at the time but it would be very likely that new growth would have developed shortly after that. While the consequences of the fire were not checked later, the fact that fire had occurred at all suggests that it is yet another factor in the development of any dune ecosystem at the site. It could possibly eliminate or reduce certain non-native flora. As well, it could provide a positive selection towards species adapted to occasional fires.

Fig. 5. Burned site at Fairy Lake, June 2004

It would be an interesting study if someone were to complete a more-formal investigation of the vegetation on site. This would include a better definition of the boundaries and depths of the sand deposits, a more-complete inventory of the plant species present, and a quantification of the plants present. Although we could do this fairly easily at present, we have missed the opportunity to know what all species were present at about 25 years after the deposits were laid down. We can be fairly sure that no plants were present when the deposits were first created. It would be very interesting to see what additional species are added to (or lost from) the list in 25 or 50-years time. It seems probable that further changes in the flora on the site will happen over time on this man-made dune-like system.

**References Cited:**

AECOM. 2009. Fairy Lake Water Quality Study. Report prepared for the Town of Halton Hills by AECOM. 63 pp plus appendices.

Axon, B.K. 1989. A rehabilitation plan for the Burlington Beach Waterfront Park. Halton Region. Unpublished manuscript prepared for the Department of Environment and Resource Studies, University of Waterloo.

EDA Collaborative, Inc. 2013. Burlington Beach Regional Waterfront Park Master Plan. Comprehensive Background Report. Report prepared for Region of Halton, City of Burlington, and Conservation Halton. 162 pp. plus appendices.

# Translation of a Menominee First Nation Cradle Song from *Runes of the North*

by Sigurd F. Olson

*Ne pa Ko my sleepy head,*
*In your basswood cradle bed*
*Down cushioned gently swaying*
*To the song the winds are playing,*
*Homeward whippoorwills are winging*
*Hear them now their sleep song singing –*
*Sleep little warrior sleep.*

*Ne pa Ko my sleepy head,*
*The golden bees have gone to bed,*
*Silver, grey-green dragon flies*
*Close their luminous great eyes,*
*Wings of silken moths are still,*
*Pine birds call you from the hill –*
*Sleep little warrior sleep.*

*Ne pa Ko, my sleepy head,*
*Tiger lily's gone to bed*
*Where the heron tall and stately*
*Watches for the moon sedately,*
*In the swamp the marsh hen drowses*
*Near the muskrat's winter houses –*
*Sleep little warrior sleep.*

*Winds are whispering in the balsams,*
*Singing softly in the cedars,*
*Crooning through the glistening birches –*
*Sleep, little warrior sleep.*

# Spring Things Photo Quiz

## Photos by: Don Scallen

Answers on page 23

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

Cartoon by Dave Coverly at speedbump.com

## Answers to the Photo Quiz on page 22

1. Compton Tortoiseshell
2. Eastern Gartersnake
3. Fairy Shrimp female carrying eggs
4. Red Elderberry flower buds emerging
5. Spicebush in bloom
6. Skunk Cabbage
7. Song Sparrow
8. Spotted Turtle
9. Spring Beauty (Carolina form)
10. Spring Peeper

# Halton/North Peel Naturalist Club Membership Form

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ Province: _____ Postal Code: _____

Telephone: _____

Email: _____

Application Type: New_____ Renewal_____

Membership Type: Single ($30)____ Family ($40)____

If "Family Membership", please list additional names:

_____

The membership year is September 1 to August 31. Renewals are due in September. For new members who join after April 1, the fees are applied to the following year's membership.

**********

Participation in our outings involves walking or hiking on various trails. By voluntarily participating, you assume full responsibility for all risks of personal injury. Make sure that any outing you choose to participate in is within your fitness level. Please wear appropriate clothing and footwear.

