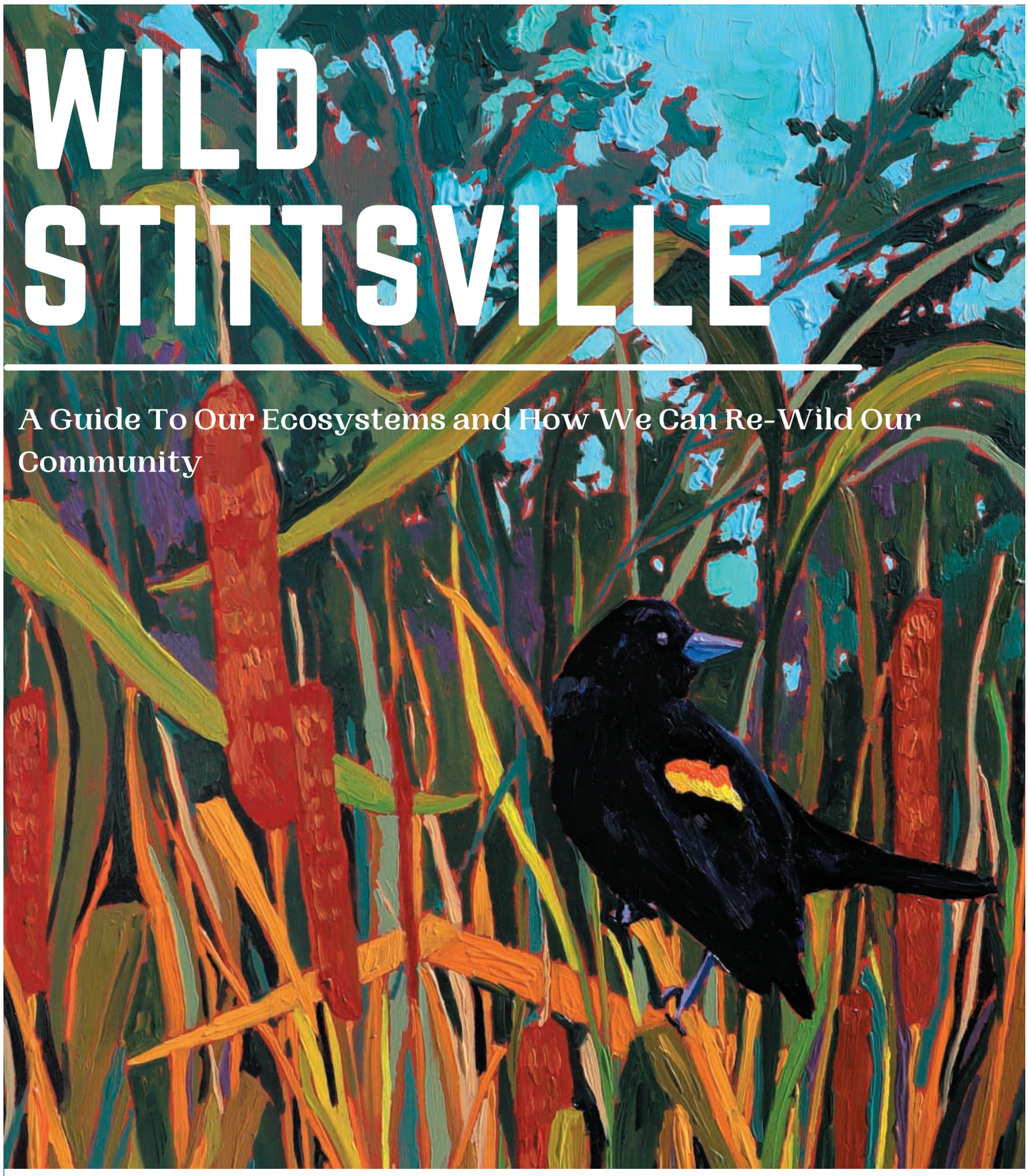
# WILD STITTSVILLE

## A Guide To Our Ecosystems and How We Can Re-Wild Our Community



CANADIAN WILDLIFE FEDERATION

CANADIAN conservation corps

CANADA SERVICE Corps

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Canada

Kemp Woodlands, Jessie Lozanski

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# Overview

This guide has been created for the community of Stittsville as part of a project for the Canadian Conservation Corps. The Canadian Conservation Corps is a branch of the Canadian Wildlife Federation and the Canada Service Corps that gives opportunities to Canadian youth aged 18-30 to get involved in conservation. The program has 3 stages, starting with an outdoor expedition, followed by a placement with a conservation organization and finally finished with a service project in the participant's hometown.

