

Bring Back the Don

SEASONAL UPDATE

SPRING UPDATE 2002



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Wetlands in the Don Valley:

Introducing the new Riverdale Park East Wetland

When thinking of Bring Back the Don, the first thing that pops into mind is tree planting, tree planting and more tree planting. However, wetland creation and enhancement has been an equally important part of our work. Chester Springs Marsh, created in 1996, was one of the Don Valley's first restored wetlands. Since then, several large and small-scale habitat wetlands have been developed or enhanced.



Cattails at the Don Valley Brick Works

Because of extensive urbanization, most of the wetlands in the Don Watershed have disappeared. Restoration efforts are needed to help 'bring back' wetlands. This year, a new habitat wetland is in the works at Riverdale Park East at the base of the south facing slope, below one of Bring Back the Don's first tree planting sites! Water for the wetland will come from rainfall, runoff from the slope and the playing field to the south. In the spring and fall of 2002, volunteers will plant the pond edge and surrounding area with a variety of hardy, native wildflowers, sedges, grasses, trees and shrubs. This new wetland will provide enhanced wildlife habitat and an educational resource for those wanting to learn about nature in our city.

Wetlands – permanently or seasonally waterlogged areas – are amazing ecosystems, capable of supporting a wide variety of animals and plants. At the Riverdale Farm Ponds, turtles hibernate in the mud over winter, herons perch on tree stumps to fish, and dragonflies spend their larval stage in ponds as aquatic invertebrates.

In addition, wetlands filter and cleanse water. Water entering a wetland is slowed, allowing sediment to settle out. The ponds at the Don Valley Brick Works filter water diverted from Mud Creek, a buried stream that flows through the ponds before entering the river.

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Brick Works Naturalization Update 2001

The Don Valley Brick Works Park officially opened on October 19, 1997 on the site of a century old brick making and quarry complex. A series of wetland environments have been constructed that provide habitat for aquatic vegetation and wildlife, and naturally filter the water from Mud Creek (a buried creek) before it flows into the Don River and out to Lake Ontario.

The Brick Works is one of the most successful Don Watershed projects, from a wildlife viewpoint. Green frogs are abundant and are successfully breeding at the site. Two snapping turtles were observed laying eggs on June 12th (see Turtle Diary on Page 5). Black-crowned night heron, green heron, great blue heron, American goldfinch, American robin, barn swallow, chimney swift, common grackle, common nighthawk, kestrel, killdeer, mourning dove, red-winged blackbird, song sparrow, tree swallow, Canada geese and mallard duck are resident or foraging bird species. Regular park visitors watched as two families of mallard ducklings transformed into young ducks. A diversity of fish can be observed in the different ponds. Other wildlife species include beaver, muskrat, rabbit, meadow vole, bats, brown and garter snakes, coyote and fox.

Water chemistry tests revealed exceptionally high levels of dissolved oxygen for water in the Don and likely account for the diversity of fish species. The abundance of green frogs also indicates favourable water quality.

As elsewhere in the watershed, very aggressive non-native species, including purple loosestrife, Asiatic bittersweet and dames rocket make the establishment of native herbaceous vegetation very difficult. Fortunately, native species are also plentiful and much of the planted vegetation is thriving. In particular, arrowheads, water lilies, water plantain, bulrushes, cattails, blue vervain, cup plant, black eyed Susans, asters, goldenrods, common milkweed, Joe Pye weed, swamp milkweed, and ferns are doing exceptionally well.

A nature interpretation tour will be held at the Don Valley Brick Works on July 11. See Events Page 3 for more details, or, if you have questions specifically about the tour, call 416-392-1948.



Brick Works Quarry Ponds, photo by Krzysztof Duniec

Issues Update

John Wilson, Task Force Chair

As I write, the new Toronto Waterfront Revitalization Corporation (TWRC) is organizing itself to conduct the Environmental Assessment of Naturalization and Flood Protection of the Mouth of the Don - and other waterfront projects. Bring Back the Don is ready to participate when this begins, and we urge you to become involved in the public consultations.

Ravine protection must be strengthened and harmonized across the new city of Toronto. That was our message to Council in support of the preparation of a new harmonized city-wide ravine control by-law by this September. The current uneven playing field increases the risk that ravines will be further degraded and fragmented.

