

# Bring Back the Don

SEASONAL UPDATE

FALL 2005

## In This Issue:

Task Force launches ambitious Waste Water Management Project **Cover Page**

Volunteers at the Root of New Growth at Beechwood Wetland **Page 2**

At Issue **Page 2**

Calendar of Events **Pages 3 & 4**

Donate to the Don! **Page 3**

Reconnecting with the Don - Balancing the Valley: Don River Retrospective at Todmorden Mills Heritage Museum **Page 4**

Species Profile: Green Heron **Page 5**

Thanks to our Funding Partners **Page 6**

## Task Force launches ambitious Waste Water Management Project

Aynsley Morris, Task Force Vice-chair

Waste water is the biggest problem facing the Don River today, and John Wilson, Chair of the Task Force to Bring Back the Don, wants to do something about it. "I hate the fact that my family and I contribute to this problem every time it rains," he says. "I just don't want to feel guilty about flushing my toilet during a storm."

When rain falls or snow melts in Toronto, much of this water runs off roads, parking lot surfaces, rooftops and sidewalks into drain pipes and storm water grates. Along the way, it gathers an assortment of pollutants: pesticides, pet waste, automobile oil, and road salt, among others. In some cases, this storm water mixes with household wastewater in combined sewers, overloading our sewage treatment plants and sending untreated water into our rivers, streams and Lake Ontario.



Even front yards can act as a sponge during a storm. Which one of these is better?  
Photos by Janice Palmer



In 2003, the City of Toronto adopted the Wet Weather Flow Management Master Plan - now referred to as the Water Pollution Solution (WPS) - to reduce and ultimately eliminate these and other adverse effects of wet weather flow. The Task Force to Bring Back the Don recently received a grant through the City of Toronto's Community Program for Stormwater Management to help implement the WPS. The Task Force's project, entitled "Understanding the Role of Urban Wetlands in Wet Weather Flow Management", combines on-the-ground habitat restoration activities at wetland sites throughout the Don Valley with educational workshops on how citizens can help manage wet weather flow and protect our waterways. The first combined planting and education workshop will be held on Saturday, October 1st at the historic Todmorden Mills.

"Along with providing essential habitat for wildlife, wetlands act as a filter to improve the quality of the water we use every day," explains John. "They act like

giant sponges, slowing the flow of surface water, reducing the impact of flooding and recharging groundwater supplies. By rehabilitating wetlands along the Don, we can make a difference to the quality of water that inevitably flows into the river in the spring and during rain storms." *Continued on page five*



# Volunteers at the Root of New Growth at Beechwood Wetland

Marni Sims, Task Force and Stewardship Volunteer

In February 2003, a major undertaking began at Beechwood Wetland. The site was home to several mature native trees including a 150 year old Bur Oak (*Quercus macrocarpa*) and a grove of Staghorn Sumac (*Rhus typhina*). A steady flow of water from groundwater seepage and surface runoff kept the wetland moist throughout the year. However, years of disturbance from the adjacent Don Valley Parkway, hydro corridors and other industrial activities had allowed non-native invasive species to dominate the area, choking out most of the native plant populations. The Task Force to Bring Back the Don, the City of Toronto, the Federation of Ontario Naturalists and the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority all agreed the area had potential for significant terrestrial and aquatic habitat improvement. In a joint decision, the site was chosen as the newest location for habitat restoration in the Don Valley.



Volunteers planting at the Beechwood Wetland

During the winter, half a metre of topsoil was excavated from the site to eradicate the populations of invasive plants and their seed beds and new topographic features were added to the wetland area. By the Beechwood Wetland's grand re-opening in October, 2004, over 6,000 native trees, shrubs and herbaceous wetland plants had been planted around the site, thanks to the efforts of hundreds of volunteers.

