



MINESING REEDS

NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF MINESING WETLANDS

Volume 45

Fall 2016

November is busy for the Friends!

Evening of Science: Reptiles and Amphibians



Wonder what's creeping around in the Minesing Wetlands? On Thursday November 10th, the Friends of Minesing Wetlands presents an educational program about the reptiles and amphibians found in Simcoe County. Special guest speaker Jeff Hathaway from Scales Nature Park will discuss identifying, handling and the threats faced by snakes, frogs, turtles, salamanders and other reptiles and amphibians. An opportunity for hands-on interaction with local animals will follow the presentation.

Part of the FOMW "Evening of Science" series, this event takes place at the Tiffin Centre for Conservation in Utopia, Thursday November 10, 2016. Doors open at 6:30 pm. and the presentation begins at 7:00 pm. While this is a free event, a suggested donation of \$10 per person may be made at the door. All Friends of Minesing Wetlands members who join us for this event are entered into a free draw to win a beautiful framed photo of the Highway 60 Corridor in Algonquin Park by David Walsh. The winner must be present to win the draw. With limited seating available, pre-registration is encouraged. Visit minesingwetlands.ca or contact Naomi Saunders, chair of the Friends of Minesing Wetlands at 705-424-1479 ext. 263 or naomi_saunders@rogers.com.

Friends of Minesing Wetlands AGM And Curling FunSpiel

What better way to pair a love for nature with an enjoyment for curling than to join FOMW for the annual Annual General Meeting and Curling FunSpiel. The event takes place Saturday November 19th at the Stroud Curling Club in Innisfil from 6:00—11:30 pm. Registration is as teams of four (\$100), or as an individual (\$25). The evening includes yummy food, prizes, cash bar and an opportunity to learn about the very important ecological area that is the Minesing Wetlands. The registration deadline is Monday, November 14th. Call or Email to register your team today: phone 705-424-1479 ext. 263 or email naomi_saunders@rogers.com.



Roadside Clean-Up

FOMW will be hosting a roadside clean-up for the Adopt-a-Highway program on Saturday, November 12th, from 1:30-3:30 pm. Participants are asked to bring their own gloves and all-weather boots. Drinks and snacks will be available. The group will meet at the Willow Creek canoe route access point on George Johnston Rd.

ADOPT
A
HIGHWAY

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For more information on the Minesing Wetlands or for Friends of Minesing Wetlands membership information, please contact the Nottawasaga Valley Conservation Authority 8195 Line 8, Utopia, ON, L0M 1T0, (705) 424-1479 please visit minesingwetlands.ca

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Opinions expressed in these articles are solely those of the authors.

Heron Today, Gone Tomorrow?

Wyman Jacques led winter heronry hikes into Minesing Wetlands and completed heron nest counts for many years including the years from 1991 to 2005. My first experience with the Minesing heronries was back in February 2005 (the "winter of the Grey Grey Owls") when my son Daniel and I joined an eager group led by Wyman. I will never forget the hike and the sights of owls and the heronry on that beautiful day. This article is dedicated to Wyman and his love of the Minesing herons.

Great Blue Herons are colonial nesters and often (but not always) choose the same nesting location each year. In 2005, two Great Blue Heron heronries were present in Minesing Wetlands, one of which was assessed as the fifth largest in Southern Ontario. In the early 1970s and likely into the early 1990s, more than 300 nests were observed most years in the Minesing Wetlands. In the early 2000s, nest counts dropped to under 200. Although surveys were discontinued after 2005, it was clear that nesting activity was declining. I recall seeing the gradual then sudden loss of the Willow Creek heronry from afar, while "marsh monitoring" in the mid-late 2000s.

Friends of Minesing Wetlands (and others, notably Chris Evans) began to follow in Wyman's footsteps around 2011. I recall a strenuous snowshoe trip in with former FOMW directors Tina Desroches and Adam Scott to view past colony locations. Two nests were present in the Mad/Nottawasaga marsh near the bald eagle nest. Only three nests were observed near 3rd Concession in the vicinity of the large colony that I had visited with Wyman and crew back in 2005.



