



# MAITLAND MUSINGS

Volume 4, Issue 1

September 2009

LOWER MAITLAND STEWARDSHIP GROUP (LMSG)

## Something is Growing Above the Falls...

On a ridge high above the Maitland River near Benmiller something very interesting is growing. It isn't a rare species of plant or a particularly odd tree, but it is expected to generate a good deal of public attention.

Thanks to a carefully negotiated partnership between the Huron Business Development Corp. and the Maitland Valley Conservation Authority, the Falls Reserve Conservation Area will soon be home to the area's only challenge course and outdoor education centre. Once complete, the Above the Falls Challenge Course (AFCC) will be made available to local schools to allow students to experience a unique learning experience. Challenge courses, also known as ropes courses, are a series of aerial elements which use the physical outdoors and perceived risk to develop group skills and critical thinking in young adults.

"This venture will not only give young people the chance to learn important lessons in communication and team building," says Rob Bundy, president of the AFCC Board of Directors, "it will also stimulate the local economy by creating new jobs and generating

additional revenues for the Falls Reserve. It's quite exciting."

In addition to the numerous challenge course 'elements' which are being installed at the Falls this summer, next spring will see the construction of a rather unusual education and activity centre. The 3,000 square foot facility will be built using only environmentally sustainable construction techniques such as strawbale insulation, a pounded earth foundation, composting toilets and a rain water collection system. The site will also generate all its own power using a small wind turbine and photo-voltaic solar panels.

By combining the thrill of the challenge course with the educational experience of an environmentally friendly building situated in a conservation area, the AFCC hopes to attract a wide and varied clientele.

"Our primary market is school groups," says Bundy, "but we also expect to offer a unique team building experience in a park-like setting to corporate clients, service clubs, and any family looking for something a little different to do."

Another unique aspect of the Above the Falls venture is the fact that it will operate as a social enterprise by streaming any and all profits into a



local fund to help finance other socially conscious endeavours. Financing for the AFCC is being realized from a variety of private and public sources, including a particularly generous donation from the United Communities Credit Union in Clinton.

During the construction phase of the project, the site of the challenge course is closed to the public but is looking forward to a grand and green opening in the fall of 2010. For more information about this unique venture, feel free to contact Bundy at 519-527-0305.

### Inside this issue:

Species at Risk—More information	2
River Valley Clean-Up September 19th	3
LMSG Contact Initiative	3
Nature Conservancy of Canada in the	4

### Special points of interest:

- Mark your calendars : Exciting Fall Event at the Benmiller Inn!
- Have your voice heard! Watch for a survey contact letter from the Lower Maitland Stewardship Group

## 'Species at Risk' in the Lower Maitland River Valley by Tara Lessard

In our previous newsletter we provided a detailed description of the Butter-nut, one 'species at risk' that can be found in the Lower Maitland area. Continuing with the 'species at risk' theme, here we will provide an overview of some other unique 'species at risk' in the Lower Maitland.

One interesting 'species at risk' in the Lower Maitland area is the Wavy-rayed Lampmussel. It is currently listed as endangered both provincially and federally. The Wavy-rayed Lampmussel is a medium-sized freshwater mussel that inhabits riffle areas with gravel or sand bottoms in large creeks and rivers. Its shell is thick and rounded, and yellow-green with numerous thin, wavy green rays. It can live as long as 20 years and can grow to a size of 10 cm.



Wavy-Rayed Lampmussel

Wavy-rayed Lampmussels display an interesting behaviour during their life cycle. They are parasitic on the gills or fins of fish during their larval stage (mainly on large and smallmouth bass). When

the mussel's larvae are ready to be released, a minnow shaped lure (part of the mussel's mantle) is waved to attract fish hosts. When a fish touches the mantle flaps, they are withdrawn and the shell is closed resulting in the release of the mussel's larvae.

In Canada, the Wavy-rayed Lampmussel can only be found in the province of Ontario. Its current Canadian distribution is restricted to the Grand River, Thames River, the Maitland River, the Ausable River and the Canadian waters of the Lake St. Clair delta.

