



Grand River
Conservation
Authority



The Grand:
A Canadian
Heritage River

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Cover photo:

The chickadee is one of the birds studied by Toni Salvadori, who took this photo.



Toni's 46 years of bird banding

By Antonio Salvadori

Bird banding as we know it today was started in North America by Dr. Paul Bartsch of the Smithsonian Institution in 1902.

In its simplest form, banding involves putting a metal or plastic band around the leg of a wild bird and then releasing it back into the wild. This is a way to study wild birds by learning about migration, longevity and other issues. Birds are caught using many different methods. The most common method is to string a very fine mesh net between two vertical poles. Since the net is almost invisible, the birds get tangled in it and can be carefully removed without injury.

I started bird banding while I was at McMaster University in Hamilton under the legendary John Miles. I met John in the Dundas Marsh shortly after I arrived from Ireland in 1963. I was immediately hooked and banding became my life.

Forty-six years later I am still at it, having banded birds from hummingbirds to albatrosses

in countries of the world.

After graduating from McMaster, I moved to Guelph and started banding in the Guelph region under John's auspices. In 1971, I started the Guelph Banding Group which continues to be active in the region. Our main banding locations were my house, just off Stone Road and Mountsberg Conservation Area.

Collectively the group has banded 128,041 birds of 209 species. Several graduates have started their own operation, including Bryan Wyatt who is very active at Guelph Lake. Between 1981 and 1996 the station was only marginally active since I was in Australia, Africa and Bolivia.

With the expanding city of Guelph, the number of birds in my backyard started to dwindle. I had to find a new principal location, otherwise interest would wane. A chance meeting with Richard Frank gave us new impetus and Frog Hollow near Eramosa became our main banding location. In 2007, we also started to band at Colwyn Farm near Fergus. These three stations

are where we do most of our banding the year round. I also operate a Barn Swallow scheme which takes me to many farms from Guelph to Orangeville during the summer months.

What birds do we catch?

Since 1996 our main species have been: American goldfinch (14,482); slate-colored junco (6,096); pine siskin (3,106); barn swallow (4,753); common redpoll (4,606); black-capped chickadee (3,311); blue jay (3,133); American tree sparrow (2,876); tree swallow (2,430); common grackle (1,956); white-crowned sparrow (1,750); house finch (1,666); purple finch (1,420); song sparrow (1,184); white-throated sparrow (1,158); and mourning dove (1,029). We also catch some unusual, rare or birds that are hard to catch such as: blue-gray gnatcatcher; red-bellied woodpecker; orchard oriole; yellow-billed cuckoo; Cooper's hawk etc.

How old are our birds?

Most banded birds die in their first winter and are found locally as the snow melts. Some live to a ripe old age. A chipping sparrow banded in my backyard holds the world record for longevity at 13 years; a chickadee also in my backyard was 10 years seven months old when last caught last spring; a blue jay and rose-breasted grosbeak from Frog Hollow were last clocked in at eight years seven months and six years respectively.

Where do our birds go?

Our birds have been found dead, shot or captured and released from northern South America to Vancouver to Eastern Canada. The found rate is less than one in 1,000 so very few birds are ever found. Most are found in and around Guelph. Mallards did make it to Vancouver as well as many states; our goldfinches have travelled to New York, Michigan, Pennsylvania and Ohio and many places in Ontario; a robin went to Mississippi; a chickadee went to Ottawa; a jay to Indiana; grackles went to West



Toni Salvadori checks his backyard bird feeders.

Virginia, Ohio and Michigan; a herring gull to South Carolina; juncos to Quebec and Pennsylvania; and a lone white-throated sparrow to Sarnia. We also caught two snow buntings that had been banded in Greenland.

Banding is not only fun, but it opens up a whole new world. I am always looking for volunteers, especially in summer when we monitor our breeding birds. If interested please contact me: 519-821-2257 or Salvadori@rogers.com.

This article was originally published in the newsletter of the Guelph Field Naturalists.



Heritage Day

Arts, culture and heritage essential to healthy communities

By Barbara Veale

The theme of the Heritage Day workshop on Feb. 12 was Beyond 20/20 vision: A New Lens for Arts, Culture

and heritage.

The workshop was held in the Cambridge Centre for the Arts and featured presentations about the interconnections among arts, culture and heritage and the importance of these to the health, prosperity and economic well-being of communities.