Luckily, the involvement of volunteers did not end then. 2005 marks the third year that a team from the City's community stewardship program has monitored the site on a weekly basis and kept the returning invasives at bay. Throughout the summer, dedicated stewards spend hours cutting back the persistent, bamboo-like Japanese Knotweed (*Polygonum cuspidatum*) in the upland areas of the site and controlling other non-native plants like Dog-strangling Vine (*Cynanchum rossicum*) to let the sun reach newly planted, native species. The stewards also monitor the level and quality of water in the wetland, and keep an eye out for interesting new species that have made Beechwood Wetland their home. Other volunteers also continue to participate in planting events each year, to add to the diversity of the site and replace plants that have not survived the winter. *Continued on page six*

## At Issue

John Wilson, Task Force Chair

There's an American Kestrel nest in a tree on Lewis Street, near Broadview and Queen. The Kestrel is a falcon, the smaller cousin of the Peregrine. Naturalist John James Audubon called it the Sparrow Hawk - for good reason.



American Kestrel by John James Audubon

It preys on songbirds, as well as other small creatures.

During Spring migration this year, the Kestrel pair could be seen hunting among the railways, industrial yards and abandoned properties near the Keating Channel. The hunting was obviously good - Mr. and Mrs. Kestrel found a "fixer-upper" tree cavity on Lewis Street and settled in.

Bring Back the Don expects more stories like this from the Don Mouth Naturalization and Port Lands Flood Protection project. We're aiming for more natural cover, more birds and more fish habitat. We want salmon, pike, even sturgeon, one day, moving upstream through the Lower Don Narrows.

We're not alone. The municipal, provincial and federal governments have endorsed this project as one of four "priority projects" for the Toronto Waterfront Revitalization Corporation. The TWRC has asked the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority to conduct the Environmental Assessment. The project is underway!

On June 23 the first public meeting of the Environmental Assessment took place at Metro Hall. About 50 participants came out to share their visions for a new Don River Mouth. There will be more opportunities over the next two years to participate in creating a natural mouth for the Don. Check out the web site - [www.trca.on.ca/water\\_protection/ea\\_projects](http://www.trca.on.ca/water_protection/ea_projects) - and contact Ken Dion at the Conservation Authority to be placed on the distribution list. Ken's at 416-661-6600 ext. 5230 or at [kdion@trca.on.ca](mailto:kdion@trca.on.ca)



# UPCOMING EVENTS

Events happen rain or shine, and usually last a couple of hours.

For more information about any of our events, please call 416-392-0401.

## Plantings

Plantings are fun for families, individuals and groups. We provide shovels, gloves and other tools. You just need to wear sturdy shoes and clothing that can withstand a little dirt. Please contact Trisha at 416-338-5053, or e-mail tkaplan@toronto.ca for more information or to register a group of ten or more.

High school students are welcome to gain volunteer hours with the Task Force to Bring Back the Don at our weekend planting events. Please see the schedule below and contact Trisha if you have any questions.

### **Wet Weather Flow Management Workshops and Planting at Todmorden Mills**

**Saturday, October 1, 12:30 p.m.**

Learn about "lot level" wet weather flow management and join in a planting event at the Todmorden Mills Wildflower Preserve. See page one for information about this project. The hands-on workshops will take place at the Todmorden Mills, at the foot of Pottery Road. Please register in advance at donworkshops@hotmail.com. or phone 416-691-1614. Day-of participants will also be welcome.

### **Crothers' Woods Planting**

**Sunday, Sept. 25, 10 a.m. - noon**

Come plant trees and shrubs in Crothers' Woods, located near Millwood and Moore. We will meet at the far end of the Loblaws parking lot, located on Redway Road, which runs south off Millwood, east of Moore Ave.

### **Beltline Pond Planting**

**Sunday, Oct. 16, 10 a.m. - noon**

The Beltline Pond is located in Moore Park Ravine, on the Beltline Trail. Access is from the trail head on the south side of Moore Ave., west of Bayview across from the cemetery. The site is also accessible by walking north on the Beltline Trail from the Don Valley Brick Works.