The author of this guide, Jessie Lozanski, is a Canadian Conservation Corps alumni who completed a two week canoe trip on Georgian Bay and a 4 month placement with the Kawartha Land Trust as part of her time with the Canadian Conservation Corps. She has a Bachelor's degree in Biology from Carleton University and is an artist, naturalist, and writer. Jessie is passionate about conservation and having a positive impact on her home community!

**You can find more information about the Canadian Conservation Corps at: https://cwf-fcf.org/en/explore/conservation-corps/**

# Table of Contents



Left: Observation Deck, Right Top: Goubourn Wetland, Right Bottom: Kemp Woodland, Photos By Jessie Lozanski

# 1.

**Stittsville, our quiet suburb, is home to many unique ecosystems full of rare and threatened species. This guide showcases our ecosystems and how we as citizens of Stittsville can help them thrive!**

## Why do we need productive ecosystems?

Sometimes living in the city and suburbs, full of concrete and cars, it's easy to forget that we are completely reliant on the natural world. Functioning ecosystems provide services to humans that account for billions of dollars. Insects pollinate the overwhelming majority of all flowering plants on Earth! Without insects we would lose our produce, plants, and with them, almost all life on Earth. Knowing that, it's astonishing to think that most of the lawn care industry is driven towards killing insects! Functioning ecosystems also clean our water and air, prevent natural disasters like flooding and produce an incomprehensible amount of value through tourism. During a pandemic when we are all stuck at home we are seeing the value of our neighbourhood green spaces - with more people walking outside than ever before! Getting outside in thriving ecosystems is proven to have positive effects on improving mood and decreasing stress. Studies have found that even a 15 minute walk in the woods can have a decrease in the stress hormone cortisol, a decrease in blood pressure and a drop in heart rate. On top of all these reasons there is an unquantifiable value in appreciating nature that needs to be preserved for future generations. The curiosity that comes with watching a deer peer at you through a forest or seeing a butterfly dance among the flowers; these are experiences that are integral to being human and ones we need to preserve for our children.

Goulbourn Wetland Complex, Jessie Lozanski

### A Little About Native vs Non-Native Species:

The overwhelming majority of plants found in urban areas are non-native, chosen for showiness and exoticism rather than their ecological value. To understand the true value of native plants, one needs to realize that they are a key part of a complicated ecosystem that keeps us alive and healthy. Native flora - plants that are uncultivated and have evolved in the same region they are in now . They are incredibly valuable because they have co-evolved with native fauna for over thousands of years creating specialized adaptations. For example, Monarch butterfly caterpillars have specifically adapted to consume milkweed by severing the ducts that produce the plant's defense. Monarchs exclusively survive on milkweed varieties - if milkweed isn't available they cannot survive on a different plant. Phragmites, an invasive plant from Europe has been in North America for over 500 years and yet it still only hosts about 5 insect species in North America compared to 170 insect species in Europe. Adaptation takes a long time and cannot keep up with the rate in which we introduce species. However, promoting native species can have quick and obvious results. Try planting a Sugar Maple instead of a Norway Maple and see how many more birds start flocking to your yard.

## Invasive Species

**Invasive Species are organisms that have been introduced to areas outside their natural range and have detrimental effects on the local ecosystems.**

Left: Phragmites, Right: Wild Parsnip

# 2. Creek

Stittsville is home to two creeks that are part of the Carp River Watershed. The Carp River is Ottawa's only river that flows entirely within the city itself from Glen Cairn through Kanata, Carp, Kinburn and finishing at the Ottawa River in Fitzroy Provincial Park. Eighty major tributaries extend from the Carp river including Poole Creek and Feedmill Creek found in Stittsville. Creeks host a wide array of plants and animals and are key to good water quality by diluting contaminants and recycling nutrients that benefits people, plants, and animals alike.