Even leaders of high tech companies in Waterloo Region need to realize that supporting arts, culture and heritage helps their bottom line, said keynote speaker Tim Jackson of the Waterloo Region Prosperity Council. Finding and keeping top employees is a key challenge, partly because prospective employees are choosing jobs based partly on quality of life. High tech companies are competing for employees who can live in Toronto, Montreal, California and Boston.

Essential to economic vitality

"Arts, culture and heritage is not 'nice to have', not a luxury. It is a necessity for building the economic vitality in this region," Jackson said. He was recently appointed chief executive officer of the Accelerator Centre and associate vice-president of Commercialization at the University of Waterloo.



Tim Jackson

Each speaker spoke about how arts, culture and heritage engage individuals, stir passions and collectively bring people together in a shared experience building community spirit and sense of place and belonging. Alex Mustakas, artistic director of Drayton Entertainment which is building a theatre along the Grand River in Cambridge, noted that a recent poll discovered that 27 per cent of Canadians regularly buy tickets to hockey games, but 29 per cent buy tickets to the arts. Edwin Outwater, music director of the Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony, shared personal experiences about his discovery



Heritage Day afternoon speakers were from left: consultant Cheryl Ewing, Edwin Outwater, music director of the Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony and Alex Mustakas, artistic director of Drayton Entertainment.

of all kinds of music and how it inspires and enriches our collective psyches.

Other keynote speakers were Patti Tombs of the City of Hamilton and consultant Cheryl Ewing.

A choice of workshops

Participants selected from many workshop sessions. Some were practical, some were participatory, but they all reflected on the broader issues of arts and heritage by concentrating on personal discovery.

It was moderated in the morning by Nancy Richards, SWO CTV, and by Mike Farwell, 570 News Radio, in the afternoon. Displays from local heritage and arts groups were also part of the event.

Another highlight was the official unveiling of the interpretive plaque for the historic Main Street Bridge in Cambridge. The plaque commemorates the heritage significance of the two-span concrete bowstring bridge, a community icon which dominates Cambridge's riverscape.

The 2011 workshop will be held in the Township of Woolwich. More information will be posted to the GRCA website as it becomes available.

1878 Grand tragedy: mini-steamer goes over the dam

*This is an excerpt from a story researched and written by Jim Quantrell in *A Part of Our Past*, a book available for \$20 from the Cambridge Archives.*

Few people know the tragic story of the *Empress of India*, a 35-foot miniature steamer that was launched on the Grand River with great fanfare on Oct. 20, 1877, only to come to a tragic end the next spring.

The steamer was intended to carry pleasure parties on the pond above the dam, a predecessor of the Parkhill Dam in downtown Galt. It was owned and operated by James Montgomery and Samuel Smith, two mechanics who built it at a factory that is now a parking lot on the river just south of Mill Race Park in Galt.

Seats were arranged along either side of the boat with the boiler in the centre and it was driven by two side paddle-wheels. Twenty-five or 30 passengers would pay 15 cents each to be taken upstream to the Rifle Range, thought to be near the present-day location of

Cambridge Memorial Hospital. The boat had a nine-inch draught so it was expected to operate even in the summer when water levels were lowest. This was anticipated to be an important addition to life along the river, but success wasn't assured: if the voyages did not prove profitable, the owners intended to move her to Puslinch Lake for pleasure cruises.

On May 20, 1878, the *Empress* was once again placed on the river to begin a busy summer of river tours. The river was somewhat higher than usual due to spring rains to the north and the current was fairly swift. However, this was not considered a problem for the engine. In the words of the contemporary account, the boat "to all appearances was perfectly safe for the business required of it; and the calamity which overtook it has come from a quarter which no one anticipated."

17 people over the dam

At 7 p.m. on May 22, 1878, 17 people including the two owners and two "adventurous" women assembled at the wharf above Blain's mill, at Parkhill Road and Water Street in Galt. The boat eased away from the wharf to begin a journey which would prove to be its last.

Usually the *Empress* was propelled parallel into the centre of the river to the dam, then turned north to begin its journey. That evening when it came time to turn north, the rudder stuck and the boat continued across the river towards the dam. As yet there appeared no cause for alarm as Montgomery and Smith struggled to loosen the rudder. They were unsuccessful and the *Empress* continued across the river before encountering the dam.

