



Toronto Field Naturalists

2 – 2449 Yonge Street
Toronto, Ontario, M4P 2E7
416-593-2656

office@torontofieldnaturalists.org
www.torontofieldnaturalists.org

Hello, I am Anne Purvis. I am requesting today that the Parks and Environment Committee support the Motion MM34.13 to make the Toronto Islands a Bird Sanctuary under the Migratory Birds Act. I am presenting this deputation on behalf of the Toronto Field Naturalists, whose mandate, since its inception in 1923 has been the appreciation and protection of nature in Toronto.

For just shy of 100 years, the TFN has defended nature on The Toronto Islands by organizing many Island hikes annually, keeping species inventories, giving Government feedback on development proposals for the Islands (Bill Ivy: *A Little Wilderness*, pg 15), and monitoring Environmentally Sensitive Areas on the islands (Toronto Field Naturalists: *Toronto the Green*, pg 26-7) Some TFN members, resident on the islands, are active in these endeavours as we speak. Many famous naturalists were encouraged in their early years by the TFN's Junior Naturalist Club, including Robert Bateman, who says this about the Toronto Islands:

In my childhood birding days, they (saw-whet owls) would sometimes gather on the islands in Toronto's harbor--one of my favorite birding haunts. My friends and I would take the ferry to that bird haven on autumn weekends and spot the saw-whet owls in the dense undergrowth at the island's edge, their lemon-yellow eyes staring right back at us through a patch of wild grapes or dogwood.' (Bateman: *Birds*, pg 86)

The TFN is asking the Parks and Environment Committee to secure the future of the Toronto Islands as a Stopover site for migratory birds, and the habitat they require. This can be done by supporting Motion MM34.13.

The TFN launched a petition in early December, about this issue, which more than 2500 people have signed. Dr. Bridget Stutchbury, author of *Silence of the Songbirds*, and an ornithologist from York University, has studied the songbird migration in great detail. She is among the signatories. Here's why this petition has attracted support.

The Toronto shoreline is a Stopover site for almost 300 species of migratory songbirds, shorebirds, marsh, and water birds in spring, fall and winter. The shoreline available for use by these visiting birds is limited, and the Toronto Islands form a large part of it.

In spring, our migratory birds have made an amazing flight from as far away as Central America and Brazil, anywhere from 4000-7000 kilometers. They fly at night to avoid predation and having crossed Lake Ontario, will land on the Toronto shore, for re-fueling. The journey to their nesting grounds in the northern mixed forest of Cottage Country or the Boreal forest will continue when they have fattened up and the weather is right for the journey. In winter, Toronto also experiences an influx of Arctic nesting ducks, who have come south from the Boreal forest and the Tundra seeking open water. This three-season migration phenomenon is a jewel in the crown of Toronto's natural heritage. Our best efforts must go into protecting and defending it.

Some of the birds that stop down on the Toronto Islands (Bird Studies Canada: ebird) are in steep decline (Bird Studies Canada: *The State of Canada's Birds*, 2012). These would include such aerial insectivores as Bank Swallows, Boblink and Eastern Meadowlark, songbirds like the Canada warbler and Wood Thrush, marsh birds like the American Bittern, and waterfowl like the Common Goldeneye. These declines are due to many causes such as loss of both summer and winter habitat in Canada and in the south. Toronto can however, increase the survival rate of these species by protecting critical Stopover Habitat at a crucial time in their arduous journey.

Our hope is that the Bird Sanctuary designation will encourage restoration of degraded areas on the Toronto Islands such as the Wildlife Sanctuary and The Trap (Norm Murr: *Toronto Island Birding and Site Guide*, 2012) to improve them as Stopover Habitat. It ought also to ensure stricter enforcement of already existing regulation of human activity in natural areas. We see this designation as adding a layer of protection to the Toronto Islands against future developments that could be a threat to bird habitat.

If Toronto develops the Toronto Islands, probably in combination with the Leslie Street Spit, as a birding destination, it will attract Birders from around the world, as is the case at Point Pelee National Park. Point Pelee is a migration stopover in southwestern Ontario on the north shore of Lake Erie, which experienced 333,000 visitors in the past year.

Make the Toronto Islands a Bird Sanctuary for the protection of migrating birds and the habitat they require. In so doing you will also be making Toronto a leader in protecting nature, in an intensely urban setting.