## Some species found in our creeks:


Great Blue Heron


Painted Turtle


Green Frog


Common Cattail


Water Scorpion

American Eels are an endangered fish that have a very unique life cycle. Starting in the Sargasso Sea in the Northern Atlantic they eventually migrate inland, some travel as far as Algonquin Park before heading back out to sea once they have matured to spawn. American Eels exist in the most diverse range of habitats out of any fish species in the world! An American Eel was found in our Poole Creek, identified by its long snake-like body and large-lipped mouth- the first to be recorded in one of the Carp River's tributaries.

Seeing a Least Bittern requires a keen eye. They easily blend in with the surrounding cattails, slowly stalking prey with their extraordinarily long neck that can extend at a moments notice to snap up an unsuspecting fish, frog or insect. Least Bitterns are the smallest of the Heron family and are threatened in Ontario from habitat loss as more and more wetlands are drained. Our creeks and wetlands provide essential homes for Least Bitterns.

Brown Trout is a European Trout species that had been stocked a little over 20 years ago in Poole Creek for recreational fishing. Having been in Ontario for over a century Brown Trout are now able to establish populations without human intervention and are therefore considered naturalized. That being said, introduced fish, despite being naturalized can still have detrimental effects on the ecosystems to which they have been introduced. This could include greater competition for native fish species, disease introduction and reduced populations in unadapted native prey.

Poole and Feedmill Creeks, Ottawa Public GIS

# What's going on in our creeks?

## Cold Water:

Although Poole Creek starts at the Goulbourn Wetland most of its water originates from rainwater that percolates through the sandy soils that lie under the western side of Stittsville - an artifact of the Atlantic Ocean flooding the St. Lawrence valley to create the Champlain Sea about 13,000 years ago. As water slowly percolates through the sand it cools to the temperature of deep soil before seeping into the creek. Cold water is essential for many aquatic species because it retains more oxygen than warmer water. When paired with low levels of pollutants and algae, Poole Creek is an ideal habitat for native Mottled Sculpin, mayflies, stoneflies, caddisflies, Brown Trout and over a dozen small fish species.

## Riparian Buffer:

A riparian buffer is the vegetated area along the edges of a stream. Environment Canada recommends that a riparian buffer has a width of at least 30m along both sides of the majority of a watercourse for it to keep the stream viable. Riparian Buffers are important for a number of reasons, one being that vegetation preserves water quality by intercepting and filtering sediments and contaminants before they reach the stream. Riparian vegetation also shade water which keeps it at a cool temperature that provides habitat and protection for a multitude of species. Both Feedmill Creek and Poole Creek were found to have relatively good riparian buffers with over 80% of both creeks having a buffer width of over 15m.

## Invasive Species and Pollution:

Pollution is evident in both Poole Creek and Feedmill Creek, mostly from garbage that is found throughout both streams. There are also a great number of invasive species like Japanese Knot-weed, Common Buckthorn, Himalayan Balsam, Norway Maple, Dog Strangling Vine, Phragmites, European Frogbit and more. Luckily both invasive species and pollution are things we can solve with some concerted clean-up efforts. Need some volunteer hours for school or something to do on the weekend? Clean up our natural neighbour's homes by picking up garbage and removing invasive species! When dealing with Invasive species contact the municipality or the Ottawa Field Naturalists Club for best practices.

# Wetland

Stittsville's largest wetland is the Provincially Significant Goulbourn Wetland Complex that sits south of Stittsville extending from Mansfield road all the way to Richardson side road with a notable marsh just down the Trans Canada Trail past Westridge. Marshes and swamps are the most productive ecosystem on earth (in producing organic matter and oxygen), even more productive than rainforests! Not only do they produce the things essential for life on earth but they also accumulate carbon in their slow decomposing organic matter, acting as carbon sinks.

## Some species found in our wetlands

Barn Swallow

American Larch

Spotted Joe Pye-Weed

Red Osier Dogwood

Belted Kingfisher

Blanding's Turtles can be identified by their large domed shells and bright yellow chins, distinct amongst Ontario turtles. They are a threatened species in Ontario, suffering from habitat loss and fragmentation as well as being victims of motor vehicle collisions. Luckily our Goulbourn Wetland provides a healthy habitat for many Blanding's turtles to grow - you might get lucky and see one near the Trans Canada trail off of Westridge!