Spreading road salt and removing snow to snow dumps can help people move around in the winter, but with negative effects on the Don. Recently, we supported the Environment Minister's initiative to declare road salts toxic under federal law and commended Toronto for developing a plan to reduce its release of road salts. As for private use, we asked both the federal government and the City to inform the public about impacts and alternatives. More information: Environment Canada www.ec.gc.ca and RiverSides www.h2inf0.org.

The City is preparing a report to council on new options for snow disposal. We are urging the City to set in place a process for eliminating the two snow dumps in the Don Valley. Anyone who has seen them after a winter of heavy snow knows that they are a blight upon the Don.



Bring Back the Don

UPCOMING EVENTS

Events happen rain or shine, and usually last a couple of hours. For more information about any of our events, please call 414-392-0401.

Planting Events

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.

Lower Don Trail

Saturday, April 20, 10 a.m.

Tree and shrub planting along the Lower Don Trail north of the Riverdale footbridge. *Take the stairs down from the footbridge and follow the signs.*

Riverdale Park East Wetland

Sunday, April 28, 10 a.m.

Tree and shrub planting at the new wetland in Riverdale Park East. *Located on the west side of Broadview Avenue, just north of Gerrard Street East. Meet at the base of the south facing slope.*

Don Valley Brick Works

Saturday, May 4, 10 a.m.

Tree and shrub planting in the park behind the buildings. *Located on the west side of Bayview Ave, just south of Pottery Road. Look for the brick buildings. Lots of parking available.*

Nordheimer Ravine

Saturday, May 11, 10 a.m.

Tree and shrub planting within Nordheimer Ravine, between Spadina Road and Boulton Drive. *Access is from St. Clair West subway station through Sir Winston Churchill Park, or into the ravine from Boulton Drive.*

Don Narrows Special Event

Saturday, May 25, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.

Learn about our Greening the Narrows initiative at the St. Matthews Lawn Bowling Club as part of 'Doors Open', Toronto's open house for architectural heritage. Planting of native shrubs around the historical building will be at 10 a.m. *Located on the north side of Gerrard Street, just east of the Don River.*

Cedarvale Ravine

Sunday, May 26, 10 a.m.

Tree and shrub planting in Cedarvale Ravine, near Bathurst Street and St. Clair Avenue. *Call Keri at 416-392-0373 for the meeting location.*

Craigleigh Gardens

Saturday, June 1, 10 a.m.

Tree and shrub planting at the top of the forested Park Drive Ravine slope. *Located in Rosedale, north of the Castle Frank subway station, near South Drive. and Glen Road.*



Riverdale Park East Wetland

Thursday, June 13, 7-9 p.m. and Sunday, June 23, 10 a.m.

Help plant wildflowers, sedges, shrubs and other wetland plants at the new wetland in Riverdale Park East. A limited supply of rubber boots will be available on site. *Located on the west side of Broadview Ave, just north of Gerrard St. East. Meet at the wetland at the base of the south-facing slope.*



Kurt Wong planting a tree at Chester Springs Marsh

Tours of the Valley

Although registration is not necessary, please call to let us know if you are interested in attending. Call 416-392-0401.

17th Annual Don River Walk with Dalton Shipway

Saturday, May 11, noon-2 p.m.

Topic: The Mouth of the Don and Ecosystem Performance Criteria (E.P.C.) *Meet at Irish Rovers Pub parking lot.*

Explore the Don Narrows

Saturday, June 8, 10 a.m.

Learn about the cultural and natural heritage of the Don Narrows, the channelized section of the river between Gerrard and Queen Streets. Explore the opportunities for reclaiming this challenging section and linking it to the waterfront. *Meet in front of Riverdale Public Library, northwest corner of Gerrard Street and Broadview Avenue.*

Nature Interpretation Tour of the Don Valley Brick Works

Thursday, July 11, 7 p.m.

Learn about the different wildlife habitats and ecosystem functions at the Don Valley Brick Works. *The Don Valley Brick Works is located at 550 Bayview Ave., between the Bloor Viaduct and Pottery Road. Meet at the Brick Works parking lot at 7 p.m., or, if coming by TTC, meet at Castle Frank station at 6:30 p.m. for a guided walk to the site.*

Restoration Sites in the Lower Don

Thursday, August 15, 6:30 p.m.

Points of interest will include the new Riverdale Park East wetland, the effects of storm water on the river, riparian naturalization sites, and wildlife observations. *Meet outside Broadview subway station for a tour of key Lower Don habitat restoration sites.*



Bring Back the Don

UPCOMING EVENTS

Events happen rain or shine, and usually last a couple of hours. For more information about any of our events, please call 414-392-0401.

