



Celebrating
20 Years
Thanks to You!



REVIEW

FALL/WINTER 2021

Goose and Egret. Photo by Mike Weissmann



Then and Now

By Christine Thompson,
Major Gifts Manager for *rare*

This year, *rare* celebrates twenty years of extraordinary investment by over 3,000 donors, and many other friends of *rare* to support our efforts for conservation, research and education. Together, you have invested more than \$45 million to ensure the lands we preserve continue to be accessible to the community in a natural state, intact in perpetuity — a dream come true. We believe that sustaining these lands is a viable goal if we all work together in reciprocity with the land.

Over the past two decades, you have helped grow and build *rare's* reputation as an international environmental research institute. You have helped *rare* weather a number of challenges that would have seen the lands

in Blair fragmented, developed, or fallen into private hands. Together, we prevailed and protected these lands, demonstrating their ecological significance to the Region of Waterloo who created the Environmentally Sensitive Landscapes (ESL) designation, the first of its kind in Canada. This designation is now applied not just to *rare* but to lands across the Waterloo Region.

You have helped us create a model of conservation that is the first of its kind in Canada, incorporating research and education into a *Chain of Learning* that reaches out to young learners, allowing them to contribute to new thinking by those who interact with them.

Consider the way things were versus the way they are now, thanks to your support:

THEN:

On December 6, 2001, we incorporated as Cruickston Park Research Reserve.

NOW:

We are named the *rare* Charitable Research Reserve to reflect the rare landscapes protected within, including alvars and old growth Carolinian forest, and the organization's unique method of conservation.

THEN:

900+ acres were preserved in Waterloo Region (3 properties in Blair — now called the Blair site).

NOW:

1,200+ acres are preserved (7 properties across Waterloo Region and Wellington County).

THEN:

The original lands were bequeathed by Matthew Wilks Keefer to the University of Guelph for agricultural research.

The *rare* Charitable Research Reserve's headquarters and seven conservation lands comprise over 1,200 acres, mostly within the Haldimand Tract. Spanning six miles on either side of the Grand River, the Haldimand Tract is land granted to the Six Nations of the Grand River in 1784 to recognize their support for the British in the American Revolution. In Guelph/Wellington, *rare* also stewards lands at the border of the Upper Canada Treaty No. 3 from 1792 and Treaty 19 from 1818.

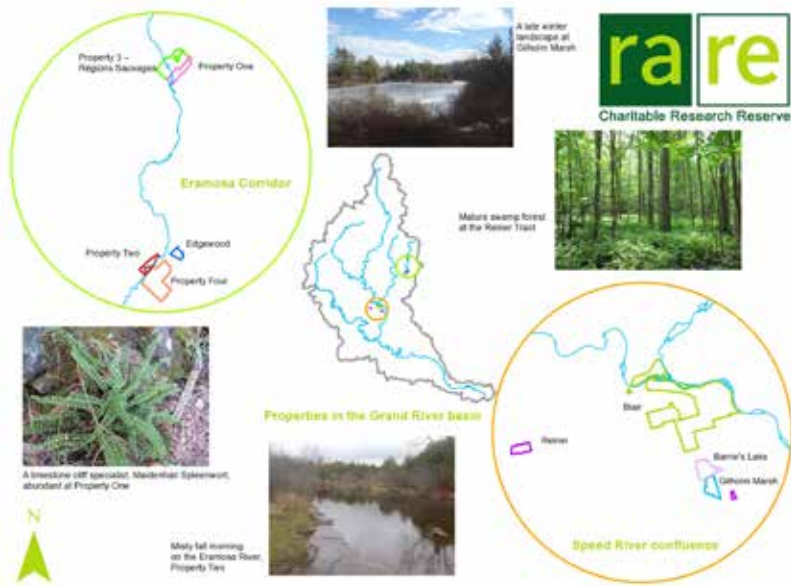
For all its properties, *rare* is grateful to the original stewards of the land, which has been rich in diverse Indigenous presence since time immemorial. We honour and respect the sovereignty of the Onkwehon:we Peoples of Six Nations of the Grand River and the Anishinaabe Peoples of the Mississaugas of the Credit who share their lands with us. Nia:wen and Miigwech (thank you). These lands today are also home to many other First Nations, Métis and Inuit who have moved to the area from across Turtle Island.



1999

The original Blair property at *rare* is put up for sale by the University of Guelph. Locals raise concerns about loss of land to development.





NOW:

The lands continue to be used as a living laboratory. Over the past twenty years, 13 university and other teaching institutions have partnered with **rare**; 108 research projects list **rare** as a site of study, 52 published in peer-reviewed international journals. More than 5,000 species have been catalogued so far in an inventory across all of our properties.

THEN:

A small group of community members gathered funds to ensure the lands are not developed.

NOW:

More than 3,000 donors from across the province and the country have invested \$45 million in **rare** to date.

THEN:

We took possession of four heritage buildings in various stages of disrepair.

NOW:

We continue to preserve an 1840s slit barn (one of just a few remaining in southern Ontario) and companion farmhouse as the hub for the 4-season *Every Child Outdoors* (ECO) program. We host North House, a prefabricated solar-powered house that makes sustainable living attractive and rewarding, installed at Springbank Farm, for research and educational use and to house the annual Eastern Comma Artist-in-Residence. We maintain the historical Lamb's Inn, housing **rare's** upgraded and updated offices, while keeping the heritage features intact.