Do you ever notice the chorus of large chirps coming from the wetlands around Stittsville during early spring? These are the calls of the Northern Spring Peeper, one of the earliest frogs to emerge in spring. During winter, Northern Spring Peepers concentrate glucose in their cells and expel water creating a natural antifreeze that prevents the frogs from freezing to death while they hibernate in below zero temperatures. In mid March they start thawing and the sounds of spring arrive!

Muskrats are medium-sized rodents with teeth like beavers and long, thin tails used as a rudder while swimming. You might notice piles of dried and decaying matter in and around the cattails in our wetlands - these are the Muskrat's homes! They build piles of mud and plant matter and then burrow below water level into the piles, creating a chamber within. Muskrats are also excellent swimmers and can hold their breath for up to 15 minutes!

Goulbourn Wetland Complex, Ottawa Public GIS

# What's going on in our wetlands?

## Beavers:

About 200 years ago beavers had been almost completely eliminated in the Ottawa valley from trapping. Their populations are just now beginning to re-establish themselves. Today, beavers are back to creating and changing our wetlands as nature's engineers. The Goulbourn Wetland Complex has changed as a result of the beaver repopulation with increasing pools of water and growing waterways. These new pools and waterways create habitat for fish, mammals, waterfowl, reptiles, amphibians and insects.

## Dead Trees:

As water levels have risen in the Goulbourn Wetland trees have been taken over by encroaching water and left standing dead. These standing dead trees not only provide great spots for building nests that Osprey are particularly fond of but they are also home to colonies of insects that attract a variety of birds especially woodpecker species. Herons also make their communal nesting sites in and amongst the standing dead trees.

## Boundaries:

The Goulbourn Wetland Complex is a provincially significant wetland, which means it is a wetland found by the province to be valuable and worthy of protection. This entails that any human intervention in and around the wetland is required to ensure that there are no adverse effects on the wetland. That being said the bounds of the Goulbourn Wetland are periodically re-evaluated- sometimes adding to the wetland, sometimes taking away as the wetland and legislation changes over time. It is up to us as citizens to ensure that we are conscious of these boundary changes so we can protect our natural neighbours!

# Forest

Stittsville is home to a number of forests but the most notable one is found in the Kemp Woodland, a protected area adjacent to Sacred Heart Catholic Highschool. The Great Carleton County Fire of 1870 burnt down most of Stittsville after a very dry summer. It is hypothesized that the Kemp Woodland was a swamp and this protected the cedar trees from burning down like most of the surrounding forests. As a result multiple trees in the kemp woodland are over 200 years old!

## Some species found in our forests


Eastern White Cedar


Sugar Maple


Yellow Birch


Jack-in-the-pulpit


White-Tailed Deer

In spring you might find Ontario's flower, the Great White Trillium, in and around our cedar forests. Trilliums are a plant with a three petaled flower and can live for up to 25 years! Another common trillium species spotted in Stittsville is the Red Trillium. The Red Trillium lacks nectar - instead, it attracts flies and beetles to pollinate it by exuding an odour that smells like a dead animal!

Ghost Pipe is a peculiar perennial plant that you might notice in coniferous forests because it is translucent white. Its white colour means it has no chlorophyll, the green pigment essential in photosynthesis- making the Ghost Pipe incapable of producing its own energy. Therefore it relies completely on fungal networks in the soil to parasitize off of other plants. Fungal networks tend to only establish themselves in rich soils and forests like our cedar woodlands.

North American Porcupines are Canada's second largest rodent behind the Beaver. They are arboreal creatures, spending most of their lives grazing on buds, twigs and bark in both coniferous, deciduous and mixed forests like our cedar woodlands. Their quills are modified hairs tipped with tiny barbs that help embed the quills in predators skin. Although inconvenient to dog owners, these quills are a necessary defense for porcupines since they are slow nearsighted creatures.