Other People's Events

Water in the City Walks with RiverSides Stewardship Alliance on the following Sundays:

April 28, June 23, July 28 and September 29, 10 a.m.

Meet outside the Chester Subway Station. Call Riversides at 416-392-1983 to register.

Annual Paddle the Don event with the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority.

Sunday, May 5, 9 a.m.-noon

Starts at E. T. Seton Park. Call 416-661-6600 ext. 5397 to register.

For more information, check out www.trca.on.ca or call Amy at 416-661-6600 ext. 5283.

Festive Earth Society Living Rivers Festival

Sunday, May 5, 1-5 p.m.

An eco-celebration at the Don Valley Brick Works. See www.festiveearth.com for more details. The Don Valley Brick Works is located on the west side of Bayview Avenue, just south of Pottery Road.

Lost Rivers Walk - Lower Yellow Creek

Sunday, May 19, 2 p.m.

Trace Yellow Creek through Mount Pleasant Cemetery, the Vale of Avoca and Rosedale. *Meet at Davisville subway station.* For other Lost Rivers Walks dates contact Peter Hare at 416-482-3032 or pjhare@infinity.net

Milne Hollow Shrub and Wildflower Planting

Saturday, June 1, 10 a.m.-noon

Plant shrubs and wildflowers with the City of Toronto in partnership with Friends of the Don East and Bring Back the Don.

Spadina Quay Wetland Planting Events **Saturday, June 8, 10 a.m.-noon**

Help plant wetland plants and shrubs and take a guided tour of the project site at the base of Spadina at Queen's Quay. Contact Eduard Sousa at 416-338-5053 for more information.

Friends of the Don East Events

Saturday, May 4, 10 a.m. - Warden

Woods Litter Clean Up

Saturday, May 25, 10 a.m. - The Geology

and History of the Toronto Brick Works

Saturday, June 15, A guided walk of

Crothers Woods

Please call 416-410-7175 for more information or check www.web.ca/~fode.

Todmorden Mills Pond Study Days

Sunday, June 9 and

Sunday, June 23

Contact Angela at 416-396-2819 for more information.



LEAF (Local Enhancement and Appreciation of Forests) offers native tree plantings in backyards to Toronto homeowners at a subsidized price. Contact LEAF at 416-413-9244, or visit www.leafortoronto.org for more information.

Adopt a Site in the Don Valley

Participate in the Community Stewardship Program!

The Community Stewardship Program involves volunteers in on-going maintenance and monitoring activities at a naturalization site of their choice.

Participants are trained and then work in a team that is guided by a more experienced volunteer (team leader). Each team visits their site twice a month throughout the spring and summer, and once or twice in the fall.

Duties consist of weeding invasive, non-native plant species, watering planted vegetation, collecting litter, maintaining bird boxes, building habitat brush bundles, and monitoring specific conditions of the site. Monitoring activities may include the monitoring of water chemistry, water levels, and benthic invertebrates, as well as surveys of birds, amphibians, and vegetation.

Stewardship teams will be working at Binscarth Swamp, Chester Springs Marsh, the Don Valley Brick Works, Glen Edyth and Roycroft Wetlands, the Lower Don Trail, Milne Hollow, Riverdale Farm Lower Pond, Riverdale Park East Wetland, and the Yellow Creek Butterfly Meadow.

If you are interested in participating, please call Katie MacDonald at 416 392-1948 or e-mail

driver@city.toronto.on.ca.



Building brush bundles

Turtle Diary

John Routh, Task Force Member



The summer of 2001 provided me with a memorable experience at the Brick Works. It began one day in June when we discovered a large snapping turtle busily depositing eggs into a mulch pile!

As it turned out, two turtles were laying eggs that day at the Brick Works. At first we tried to protect the nesting areas with fencing, but it was quickly knocked down. Young cyclists apparently used the mulch piles as a jumping ramp. All we could do was watch and wait.

Snapping turtles (*Chelydra serpentina*) have an average incubation time of 60-75 days. After a long hot summer, there were no signs of activity. Here is what happened next:

I started with the mulch pile nearest the ponds. The pile was hard and dry, almost like particleboard. After a few minutes of digging I came up with a broken eggshell, then I uncovered the clutch of eggs. I picked up an unhatched turtle that appeared dead and brushed off the mulch. Soon I noticed some movement so I dipped it in the pond, then set it beside the water's edge and watched it. After a couple of minutes it unfolded its tail, extended its head and legs and quickly scooted into the water. Then I returned to the clutch and found most of the eggs unhatched. Some of the turtles still had pea-sized sacs attached to their belly. The 'yolk sac' is filled with nutrients that the turtle uses during early development for sustenance. After consultation, I found out that the sac was small enough to indicate that development was nearly complete and these turtles could be released. In all, 28 turtles were released into the pond. It was an exhilarating experience.