### **Don Valley Brick Works Tree and Shrub Planting**

**Saturday, Oct. 22, 10 a.m. - noon**

Join us at the Don Valley Brick Works to plant trees and shrubs. The Brick Works is located on the west side of Bayview Ave., south of Pottery Road. The planting event will take place in the park, behind the buildings.

## Tours

### **Impact of Invasives\***

**Tuesday, Sept. 13, 1 - 2:30 p.m.**

Join Miriam Webster of the Todmorden Mills Wildflower Preserve, and explore the Wildflower Preserve to learn about the impact of invasive species and the importance of stewardship activities at various sites along the Don. This hike will start and end at the bridge to the parking lot at the back of Todmorden Mills at the foot of Pottery Road. This hike is a joint endeavour with the Toronto Field Naturalists.

### **Restoration Activities in the Don Valley\***

**Saturday, Sept. 24, 10 a.m. - noon**

Join Bryan Bertie and Martin German to visit and discuss the ecological significance of various areas along the Don and the challenges that need to be addressed. Discover how your actions can help improve the Don. This hike will start and end at the bridge to the parking lot at the back of Todmorden Mills at the foot of Pottery Road.

### **Sherwood Park and Burke Brook**

**Sunday, Oct. 2, 2 - 4 p.m.**

Explore part of Burke Brook, a tributary of the Don River and observe whether or not an urban ravine park can be loved too much. This walk will start and end at the main entrance to Sherwood Park, from Sherwood Avenue (limited parking available), 200 metres east of Mt. Pleasant Rd.

### **Hike a Bikers' Dream**

**Saturday, Oct. 8, 10 a.m.**

Hike the trail that mountain bikers consider one of the best in southern Ontario. Meet at the Broadview subway station. This 14 km hike will be at a moderate pace with some steep sections. Wear sturdy shoes. Bring a lunch and TTC fare. The walk will continue past Pottery Road to E. T. Seton Park. There will be a pub stop after a bus ride. No dogs, please. This is a joint hike with the Toronto Bruce Trail Club.

### **Preserving the Integrity of the Don Valley\***

**Sunday, Oct. 16, 10 a.m. - noon**

Explore a natural area at the edge of the valley and discuss issues related to the valley's health and integrity. This hike will start and end at the bridge to the parking lot at the back of Todmorden Mills at the foot of Pottery Road.

### **The Forks of the Don**

**Sunday, Oct. 23, 10:30 a.m. - 1 p.m.**

Explore where the West and East Don Rivers join Taylor-Massey Creek to form the Lower Don River. Discover many natural treasures and how they are interconnected with each other and our daily lives. This hike will start and end at the entrance to Coxwell Ravine Park (limited street parking) near Coxwell Ave. and O'Connor Drive. *Note:* this hike requires climbing a long stairway.

*\* Complement these walks with a visit to "Reconnecting the Don: Balancing the Valley" on display at Todmorden Mills. The museum opens at noon on weekends in the fall. See page four for more details.*

## Donate to the Don



The Green Herons, White-tailed Deer, Cardinals and Kingfishers that live in the Don Valley need your support to bring back a clean, green, accessible Don River.

By making a donation to the Task Force to Bring Back the Don, you're helping to take direct action to protect habitat for all the species that live in Canada's most urban watershed.

Your support will make a difference. Make a donation today! Please fill out the coupon on the reverse side.

Donors will be issued a receipt for income tax purposes.



## UPCOMING EVENTS

Events happen rain or shine, and usually last a couple of hours.

For more information about any of our events, please call 416-392-0401.

## Other Events In the Don

### Upper Don, Humber, Rouge Highland and Toronto Island Planting Events

Please visit [www.toronto.ca/greentoronto](http://www.toronto.ca/greentoronto)

### Riverale Farm Events

Please visit [www.friendsofriverdalefarm.com](http://www.friendsofriverdalefarm.com)

### Many other groups host community activities in and around the Don Watershed:

### Friends of the Don East

Please visit [www.fode.ca](http://www.fode.ca) for a listing of FODE events or call 416-657-2800.