The invasion of the exotic Zebra Mussel is likely responsible for the extirpation of the Wavy-rayed Lampmussel from areas that it once inhabited. Being such efficient filter feeders, Zebra mussels easily out-compete the Wavy-Rayed Lampmussel for food and habitat. Siltation is the most immediate threat to the remaining populations of Lampmussels, but eutrophication (excessive nutrients usually caused by runoff from the land), and pesticide inputs may also be important factors.

Another unique 'species at risk' in the Lower Maitland area is the Queensnake. This mild-tempered snake is listed as threatened in both Ontario and Canada. The Queensnake is aquatic, living in clear, small rivers where there is good rock cover. It is

rarely found more than three meters from water. It feeds almost exclusively on crayfish, especially freshly-moulted individuals that are soft, and easier to swallow. Adults are slender and grow to between 60 cm and 90 cm in length. The Queensnake is brown-green on the top, with a pale stripe along each side and three dark stripes down the back. The belly is yellow with four dark stripes. No other snake has a striped underside, so this is an important feature for identifying this species.



A juvenile Queensnake

In Ontario, there are fewer than 25 sites where the Queensnake now occurs. Habitat loss is the most significant threat to Queensnake populations. However, crayfish, their main source of food, are sensitive to acidification and heavy metals. As waterways have become polluted and crayfish have died out, the Queensnake has also declined.

And last but not least, the 'species at risk' with a unique name, the Green Dragon. It is listed as special concern, both provincially and federally. The Green Dragon is a peren-

nial wildflower which grows in wet forests along streams, particularly maple forest and forest dominated by red ash and white elm. It can grow to between 40 and 100 cm from a corm, or enlarged root which doubles as a storage organ for the plant. The leaves are slender and arranged in a semicircle at the top of the plant. The green-yellow flower (which looks similar to Jack-in-the-Pulpit) has a long, leaf-like "cup" that surrounds the flower spike. It flowers from late-May to June. In Ontario, the Green Dragon grows at only about 50 sites in the southwestern part of the province, and most of these remaining sites are on private land. Historical records suggest that the species was once more widespread in Ontario, and it may have declined as forests were cleared.

So, as you can see, the Lower Maitland area is home to a number of unique 'species at risk', some that are found in only a handful of other locations in Ontario. If you suspect you have one of the species mentioned, or any other 'species at risk' on your property, and you are interested in participating in recovery efforts, you can contact your local MNR office.

Note: This article was developed using information from the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR). For more information, visit MNR's website at [www.mnr.gov.on.ca](http://www.mnr.gov.on.ca)

## Cleaning Up the River Valley

Connect with your community and with people across Canada who care about the environment!

TD Great Canadian Shoreline Clean-Up is a yearly event that the Lower Maitland Stewardship Group (LMSG) is again participat-

ing in. Please consider coming out to help!

**Saturday, September 19th at 9 am**, we will be gathering outside the CPR Station at the Harbour Beach in Goderich to remove garbage from the mouth of the river east

along the valley corridor.

To find out more, go to: [www.vanaqua.org/cleanup](http://www.vanaqua.org/cleanup) and follow the links to register. Or, contact **Denise Carnochan** at (519) 524-8394 ext. 3 or email

[dcarnochan@huroncounty.ca](mailto:dcarnochan@huroncounty.ca)



Landowners and stakeholders of the Lower Maitland River Valley are invited to help clean up the valley.

## Update: Natural Conservancy of Canada & the Lower Maitland

The Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) has been an active land steward in the Lower Maitland River Valley for over a decade, with more than 600 acres (240 hectares) of land protected since 1996.

NCC recently acquired two properties in the Holmesville area, the 147-acre (59-hectare) Ashton-Potter and 218-acre (88-hectare) Goud properties. NCC is currently preparing management plans for both properties that will set out short and long-term management actions to protect and enhance the natural features at each property.

Future actions will include the restoration of retired farm fields to forest

and grassland habitats, as well as the monitoring of rare plant and animal species, such as the Queen Snake, and Butternut tree.

Much recent management work at these properties has been accomplished through collaboration with local volunteers and partner organizations. Volunteer naturalists have added over 100 species to the inventory list at the Goud property, including populations of endangered Butternut trees and the rare Tawny Emperor butterfly, and continue to monitor both rare and invasive species at NCC properties.

NCC is looking for donors to help complete critical management pro-

jects at NCC properties including the creation of interpretive displays along the Maitland Trail on the Goud property in partnership with the Maitland Trail Association.