Chris Evans identified a new colony along the east edge of the Nottawasaga River swamp in 2011. About 22 nests were observed. A similar count was recorded in 2013 but, in 2014, fewer nests were observed by FOMW members and some of those were in disrepair. This was not a good sign! However, that same spring, Sean Rootham and I were paddling the Mad River and observed several heron nests in their traditional heronry near 3rd Concession. A FOMW snowshoe hike that winter identified 30 nests – the herons had returned! Ice conditions last winter were unsafe and we were unable to view either the 3rd Concession or Nottawasaga nesting sites.

Clearly, heron nesting activity has declined significantly in Minesing Wetlands. Why might this be? Intimidation by our resident bald eagles may be a factor. Poor survival of young due to predation or weather may also be a factor in the decline. Natural decline of the drowned swamps preferred for nesting may force herons to abandon declining sites and select "fresher" drowned forests which provide sturdier branch structures for nest construction. This may be the case at the former Mad/Notty nesting site. However, these "fresher" forests are in abundant supply elsewhere in the Minesing Wetlands.

Will the Minesing heronries return to their former glory? Only time will tell. Nesting or not, colonial nesting members of the heron family continue to frequent Minesing Wetlands. Squadrons of Black-crowned Night Herons fly in from heronries off the Collingwood shoreline and are seen regularly seen foraging during marsh monitoring. Great Egrets also come in from Collingwood to forage and roost. Over 30 Great Egrets were observed near the Mad/Nottawasaga confluence in late June 2016 and egrets are also known to roost in numbers off 2nd Concession near the Lookout. The Minesing heronries may ebb and flow over time but members of the heron family will always (we hope!) be part of Minesing and the Minesing experience!



Reedy or Not: Controlling Common Reed in Minesing Wetlands

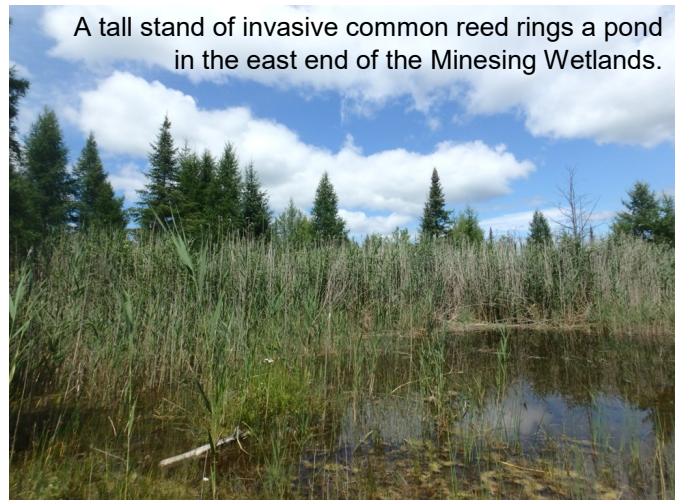
By now, most people in Ontario have probably noticed common reed (*Phragmites australis*) during their travels through the province. Whether it is a giant population lining a major highway for kilometers, a dense stand towering in a marsh, or small patches popping up along a lakeshore, common reed is pretty hard to miss. Standing up to 5 m tall, with huge fluffy purple or brown seed heads and wide blue-ish green leaves, it's quite showy for a grass.

Unfortunately, this impressive-looking plant is an alien invasive species, meaning that it was introduced by humans outside of its natural range. Its spread threatens native species, ecological communities and ecosystems. Like most invasive species, common reed (or "phrag" it is often called) is remarkably adaptable to a wide range of environmental conditions; it can grow in water or on sand dunes, in full sun or on wooded wetland edges, in an otherwise pristine wetland or a roadside ditch or agricultural drain. It's allelopathic (which means that its roots release chemicals that inhibit the growth of other plants), and spreads quickly by its roots and seeds, forming dense stands (monocultures) that exclude other plant species. Given the tangle of stems, lack of plant species variety, and changing moisture regime associated with these dense patches, wildlife (such as turtles, insects, and birds) can't use the monocultures as habitat, and they often become "dead zones" with little biodiversity. Together, these nasty characteristics make common reed one of the most serious threats to the health of wetlands locally, provincially and nationally.

The provincially and internationally significant Minesing Wetlands contains a variety of wetland habitat, including large expanses of marsh and fen that are susceptible to invasion by common reed, which is currently found in recently established populations around the wetland margins. Over the past four years, the Nottawasaga Valley Conservation Authority (NVCA) and the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) have been working together to monitor and map invasive common reed in the wetlands and control existing patches through a variety of techniques.