Since the boat could not be steered, orders were given to reverse the engine in an attempt to return to the east bank. The stern was upstream of the bow and it was hoped that this would allow the boat to reach safe anchorage.

But the little steamer continued to be drawn towards the dam. Even as the



LOOK WHO'S TAKING ACTION

GRCA tree planting makes dramatic rise

The earth has good reason to be happy this spring because GRCA and its clients and partners are planting close to half a million trees this spring.

In fact, the 451,000 trees going in the ground this year is nearly six times more than the 77,000 trees planted in 2007. Interest in tree planting is increasing and there is more financial help available for people and organizations that want to increase forest cover.

About 177,000 trees will go onto GRCA-owned land, such as conservation areas and natural areas. This includes trees that will be planted by the public at the Guelph Rotary Forest at Guelph Lake on Saturday April 24, Chilligo Restoration project in Cambridge April 25, at Conestogo Conservation Area clean up and tree planting day May 1 and Waterloo Earth Fest on Saturday May 8. For more details on these events, please see the Grand Strategy Calendar on the back page.

The GRCA carries out numerous tree planting projects on both private and GRCA-owned property each spring.

Most trees being ordered through the GRCA will go on private land — about 274,000 this spring. Plantings on private land are paid for by the property owners who require the service. If eligible, these costs may be offset by programs such as the Rural Water Quality Program.

“It is really great to see that individuals are taking action to improve the health of the watershed,” said Anne Loeffler, a GRCA conservation specialist. “I work with them every day and I am really inspired by their commitment. Fortunately we have a wider range of funding programs.”



An 1878 photo of the 35-ft steamer the *Empress of India* after it went over the dam in Galt. Eight of 15 passengers died.

Photo courtesy of the Cambridge Archive

Empress neared the brink, Montgomery appeared unconcerned, feeling that the boat would ground itself on the dam and that the passengers could then be taken off by rescuers. Montgomery had miscalculated. It would appear that the shallow draught of the boat combined with the swollen level of the river swept the steamer broadside over the dam.

Eight people died

Of the 17 people on board, eight were drowned. It was thought that most of these must have been injured in the fall and probably rendered unconscious and unable to swim to safety. Montgomery lost his life, while Smith survived. Both the young women survived the plunge, and the survival of one of these women was described by an observer to be “perfectly miraculous” as she held her breath, was whirled around three or four times in the water by the dam, was carried downstream and held onto a pier

until she was rescued.

While many were lost, as many survived the accident and the stories of their escape suggest that mere good fortune was the difference between life and death.

The shock of the loss of so many fellow citizens in a single accident, some from prominent families, was widely felt as “a gloom as of a pall” hung over the town.

Victoria Day celebrations were postponed until July 1 and a public funeral for all the victims took place June 1. The last rites were held at the town hall “while thousands from the town and the country surrounding assembled to pay the last sad rite to those who had been so suddenly struck down.”

Even now, the waters of the Grand River and her tributaries can swell and become turbulent and dangerous, especially in spring and near dams, so it is essential to always be careful.



Tree planting events such as this one at the Guelph Rotary Forest get trees in the ground, increase awareness each spring. The volunteers can visit years later, knowing they helped create the forest. Check the back page for more events information.

“Tree planting is definitely going in the right direction — up,” said Martin Neumann, supervisor of terrestrial resources for the GRCA. He likes to list the many benefits of trees which go a long way towards creating a healthy environment, minimizing water problems and they are good for all living creatures. Plus, he likes to add, they are beautiful to look at.

In the mid 1980s, the GRCA planted a million trees a year, so we still have a long way to go to get back up to those numbers. The drop in tree planting was because the province cut funding for trees and closed the provincial tree nurseries.

But Neumann says tree planting numbers don't tell the entire story. Now tree planting projects are more complex, with a wider range of tree species being planted to increase biodiversity. Bigger trees are being planted, not just small seedlings but saplings which have a greater chance of survival. The GRCA has also adopted the practice of “direct seeding” in some projects, especially for oaks, hickories and walnuts. These numbers are not included in the tree tally

By the numbers
2010: 451,000 trees
2009: 227,000 trees
2008: 150,000 trees
2007: 77,000 trees

mentioned previously. Native herbaceous seed mixes are being sown as a companion planting for young seedlings, and more emphasis is also being placed on restoring wetlands, prairies, and savannas – all part of a healthier and more sustainable environment.