Kemp Woodland, Ottawa Public GIS

# What's going on in our forests?

## Old Growth Trees:

Our Kemp Woodlands host Cedar trees over 200 years old, the oldest being 255 years old, as well as multiple mature Yellow Birch. In the 1700s, these trees started their lives as tiny saplings and shaped and moulded their environment as they grew creating whole ecosystems around them. Old growth forests have unique soil that is teeming with fungal networks and is more effective at sequestering carbon than young forest soil. These forests also provide an array of habitat, from dead standing trees to logs and brush piles that can host thousands of organisms - from large mammals to birds, insects, fungi and bacteria. Some species like Pileated Woodpeckers also need trees large enough to support their roosting cavities, something that usually only old growth trees can provide.

## Ferns:

There are over a dozen different fern species found in the cedar forests around Stittsville including Maidenhair fern, Lady fern, Sensitive fern, Bracken fern, Christmas fern and Ostrich fern to name a few. Ferns are a vascular plant meaning they have roots, stems, and complex leaves but unlike most vascular plants (like wildflowers, fruit trees, and coniferous trees) they reproduce by spores rather than seeds. This is because ferns are a very ancient plant species emerging about 358.9 million years ago during the carboniferous period and act as an essential bridge between nonvascular plants like moss and the vascular plants we know today.

## Butternuts:

Butternuts have been found in cedar forests around Poole Creek. They are an endangered species in Ontario, as more than a third of the trees have been killed by Butternut Canker, a fungal infection. Butternut trees can be identified by their bark with flat topped ridges and its edible nuts found in fuzzy light green husks that provide food for small mammals and birds.

# Human Habitat

All over Stittsville there are habitats altered by humans. These might include human-made ponds, open fields, and backyards. These habitats are not ideal for wildlife, often taken over by invasive species or lawns but as time has passed some areas are becoming more naturalized allowing for wildlife to return.

## Some species found in our human habitats


Canadian Goose


Queen Anne's Lace


Northern Cardinal


Chickadee


Aster

Red-winged blackbirds are a friendly sight in Stitttsville, with their black bodies and red and yellow shoulder patch. They like to call in our trees, fields, and wetlands with their distinctive songs of spring and summer. Despite being a common sight, their populations have actually decreased by thirty percent over the last fifty years from habitat loss.

Staghorn Sumac is a large shrub with red berries and soft fuzzy bark, much like the velvet found on deer antlers. Sumac berries host a large variety of animals since they remain on the plant overwinter, thereby feeding small and large birds like songbirds, grouse, and turkeys. These shrubs are often an establishing plant in disturbed areas - making Staghorn Sumac a very common shrub around Stittville!

Goldenrod is a tall yellow wildflower that you might assume is what gives you allergies every summer and fall. The actual culprit is ragweed that typically inhabits the same area and blooms at the same time. Goldenrod is an extremely vital plant to our local ecosystems, supporting over 115 caterpillars of butterfly and moth species in Ontario. Considering that 96% of the diet of baby birds are young insects like caterpillars (not seeds and berries) goldenrods are responsible for an incredibly large food chain!

Stittsville, Ottawa Public GIS

# What's going on in our human habitats?

## Succession:

Succession is the progressive change in plant species over time. Around Stittsville you can watch succession take place - especially in our open fields that are currently being re-colonized by native plants. Typically herbaceous plants like goldenrod, ragweed and asters are some of the first plants to re-establish disturbed areas, followed by perennial herbs and woody shrubs like Staghorn Sumac. After around 50-60 years trees like Red Cedar, Trembling Aspen, Pin Cherry and White Ash will begin to dominate the landscape. If you have a large property that you would like to allow succession to occur, keep an eye out for invasive species that like to take over sunny and disturbed areas.

## Coyotes:

Living in Stittsville you probably have heard the haunting yips and howls of coyotes. They are generalist species and highly adaptable, finding homes in wilderness and cities from the southwestern United States all the way to our northern territories. Unsurprisingly they have adapted to habitat loss quite well and found a niche in the suburbs since they are plentiful with food like mice, rabbits, and berries but also provide refuge from wolves and hunters.

## Earthworms:

Earthworms are those pink wriggly worms that come out in hordes after rainfall. They are so common in our lives that it's assumed they are part of the landscape- but they actually are only recent additions. Earthworms are an invasive species introduced to North America from Europe and have significantly populated every province and territory. They can wreak havoc on our forests by consuming the leaf litter that is home to emerging plants and change the soil, making it hostile to our native flora and fauna. Be cautious not to transport earthworms to new areas like moving plants from your yard to your cottage and dispose of bait in areas like your lawn rather than a natural forest or field!