The methods used to control common reed depend on the size of the patch and the site conditions: herbicides (applied by a licensed exterminator) are the most effective method to completely kill the plants and their roots, however they can only be used on dry land; for small patches on wet ground or in the water, stems can be cut below the soil level to "drown" and weaken the plant; and in the fall and winter, seed heads can be collected to reduce spread. In 2015 and 2016, NCC and NVCA continued to map the spread and extent of this invader, and used a combination of these methods to work on controlling priority patches around the Minesing Wetlands. These efforts were supported by many incredible partners and volunteers, including a private ecological services contractor, FOMW members who collected seed heads on a snowshoe hike in February 2015, a neighbouring land owner (Harold Parker) who helps control the patch in the marsh near his property annually, and the 12th Barrie Scouts who cut stems in October 2015. Just as Rome wasn't built in a day, common reed won't be controlled in a year, or likely even a decade. Protecting wetlands from this invader will require years of repeated treatments, vigilant monitoring, community support, and funding.

Continue reading on page four to find out how we can help control this invasive species. It's going to take a big coordinated effort of governments, agencies, and the public working together to stop the spread of common reed, but, as Friends of Minesing know, our wetlands are worth it!



A tall stand of invasive common reed rings a pond in the east end of the Minesing Wetlands.

With Fond Memories: Wyman Jacques

There are those of a certain age in Barrie, who may remember "Mr. Jacques" best as their biology teacher at Barrie North Collegiate. Having left his mark in various Ontario locations as a young man, Wyman Jacques established his family in Barrie and became an integral part of the church, horticultural and naturalist communities.

In the late 1980's and early 1990's, the Nottawasaga Valley Conservation Authority undertook the ambitious project of developing the Tiffin Centre for Conservation into the dynamic property it is today. At that time, the John L. Jose Environmental Learning Centre, along with the network of trails and other facilities at the Tiffin Centre, were in the concept phase. In recognition of his support towards the project being realized Wyman Jacques is recognized on the donor wall beside the fireplace in the Jose building.

Meanwhile, Wyman's work to monitor nest numbers in the heronries of the Minesing Wetlands provided important and meaningful insight into the cycles of this internationally recognized ecosystem. Wyman's willingness to share his passions with anyone who was interested led to the popularity of Friends snowshoe hikes through the wetlands, to visit the two main heronries. Wyman was an inspiration to those who joined him on these trips.

Wyman passed away in August, and while he will be missed, the research he conducted remains, and we should all strive to be as dedicated to community, and the environment, as he was.

*Submitted by Hellaina Rothenburg,
Minesing Reeds Editor*



Led by Wyman Jacques, a group makes their way through the Minesing Wetlands to inspect the heronries (February 2000)

Actions we can all take to help control common reed:

- Learn how to identify invasive common reed and distinguish it from the native *Phragmites australis* species (please visit www.invadingspecies.com for resources)
- Report your sightings of Common Reed to EDDMapS Ontario (<https://www.eddmaps.org/ontario/>) so that land managers can work to control the invasion
- Don't be a vector: ensure that you are not transporting *Phragmites* roots, stems, or seeds on your tires, in transported soil, or yard waste
- Offer to take on a patch (with landowner permission, of course!) that you will cut (to drown) every year in late summer or early fall
- Spread the word about invasive Common Reed and how to stop its spread

Are you interested in becoming a "Friend of Minesing Wetlands?" Funds raised contribute to FOMW-led conservation initiatives in the Minesing Wetlands. Members receive discounted rates for planned tours throughout the year and receive "Minesing Reeds" (by post or by email). Memberships are valid for the current calendar year. Thank you for your support!

Please check the appropriate box for your pass and membership category:

☐ \$20 for an individual ☐ \$50 for a family ☐ \$200 for a Club ☐ \$400 for a corporation

*Please return this form, with a cheque payable to NVCA c/o Friends of Minesing Wetlands,
to the N.V.C.A., 8195 Line 8, Utopia, ON, L0M 1T0.*

Name _____

Address _____

I would like to receive Minesing Reeds via email ☐ email address _____