Many other trees are being planted through municipal or private initiatives. “Imagine how much we could accomplish if we collectively set our mind to it,” Martin said. The more companies, families, organizations and rural landowners who turn their attention to trees, the healthier the landscape will be for the next generation.

For more information on tree planting for this fall or spring 2011, 519-621-2763 ext. 2269.

Tom Sitak inspires Brantford students

A teacher at Pauline Johnson CVI in Brantford, Tom Sitak, received a 2009 Grand River Watershed Award.

He teaches environmental courses and many of his students have been

inspired to take up environmental work. In fact, in 1993 the students of Pauline Johnson Collegiate Vocational School and the Brantford Steelheaders received a Watershed Award. Sitak says he is carrying on the work of his predecessor, retired teacher Gerry Rand who started the work to improve D’Aubigny Creek, in the west Brant neighbourhood. Over the years, they have undertaken numerous projects to increase their understanding of the natural world as they also take measures to rehabilitate the creek.

More recently, they have planted 4,000 trees along Silver Creek in a suburban neighbourhood.



Tom Sitak

“Today a lot of students don't realize where their drinking water comes from, where their food comes from, they don't realize where their waste goes. And by getting them outside, they start to realize how important the environment is for our own survival,” Sitak says.

He does much more to improve their understanding of the natural world: Sitak's students test water quality, monitor the bugs in the river, survey fish populations. They have a tree nursery at school and a fish hatchery in their classroom. They study and work on every aspect of D’Aubigny Creek and also are among the partners working at Silvercreek Park. Some students are opting to go into environmental work.

“That's probably one of the things that is most satisfying to me as a teacher is to see many students who take the field ecology class, go to post-secondary and eventually careers that deal with the environment and natural resources,” Sitak says. He is grateful for the support that the program has received from his colleagues, the community and the Ministry of Natural Resources.

In September, his students will have even more opportunities to learn about the environment. His field ecology course will be expanded into a new

“Specialist High Skills Major” program that focuses on the environment, thanks to additional Ministry of Education funding. A highlight will be that students will go to Apps’ Mill Nature Centre two days a week for one semester to learn outdoors. They will also do community stewardship work in Brantford.

Other high schools in the watershed are also partnering with the GRCA on these kinds of programs.



WHAT'S HAPPENING?

Four deadlines loom this spring

Watershed award nominations needed by May 1

Nominations for this award can come from anyone in the watershed, so if you know a person, organization or business that you think deserves an award, please make a nomination. The deadline for nominations is May 1, 2010. A nomination form is available in the



Watershed Awards section of the GRCA website at www.grandriver.ca.

The GRCA presents two types of awards: the Honour Roll Award for a sustained record of achievement over an extended period of time and Watershed Awards for outstanding examples of conservation and environmental work.

Grand Registry forms due to GRCA by June 30

Each year, the GRCA compiles a registry of actions/activities/events which were undertaken in the previous year to improve the health and heritage of the Grand River watershed.

Everything from performing and visual arts, events, educational seminars, and municipal planning policies, to “hands on” environmental and heritage protection and restoration work is included.

By profiling and celebrating the numerous activities that take place in the watershed each year, new opportunities are offered for creative partnerships, exchange of information and know-how, and increased public awareness and support. The Registry is available for viewing on the GRCA website at www.grandriver.ca.

Submission forms are available on the GRCA website or by contacting Barbara Veale, Coordinator of Policy, Planning & Partnerships.

Submit your 2009 actions by April 30, 2010 to Barbara Veale at grandactionsregistry@grandriver.ca.

May 1 for conservation grants applications

Applications are now being accepted from community groups and schools for Community Conservation Grants given out by the Grand River Conservation Foundation.

Each year the foundation awards grants of up to \$1,000 to qualified groups (must be a registered charity) or up to \$500 for elementary schools undertaking conservation projects in communities throughout the Grand River watershed. Eligible projects must be tangible and available for the use or benefit of the entire community.

Deadline for receipt of grant applications is May 1. The award recipients will be selected this summer with the cheque presentations this fall. A final report may be requested of grant recipients within one year, or upon the successful completion of the project.