### Lost Rivers 10th Anniversary Mud Creek Marathon Walks:

**Sunday, September 18, 2005, 10 a.m.**

**Sunday, September 25, 2005, 10 a.m.**

**Sunday, September 25, 2005, 1:30 p.m.**

For more information on these and other walks, please visit [www.lostrivers.ca](http://www.lostrivers.ca)

### Volunteer for Nature

Please visit [www.ontarionature.org](http://www.ontarionature.org)

### RiverSides Water in the City Walk

Please call 416-868-1983 or e-mail [waterwalk@riversides.org](mailto:waterwalk@riversides.org) for information and to register for their fall walk.

## Reconnecting with the Don - Balancing the Valley: Don River Retrospective at Todmorden Mills Heritage Museum

If you missed it the first time or want to see it again for the second, third, fifth or tenth time, here's your chance! The Task Force to Bring Back the Don is remounting its retrospective "Reconnecting with the Don – Balancing the Valley" at the Todmorden Mills Heritage Museum. From August 13 to December 23, 2005, you can explore the history of the Don River and Toronto's changing attitudes towards the Don Valley over the last century. Todmorden Mills is at the site of the first grist mill in Toronto and offers a great background to the Task Force's exhibit.

Join us also at Todmorden Mills on October 1 at 12:30 p.m. for the first of the Task Force's education workshops "Understanding the Role of Urban Wetlands in Wet Weather Flow Management".

See "Project", on page 5, for directions to the Museum. The museum is closed Mondays and, starting October 1, is open Tuesday to Friday, 10 a.m. - 4 p.m. and weekends, noon - 4 p.m.



Riverdale Park, 1923, John Ryan, Photographer; Collection of the Toronto Public Library, TRL Canadian Historical Picture Collection, T32447.

## Bring Back the Don

*Yes, I want to help Bring Back the Don.*

My donation is:  \$200  \$100  \$50  \$25  Other \$ .....

I have enclosed a cheque payable to: "City of Toronto, Task Force to Bring Back the Don"

Please charge my:  VISA  Mastercard

Number: ..... Expiry Date: .....

Signature: .....

Name: ..... Telephone: .....

Address: .....

City, Province: ..... Postal Code: .....

*Thank you for your support*

## Our new look...

The future of the Don Valley is a little brighter these days, so we thought we would reflect that in this newsletter. Designer Lynn Madigin chose the rust colour to represent Fall in the Don; another colour will be chosen for the Spring newsletter, to better differentiate the two. By using less-expensive recycled white paper, we can print in two colours and still reduce printing costs.

## Species Profile: Green Heron

*Butorides virescens*

Marni Sims, Task Force and Stewardship Volunteer

Though most of us have seen a Great Blue Heron – either standing on a shoreline or wings spread in flight – its smaller cousin, the Green Heron, is a rarer sight, especially in the heart of Canada’s largest city. But that’s exactly what a community stewardship team discovered one June evening during



Green Heron at the Riverdale Farm Lower Pond.  
Photo taken by the Riverdale Farm Ponds Stewardship Team.

their weekly outing at Riverdale Farm. While looking into the treetops, the group spotted the heron’s nest of sticks, complete with mother and young peering back at them.

It’s not surprising this small, stocky wading bird had chosen the ponds of Riverdale Farm as its breeding location; because of its varied diet of invertebrates, insects, small fish and frogs, it is able to survive in the vicinity of smaller ponds

and marshes. It is also one of the few birds that uses bait to attract its prey, dropping insects and other small objects onto water surfaces to attract fish from below.

The Green Heron is dark in colour, with long, yellowish legs and a long, dark pointed bill. It is named for the green-black crown on its head and is about the size of a crow. Though this is not the first sighting of a Green Heron in the Don Valley, it is a positive sign that the health of the Don River and the surrounding environment is improving. With continued restoration and stewardship efforts, we will surely see a wider variety of species along the Don.



Monarch Butterfly on thistle in the Nordheimer Ravine.  
Photo by Susan Aaron.