The Nature Conservancy of Canada is Canada's leading land conservation organization. Since 1962, NCC has helped to protect more than 2 million acres of ecologically significant land nationwide.

For more information visit [www.natureconservancy.ca/lmrv](http://www.natureconservancy.ca/lmrv)



## “What’s On Your Mind”— Lower Maitland Landowner Contact

### Initiative by Tara Lessard

Most of you should have received a letter outlining the Lower Maitland landowner contact initiative that is occurring this summer. In the interest of learning more about landowner needs and viewpoints, the Lower Maitland Stewardship Group is hoping to meet with a number of Lower Maitland landowners to conduct a survey. The main goals of the survey are to:

1) determine what features of the valley are important to the landowners;

2) determine what assistance or support they might need to help implement stewardship activities, and;

3) provide them with information about some available stewardship and funding opportunities.

The LMSG has retained a technician to implement the survey, and they will be contacting a number of Lower Maitland Landowners to try and arrange a meeting to discuss their property, their views about the valley and needs for the steward-

ship assistance.

If you own a property that abuts the Lower Maitland River and you did not receive a letter in the mail, or if you would like for information about the survey, please contact Steve Bowers at 519-482-3661 or at [steve.bowers@ontario.ca](mailto:steve.bowers@ontario.ca).

You can also visit our website <http://lmsg.huronstewardship.on.ca/>.

**LOWER MAITLAND  
STEWARDSHIP GROUP  
(LMSG)**

**Steve Bowers  
Stewardship Coordinator**

PO Box 819  
100 Don Street  
Clinton, ON N0M 1L0

Phone: 519-482-3661  
Fax: 519-482-5031  
E-mail: [steve.bowers@ontario.ca](mailto:steve.bowers@ontario.ca)

**We're on the web:  
[www.huronstewardship.on.ca](http://www.huronstewardship.on.ca)**

The Lower Maitland River Valley is a landscape worthy of protection. Surrounded by highly productive agricultural land, the valley is deeply incised and features an intact corridor of forest, numerous natural heritage features for fish and wildlife habitat, woodlands, limestone outcroppings, and many other features of interest. To date, the river valley has been relatively untouched by development.

The LMSG was formed in 1998 and consists of landowners, stakeholders, organization and agency representatives, and individuals interested in protecting and enhancing the valley and its natural features.

The group has prepared a strategy to outline its goals and to direct its activities to reflect our vision for the area, with a focus on valley protection, landowner's rights, and sustained stakeholder use.

***If you have an interest in hearing more about these activities or the group, contact Steve Bowers, or attend our upcoming event on Saturday, October 17, 2009 (details on the separate sheet).***

**Lower Maitland Stewardship Outing—Spring 2009**

Auburn Riverside Retreat campground was the location of the spring 2009 Lower Maitland Stewardship Group outing on May 9th. Owners Wayne and Marie Scott welcomed participants to their campground located along the Maitland River, just west of Auburn.

While forecast of rainy weather resulted in a small crowd, those who attended enjoyed an interesting hike into the Scott's elk pen and then along some of the park's hiking trails adjacent to the river and through a hardwood forest.

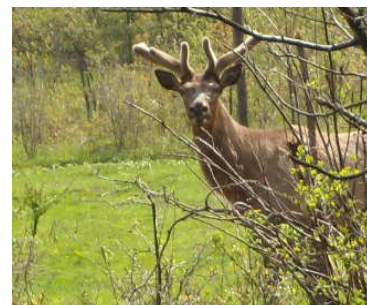
After a great BBQ lunch, a few brave souls lead by Jim Ginn, Bert Dirven and Wendy Hoernig embarked on a short trip down the river in canoes. Timing of the canoe outing corresponded with a dramatic shift in the weather as the wind became stronger and shifted to the north, while temperatures plummeted.

In spite of the foul weather, everyone made it back safely, but will definitely remember this trip. Mike Verhoef was guiding fisherman further downstream and said it was definitely one of the nastiest days he has spent on the river in many years.



Above: A group of participants enjoying a hike along the Maitland

Below: A curious elk in the elk pen.



Photos submitted by Steve Bowers

Submitted by Steve Bowers