Applications can be downloaded from the Foundation section of the GRCA website at www.grca.ca or by contacting the foundation in Cambridge at (519) 621-2763 ext. 2271 or by e-mail at foundation@grandriver.ca.

Environmental scholarship deadline is May 31

Applications are being accepted until May 31 for the S.C. Johnson Environmental Scholarship.

This scholarship, worth \$1,500, is made available by the Grand River Conservation Foundation to help post-secondary school students continue their studies in conservation and environment related fields.

Applications are open to full-time students who have completed the third year or sixth semester of an honours program in a watershed university (Waterloo, Guelph, Laurier) or the second year of a three-year program at Conestoga College. Students must be Canadian citizens or permanent residents, in environmental sciences, engineering, chemistry or manufacturing.

The deadline for applications is May 31. A selection will be made by the foundation’s awards committee prior to Aug. 31. For information and an application form contact the foundation by e-mail at foundation@grandriver.ca or by phone 519-621-2763 ext. 2271.

Update to Grand River basin study

The Grand River watershed has its share of challenges — some old, some new — but a project just getting underway will provide a new road map to navigate through those issues over the next quarter century.

It’s been more than 25 years since the Grand River Basin Water Management Study was released. That report looked at three key issues — flood damage reduction, water supply and water quality — and provided a list of more than 20 recommendations to address them. Most of the recommendations were implemented.

Now, it’s time to update that study and provide a new road map for the next 25 years — a time that will bring new pressures caused by rapid population growth, climate change and agricultural intensification.

Last fall, representatives of several watershed municipalities, provincial and



federal departments, Six Nations of the Grand River and the GRCA met to develop plans to update the 1982 study.

They agreed to form a steering committee to guide development of the new plan with a completion date of 2012. The next step — setting up technical teams to look more closely at the issues — is underway now.

Much of the technical and scientific information needed to do the study already exists, the results of work done by the agencies involved. The technical team will pull the data together and take a fresh look at how the pieces all fit together. The researchers will also look at “data gaps” — places where more knowledge is needed — and suggest studies needed to fill the gaps.

An updated basin study will give decision makers at all levels of government the tools and knowledge they need to implement projects and programs to address watershed issues. The study will support the collective vision of clean water, a healthy environment and prosperous communities.

Resource management in a period of high growth presents several challenges.

Steps must be taken to ensure that the watershed’s rivers can adequately handle the effluent from wastewater treatment plants. Pollution from non-point sources on rural and urban land has to be addressed in a more comprehensive fashion.

It is becoming more costly to achieve improvements in water quality through treatment plant upgrades alone. Other alternatives that build a healthy, resilient watershed are required.

Demand for water for municipal supplies is rising and municipalities face difficult and costly decisions about future water sources.

Vital physical features — the Waterloo, Galt-Paris and Orangeville moraines — are facing development pressures which could impair their ability to recharge groundwater aquifers.

Climate change will require new thinking about ways to respond to flood-



Going south: A five-year twinning agreement was signed by GRCA CAO Paul Emerson and Joseph to continue the GRCA’s assistance in Argentina in February.

ing and other environmental issues.

These issues cannot be considered in isolation from each other.

Dealing with one will affect the others. The watershed is an environmental whole, and it needs broad solutions to its problems.

The study will look beyond existing “end-of-pipe” solutions to find new technologies and new approaches to address these issues that will complement and build on existing municipal infrastructure.

Birding brochure wins award

The *Trails Take Flight* brochure and website project received an award from the Economic Developers Council of Ontario.

This project was completed last spring. The website has a brochure, maps and detailed information on 20 of the best birding and hiking trails in communities throughout the Grand River watershed.

Partners in Grand River Country, which received the project include Wellington-North, Elora Fergus Tourism, Guelph Wellington Tourism, Woolwich Township, St. Jacobs Country, County of

Brant Tourism, Brantford Tourism, Six Nations Tourism, Haldimand Tourism, and the GRCA.

The Trails Take Flight project was partially funded through a grant from the



Ontario Ministry of Health Promotion. Trail and birding research was done in partnership with the Guelph Field Naturalists Club, with brochure and website design by GRCA.

