



TORONTO ORNITHOLOGICAL CLUB

June 30, 2024

Dear Members of the Infrastructure and Environment Committee (IEC).

Re: Item IE15.2: Toronto Island Park Master Plan

I am writing on behalf of the Toronto Ornithological Club (TOC). Our club was established in 1934 and our many members are passionate about all things related to birds. Our members keep meticulous records of all the birds we observe, and the resulting database of information allows us to keep track of the numbers and diversity of birds in Toronto over many decades. Many birds are in decline in terms of number and diversity. Although our focus is on birds, it is recognized that birds are an indicator species, reflecting the health of our environment, so when the number and diversity of birds decline, something is seriously wrong with the health of our environment and this has impact on human health as well. Birds are the proverbial “canary in the coal mine”.

I am also writing as a concerned citizen who lives on the waterfront of Spadina-Fort York and I consider Toronto Island to be my backyard. My love for Toronto Island began in grade 6 when I spent a week at the Toronto Island Natural Science School. That week was a life changing experience for me and I can draw a direct line from that week on the island to my deputation to this committee.

Toronto is a city blessed with a waterfront that hosts many beautiful parks, but many of these parks have been man made over recent decades. Toronto Island is unique because its natural history precedes the arrival of Europeans and as a result, its biodiversity is richer than all of the other waterfront parks in the city. As a result, the island provides feeding grounds for birds throughout the year, even in winter when waterfowl congregate around the island. Aerial insectivores, such as swallows and swifts that are in rapid decline, come to the island where there is a rich supply of food. A large number and diversity of birds stop on the island to rest and feed before continuing their journey to nesting grounds in the north, And above all, birds nest on the island where there is suitable habitat to raise their young. This year, a pair of Bald Eagles constructed a nest on the island and successfully raised two young that have fledged. This is the first documented nesting of Bald Eagles in the recorded history of Toronto, news that reached as far away as London England in an article in The Guardian that has worldwide readership (photo). This nesting was made possible by the existence of 6 Environmentally Significant Areas on the island, as well as its surrounding waters.

Toronto Island’s biodiversity is not limited to birds. This year, River Otters were observed feeding on fish on one of its secluded bays. The island is indeed a very special place requiring special attention to preserve and expand its natural areas. This would add to Toronto’s contribution to preserve 30% of the land by 2030, that was signed by Canada at the United Nations Biodiversity Conference, COP 15, held in Montreal in 2022. The strategy is to think globally but act locally and TIMP is a great opportunity act locally.

We wish to acknowledge the challenges the Toronto Island Master Plan (TIMP) team have had to face with so many people and groups wanting to have input into the plan. In terms of nature on the island, the TIMP has come a long way from the first online public forums a few short years ago, but we feel that the protection of habitat and biodiversity on the island must be given top priority in the TIMP and any decisions involving change on the island must take this into consideration through an advisory group that includes representation from the Toronto Island Biodiversity Group, Toronto Ornithological Club, Toronto Field Naturalists, Bird Friendly City – Toronto, and the Toronto Island Community Association are represented within this group.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

John Nishikawa, Director of Conservation  
Toronto Ornithological Club.

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