# 3. Stittsville Over Time

## Can you spot the differences?

Stittsville is a rapidly growing suburb with many of our fields, forests, and wetlands disappearing within the past few decades. Our local habitats are now isolated fragments of the ecosystems that used to exist. That being said there is also evidence of areas becoming naturalized like old farmer's fields. There is no denying that people need places to live so habitat fragmentation will always occur but we do have a control over promoting conservation values and using land responsibly.

1976

2002

2019

Ottawa Public GIS

Timbermere 1976

Timbermere 2002

Timbermere 2019

Ottawa Public GIS

## Homegrown National Park:

Douglas W. Tallamy, author of Nature's Best Hope posited the idea of a Homegrown National Park. This was after discovering that lawns in the United States cover 40 million acres - an area almost the size of all their National Parks combined! With all of that space we could easily create a national park in our backyards! Yards are still fragments of the ecosystems that used to exist, but they can act as wildlife corridors. Wildlife corridors are areas of habitat in a natural state that connect ecosystems. Currently our lawns are ecological wastelands - so to make our yards into a Homegrown National Park, we need to make lawns part of the surrounding ecosystems - this happens by planting native plants, providing food and shelter for wildlife and allowing natural processes to occur. If every homeowner in Stittsville converted even part of their lawns to natural habitat we could significantly contribute to our surrounding ecosystems!

# 4. Gardening For Wildlife

## Pollinators:

Pollinators are insects and small mammals that feed on nectar and pollen and transport pollen between flowers- essential to plant reproduction. Canada has a large variety of pollinators - from butterflies to beetles, hummingbirds and moths - but bees do the vast majority of pollination. Honey Bees, the bee most people are familiar with, are actually an introduced species from Europe. There are over 900 native bee species in Canada that are much more effective pollinators than Honey Bees - like Bumble Bees and Mason Bees (wasps and hoverflies are significant pollinators as well!). The majority of our native bees and wasps are also solitary and non-aggressive. Planting native plant species is the best thing you can do to help out our bees, especially avoiding introduced plants that have closed petals, preventing the pollinators from accessing the nectar. Providing native flowers in a variety of colour, shape and blooming times will create a haven for pollinators in your yard since every pollinator has its own lifestyle and time of activity!

## Some tips for gardening for pollinators:

- Bees are especially attracted to blue, yellow, purple, and pink flowers
- Do not use chemicals like pesticides in your yard, these are one of the leading causes of pollinator decline
- Plants like Blueberries, Serviceberry, Wild Strawberry, Apple, Willow, and Violets are good for bees in spring
- Plants like Bergamot, Coneflower, Milkweed, Yarrow, Native Roses, and Culvers Root are good for bees in summer
- Plants like Aster, Black Eyed Susan, Goldenrod, Great Blue Lobelia, and Blue Vervain are good for bees in fall
- Large bee hotels can attract bee parasitoids so try finding or making small bee homes
- Putting out a shallow dish of water will quench your pollinator's thirst!

## Wildlife:

Pollinators aren't the only important parts to your backyard habitat. All healthy ecosystems rely on a complex network of relationships between their resident organisms so we need to attract a variety of animals! These include birds, mammals, amphibians, reptiles and non-pollinating insects.

## What plants should I put in my garden?

Listed are some examples of native plants you can put in your yard. Further research would be recommended since every yard has different conditions. Websites like the Natural Edge's plant database present an extremely easy way to find suitable plants for your yard's soil type, sunlight level and ecoregion. More resources include the Ottawa Field Naturalists, Fletcher Wildlife Garden and the Canadian Wildlife Federation.