The *Trails Take Flight* brochures are available from local

Tourism Information Offices, the GRCA in Cambridge — or check out the Trails section of the Grand River Country website at www.grandrivercountry.com.



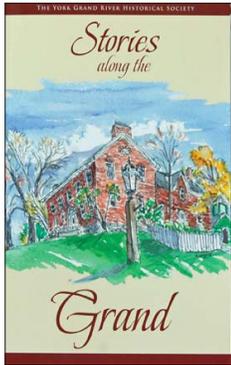
NOW AVAILABLE

Haldimand history

By Jean Farquharson

The York Grand River Historical Society proudly launched its new

book, *Stories Along the Grand: A Collection of Stories From Many Writers Featuring the Early Settlement in*



Haldimand Near the Grand River Between 1783 and 1930.

The history stories range from witty sayings to serious family history.

Since some of the stories have never been in print before, this book will provide new material for those researching Haldimand County. The personal name index will help family historians locate their ancestors.

Compiled by William Haartman and edited by Jean Farquharson, the stories are written by members of the York historical society and other local historians.

John Nugent has provided delightful

drawings of scenes and buildings along the Grand River for the book and its cover. Attractively printed on 100 per cent recycled paper, the soft cover book

is available for \$20 from members and at local bookstores and museums. Proceeds will help fund signs along the Grand River and other projects.

About Grand Actions

This newsletter is produced every two months by the GRCA. Current and back issues are available online at: www.grandriver.ca.

For newsletter submissions and e-mail or post subscriptions, contact:

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E-mail: jbaine@grandriver.ca

Deadlines for submissions are the 15th of February, April, June, August, October and December. Submissions may be edited for length or style.

Tax deductible donations and sponsorships toward the cost of producing this newsletter are always welcome.

This publication is printed on Rolland Enviro100, an FSC certified, environmentally-friendly paper. The paper is manufactured using 100% post-consumer fibre and is processed chlorine-free using biogas energy.



The Grand Strategy Calendar

Green Living and Technology Fair, Saturday, April 17, 11:00 am–5:00 pm, St. Jacobs Arena, 29 Parkside Dr. Learn how to reduce your energy and water use. Buy green products, talk with green energy providers, learn about home energy audits, carsharing, landscaping and much more. Free electronic waste drop-off. For more information on this or the **Alternative Energy Tours** scheduled for the same day, or many other spring activities, visit www.healthywoolwich.org or call Joy at 519-664-3534.

Earth Week Speaker Series sponsored by the Brant Community Foundation, Tuesday and Thursday, April 20 & 22, 7 p.m. to 9 p.m., St. Andrews Church, Brantford. Species at Risk on Tuesday and Grand River water quality and quantity on Thursday. Event is free, but you can reserve a seat with a ticket, since these events sold out last year.

Earth Day, April 22, many communities. Check Earthday.ca for more than 20 listings for related events in watershed communities, including tree plantings, clean up events and others.

Guelph Rotary Forest Earth Day, Saturday April 24, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., Guelph Lake Nature Centre, Guelph. Activities include tree planting, creepy creature shows, earth day crafts, music and vendor tents. Planters are encouraged to bring their own shovel. Groups are encouraged to participate. There is no charge and there will be free refreshments. Parking will be available at the Lakeside Church on Conservation Road. Transit buses will provide shuttle service from the parking lot to the Earth Day event site and will also leave from St. George's Square in downtown Guelph every 30 minutes.



Tree Planting and Dedication, Sunday April 25, 1:30 p.m. to 4 p.m., Chilligo Restoration Area, Cambridge. Tree planting begins at 1:30 p.m. and a dedication at 3 p.m. to celebrate the thousands of hours of planning and effort that have gone into making the new ponds and restoring the former Chilligo millpond. If you, your family or your group are interested in tree planting, call 519-6521-2763 ext. 2296.

Waterloo Earth Fest, Saturday, May 8, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., Laurel Creek Conservation Area, Waterloo. This is a free fun-filled day of family activities with an environmental theme. Join us to dig in and plant 1,000 trees and shrubs or enjoy some hands-on activities such as building a bird box and drumming with Creation Africa. **School Challenge:** Waterloo Region schools who register the most participants will receive an environmental prize for their school.

Note: For a complete list of events at the GRCA's conservation areas and nature centres, please visit the Calendar at www.grandriver.ca.