**********

Please fill out this form and bring it to our next indoor meeting, or mail it along with a cheque payable to Halton/North Peel Naturalist club to:

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

# Halton/North Peel Naturalist Club

**Box 115, Georgetown, Ontario L7G 4T1**

Charity Registration number 869778761RR0001

www.hnpnc.com

## Board of Directors

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Member at Large: Andy Kovacs
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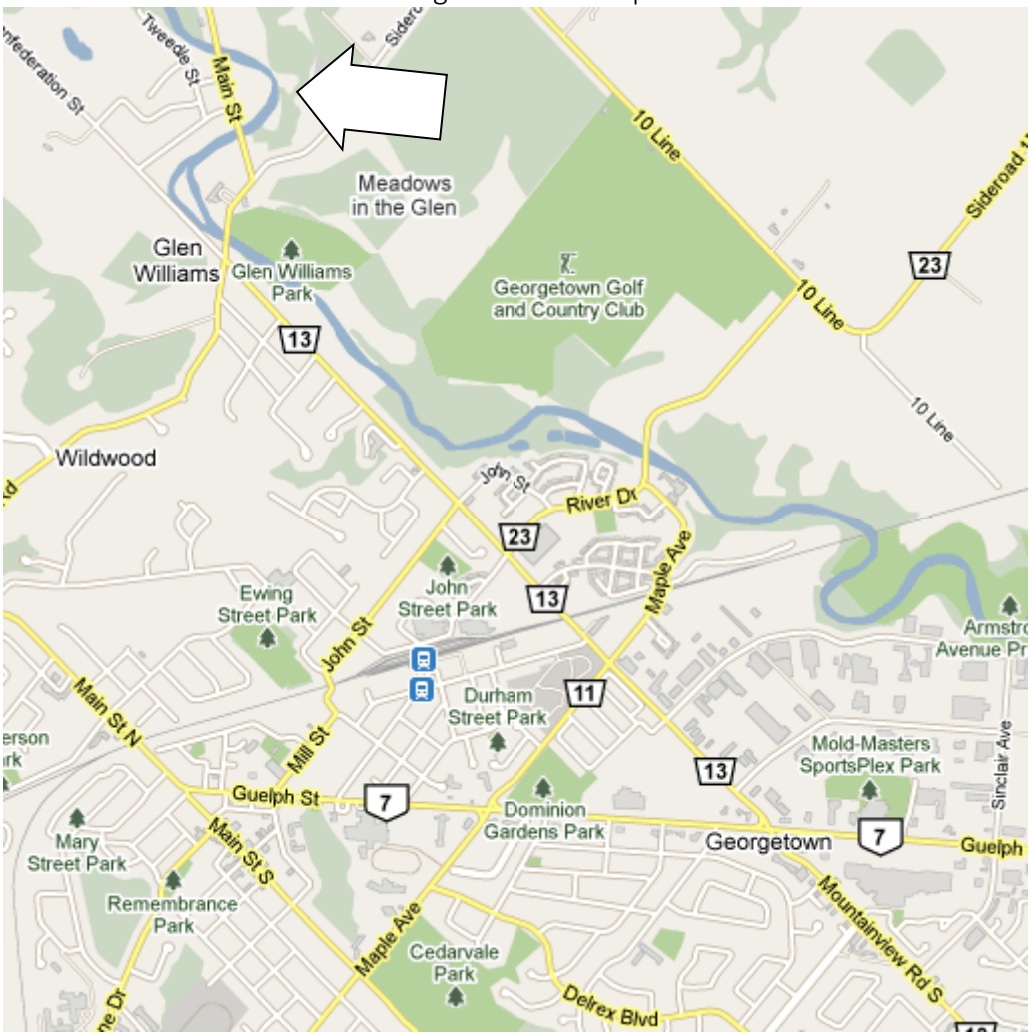
Roving: William McIlveen
Hardy Property Steward: Helen Pinchen
Crozier Property Steward: John & Margaret Beaudette

Meetings are currently held via ZOOM.

When in person meetings resume, they will once again be held at
St Alban's Church at 537 Main St, Glen Williams
Meetings start at 7:30 p.m.