Resources:

- https://can-plant.ca/
- https://naturaledge.watersheds.ca/plant-database/
- https://cwf-fcf.org/en/resources/encyclopedias/native-plant-encyclopedia/
- https://ofnc.ca/programs/fletcher-wildlife-garden/make-your-own-wildlife-garden
- https://ofnc.ca/programs/fletcher-wildlife-garden/flora-and-fauna-at-the-fwg/plants-for-wildlife-at-the-fwg
- https://cwf-fcf.org/en/explore/gardening-for-wildlife/?src=menu
- https://cwf-fcf.org/en/explore/gardening-for-wildlife/action/get-certified/

Trees:

- American Beech
- American Mountain Ash
- Balsam Fir
- Basswood
- Black Cherry
- Black Walnut
- Bur Oak
- Red Oak
- White Oak
- Canada Serviceberry
- Eastern Red Cedar
- Eastern White Cedar
- Eastern Hemlock
- Ironwood
- Large- tooth Aspen
- Trembling Aspen
- Red Maple
- Striped Maple
- Sugar Maple
- Silver Maple
- Red Pine
- White Pine
- White Birch
- Yellow Birch

Wildflowers:

- Black Eyed Susan
- Blanketflower
- Blue Vervain
- Blue Lobelia
- Blue Lupine
- Boneset
- Butterfly Milkweed
- Canada Goldenrod
- Common Milkweed
- Common Blue Violet
- Cup Plant
- False Solomon's Seal
- Foxglove Beardtongue
- Purple Coneflower
- Hoary Vervain
- Lance Leaved Coreopsis
- New England Aster
- Wild Bergamot
- Spotted Joe- Pye Weed
- Wood Lily
- Yarrow
- Wild Geranium
- Wild Blue Flax
- Wild Chives

Shrubs:

- Alternate Leaved Dogwood
- Beaked Hazel
- Black Elderberry
- Canadian Gooseberry
- Canadian Serviceberry
- Canada Yew
- Chokecherry
- Common Juniper
- Common Wild Rose
- Highbush Cranberry
- Maple leaved Viburnum
- Ninebark
- Pincherry
- Prickly Wild Rose
- Red Osier Dogwood
- Staghorn Sumac

# How To Build Habitat

## Leaf Litter:

Moths and butterflies often have part of their life cycles in trees and then drop down to the leaf litter below. Many butterflies and moths overwinter in leaf litter as eggs, caterpillars ,or adults. Luna Moths, one of Canada's largest moths, make their cocoons in leaf litter- If you always tidy your lawn then they have nowhere to go! Leaf litter also provides benefits to your plants by adding nutrients back into your soil, retaining moisture and reducing soil temperature which will benefit your plants.

## Plant Layering:

Birds often nest and feed in varying plant layers so having a variety of large trees, shrubs, vines and ferns will be highly beneficial for their lifecycle.

## Plant Trimming:

When trimming your plants in fall, leave a large amount of their stems since many insects overwinter in the pith and hollows of stems.

## Brush Piles:

Tempted to throw out your yard clippings? Instead of having them carted away try piling your twigs, branches, and plant waste in a corner of your yard to create habitat for birds and insects!

## Cedar Hedges:

Planting cedar hedges along your fence or in place of a fence is a great way to increase privacy in your yard while also creating habitat! Birds, small mammals and insects all find homes in cedar hedges, especially in winter months when they seek shelter from the elements.

## Dead logs and stumps:

Countless organisms find homes in your decaying logs and stumps. Instead of having your stump removed, leave it and let it become a busy haven for wildlife. Logs can also be beautiful accent pieces in your garden.

## Water:

Birds, insects and small mammals need water too! Putting out a shallow dish of water with some rocks that insects can rest on is a great way to quench the thirst of your backyard wildlife. To prevent the water from becoming a pool of mosquito larvae or fungal growth, make sure you clean it out every few days and refresh it with some clean water.

## No lawn?

If you have a small yard or no yard at all try having planters full of native flowers. Non-native annuals like heirloom cosmos and zinnias are also beneficial for pollinators and their seed heads can be left as food for birds.

## What Else Can I Do:

If you don't have a yard or are looking to do more, start looking into our local parks and natural spaces. Maybe you could build some bat boxes (https://cwf-fcf.org/en/explore/bats/?src=menu) that you could put up around Stittsville or clean up garbage in a stretch of Poole Creek. You could also organize planting of native plant species around a soccer field or get involved in local government to make sure the needs of our natural spaces and community are met. Eroded community is often paired with eroded natural spaces and it is in our control to make sure us and our ecosystems are thriving. Finally, recording your wildlife observations on the iNaturalist app is a great way to contribute to citizen science - many organizations use collected observations to track wildlife populations including this guide!

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