Recently, a management plan was created for the Brick Works site by the City. The plan suggests the creation of a turtle nesting site that is more natural than a mulch pile. We hope that this new plan will allow the snapping turtles to lay their eggs and hatch without our assistance.



1) Mulch pile, 25 feet from the pond.



2) Nest, half buried in mulch pile.



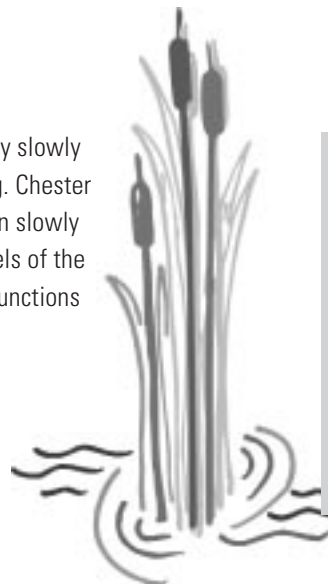
3) The turtles are released into the pond.

Photos taken by Janice Palmer.

Wetlands *continued from page one...*

Wetlands also control floodwaters, reducing damage and drought by slowly releasing water back into the ground or watercourses after flooding. Chester Springs Marsh was designed to fill with water after a hard rain then slowly release water back into the Don River. Consequently, the water levels of the marsh are dependent on weather conditions. All of these wetland functions are key to a healthy watershed.

Check out our Planting Events and the Community Stewardship Program information to learn how you can help make the wetland projects a success.



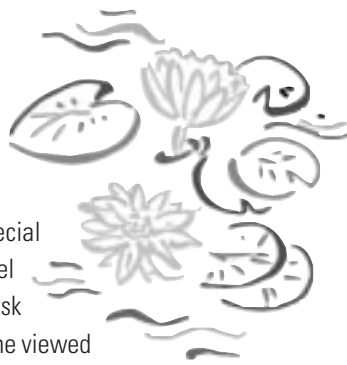
Visit our Web site to view more pictures of the turtle hatching at:

www.city.toronto.on.ca/don/turtle

Wetland Facts:

- 1/4 of the earth's wetlands are in Canada
- Canada is approximately 1/7th wetlands
- Wetlands are home to 42 per cent of our plant and animal species at risk.

Remembering Isabel Wilson, 1910 - 2001



The Task Force to Bring Back the Don would like to extend a special thank you to the many family members and friends of the late Isabel Wilson for choosing to mark her passing with a donation to the Task Force. An avid gardener, lover of wildflowers and natural areas, she viewed restoration as an optimistic endeavour, an opportunity to rejoice in what is beautiful in the world and therefore deserving support. Mrs. Wilson also had a strong sense of civic duty and devoted much of her time to volunteering in Toronto. She appreciated the importance of public involvement in community projects. Funds raised in her memory will be put toward community plantings at a new wetland project in Riverdale Park East.

Chester Springs Marsh

“Sitting on one of the large rustic logs,...I savoured the surround [and] marveled at the transformation that had taken place. Where once had been a place for rubbish and trash, the Task Force to Bring Back the Don has managed to create an urban wilderness habitat for all to enjoy.”

Gary Beecroft, March 5, 2001



Summer at the Don Valley Brick Works

DOING RESEARCH ON THE DON?

A collection of Don River materials is housed in the Urban Affairs Branch of the Toronto Public Library at Metro Hall, 55 John St. (John 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 St.

Toronto ON M5V 3C6

For information about events or activities, please call 416-392-0401, or e-mail us at driver@city.toronto.on.ca.

Bring Back the Don events are also posted on the City of Toronto's Web site:

www.city.toronto.on.ca/don

Thanks to our 2002 Funding Partners!

So far this year, funding for Task Force projects has come from: City of Toronto, Environment Canada, Great Lakes Sustainability Fund, Unilever Canada, Toronto Remedial Action Plan, TD Friends of the Environment Foundation, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, The Pat and John McCutcheon Charitable Trust, Federation of Ontario Naturalists and many others.

Bring Back the Don 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.