## Project

*Continued from page one*

Also essential to improving the Don’s water quality is reducing the amount of runoff that flows into the river in the first place. This is where local homeowners can make a big difference, by implementing “lot-level” improvements in their own backyards. The Task Force’s hands-on workshops will demonstrate some examples, from permeable driveway paving, to downspout disconnection, to backyard swale creation and native plant gardening.

On Saturday, October 1<sup>st</sup>, beginning at 12:30 p.m., you’ll have the opportunity to participate in four wet weather flow mini-workshops and join in a planting event at the Todmorden Mills Wildflower Preserve. If you plan to attend this event, please register in advance at [donworkshops@hotmail.com](mailto:donworkshops@hotmail.com), or phone 416-691-1614. Day-of participants will also be welcome.

John hopes that with the implementation of the WPS, he and his family can begin to flush the toilet guilt-free. “I invite everyone to come out and see how easy it is to make a difference to the health of the Don River and all of Toronto’s watersheds.”

*The Todmorden Mills Museum is located on Pottery Road, just west of Broadview Avenue at Mortimer Avenue. To access the site from the Don Valley Parkway, take the Bayview/Bloor Street exit, then follow Bayview Avenue north to Pottery Road. By TTC, from the Broadview subway station, take any northbound bus to Pottery Road. The Museum is a short walk down Pottery Road, in the Don Valley.*

For future workshop dates, please check our web site at [www.toronto.ca/don](http://www.toronto.ca/don) or phone 416-392-0401.



## Wetlands are the Best Lands

Check out the new “Wetland restoration” page at [www.toronto.ca/don/wetlands.htm](http://www.toronto.ca/don/wetlands.htm) for information and photos of wetland restoration projects in the Don.



Late day sun shines on the Beechwood Wetland. Photo by John Routh.

## Volunteers

*Continued from page two*

As we know, wetlands perform an important role in the maintenance of a healthy natural environment, capturing wet weather flow and filtering it before it enters the Don River and, ultimately, Lake Ontario. Wetlands like Beechwood also provide habitat for a range of wildlife, from dragonflies to white-tailed deer. The volunteers who have planted, weeded, watered and monitored at the site over the past three years should feel very proud of their role in rejuvenating this wetland habitat and contributing to the restoration of a clean, green Don River. We couldn't have done it without you.

*The Task Force to Bring Back the Don and the City of Toronto are grateful for the support of the TD Friends of the Environment Foundation, who recently committed funds for the continued enhancement of the Beechwood Wetland site, as well as the many other donors who have made this restoration work possible.*



Turtlehead above, and Skunk Cabbage below, in Nordheimer Ravine. Photos by John Routh



## THANKS TO OUR 2005 FUNDING PARTNERS!

So far this year, funding for Task Force projects has come from: City of Toronto (including a grant from the Community Program for Stormwater Management), Toronto and Region Conservation, Environment Canada - EcoAction Community Funding Program, Nature Canada, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, Unilever Canada, Ontario Nature, patrons of the Mill St. Brewery, Helen McCrea Peacock Foundation at the Toronto Community Foundation, Enwave, Green Toronto Awards Fund at the Toronto Community Foundation, TD Friends of the Environment Foundation, and many others.

The Task Force also thanks the many individuals, corporations, school groups and community organizations that have participated in our projects and have contributed to “bringing back” the Don watershed.

## DOING RESEARCH ON THE DON?

See the bibliography on our web site, [www.toronto.ca/don](http://www.toronto.ca/don). The Toronto Public Library has a collection of related materials at its Urban Affairs Branch in Metro Hall, 55 John Street (at King). Call 416-397-7241 for more information.

## BRING BACK THE DON

The Task Force to Bring Back the Don is a 23-member citizens' group sponsored by the City of Toronto that works to “bring back” a clean, green and accessible Don River watershed.

The Task Force to Bring Back the Don  
Metro Hall  
23rd Floor  
55 John Street  
Toronto ON M5V 3C6

Bring Back the Don events are also posted on the City of Toronto's web site: [www.toronto.ca/don](http://www.toronto.ca/don)