THEN:

We maintained 72 community garden plots.

NOW:

We maintain 111 community garden plots plus 16,000+ ft² of gardens and orchard designated to support local food banks — Springbank

Food Bank Gardens — providing as much as 8,000 lbs annually to those most in need in the community.

ALL THANKS TO YOU

None of this would have been possible without the ongoing commitment of supporters such as you. This, the 20th anniversary of **rare**, is a testament to the hard work and investment of thousands of individuals inside and outside the region. With that support, we look forward to the next twenty years and beyond, preserving the natural lands of Waterloo Region and Wellington County.

Photos this spread, clockwise from top left: 1. Sunset Tree, by Devon Crowell; 2. New Properties Map; 3. Grey Squirrel Project, by Jenna Quinn; 4. Aerial Photo of Gardens at Springbank Farm; 5. Resource House, by S. Perry; 6. North House Exterior, by Nancy Froklage; 7. Front of Lamb's Inn, by Peter Kelly; 8. KW Record article, November 20, 1999; 9. Southwood Mentorship (Birds & Butterflies), by Jenna Quinn



20 Years of **rare**



DECEMBER 2001

Cruickston Charitable Research Reserve incorporated by a group of community-minded people with a view to conserving the property in perpetuity on behalf of the public. Home to 45 species of native trees and 49 rare plants as well as 201 species of birds, and rare species of fish.

2003

Cruickston Creek and its associated wetlands designated Class 1 Provincially Significant Wetland, a component of the Barrie's Lake-Bauman Creek Wetland Complex. Region amends its official plan to designate the area as an Environmentally Sensitive Landscape.

Celebrating Five Years of Turtle Rescue at *rare*

By Alissa Fraser,
Conservation Technician for *rare*

The *rare* Turtle Rescue Project celebrated its fifth anniversary by helping 1,893 turtle hatchlings out of the shell — our highest number of hatchling releases to date! A total of 69 nests were collected with an additional 29 protected with nest protectors. This brings our grand total to 275 nests collected and 6,935 hatchlings released over five years. Thanks to everyone who helped us achieve this, using our new Turtle Hotline.

All eight species of turtles in Ontario are at risk. Turtles take years to mature and face high juvenile losses due to environmental conditions and predators. Southwestern Ontario has a dense road network and development that continues to expand. To increase nesting success and offset human impacts, the Turtle Rescue Project collects turtle eggs from roadsides, sports fields and other high-risk areas. After two months in the incubators, the eggs hatch and the hatchlings are released in a suitable habitat near their original nest location. This helps turtles get past the two most difficult parts of their life: hatching and making it to water for the first time. This year, we heard from several individuals looking to build their own nest protectors on their property. Turtles often return to the same area to nest. If you have a turtle that nests in your yard, consider building your own nest protector

using the schematic provided by the Canadian Wildlife Federation (Download it at <https://bit.ly/3pBiwLY>).

Despite our success, there still needs to be longer term solutions to protect our turtle populations, including increased habitat protection and wildlife corridors to safely connect remaining natural areas. Roads present a major risk to all wildlife. The wildlife crossings installed beneath Roseville Road in North Dumfries shows what can be accomplished when the community steps up. It would be remarkable if, by the time the Painted Turtle hatchlings that were released in 2017 mature in 7-10 years, they are able to travel safely in search of mates and nesting sites without encountering motor vehicles.

Watch out in May and June for nesting turtles and report any you think may be vulnerable to the *rare* Turtle Hotline at (226) 962-6885. We also appreciate reports of nest protectors in need of repair or, between August and October, of protected nests starting to hatch.

You can donate to the Turtle Rescue Project at raresites.org/donate or donate to the Turn the Map Green campaign to ensure lands under *rare*'s umbrella are protected in perpetuity. We appreciate the contributions *rare* supporters have made so far to give today's turtles hope for tomorrow.



Sharing the B

By Jessica O'Connell
Garden Assistant for *rare*

On September 22nd, *rare*'s Springbank Farm joined local community partners in a season wrap-up and celebration of One Seed, One Community's seed saving and sharing project. This event was a Fresh Food Drive Extravaganza that occurred in partnership with the Idea Exchange: Preston, *rare* Charitable Research Reserve, Seeds of Diversity Canada, and the Cambridge Self Help Food Bank.

The opportunity to deliver even more vegetables to the Cambridge Self-Help Food Bank (CSHFB) initiated weekly Fresh Food drop-offs at *rare*'s main office every Wednesday, leading up to the Extravaganza. We encouraged local community members and gardeners to donate any produce they had grown or purchased to the Fresh Food Drive Extravaganza which in turn was donated to the CSHFB. A local network of gardeners trying to feed the community together have a far greater impact on regional food security than if only one "bank" were to work on its own.

The opportunity to collect seed from gardeners who had grown the Cascadia Pea, this year's seed shared by One Seed, One Community was also a part of this Extravaganza. Donated seeds will enter the Idea Exchange: Preston Seed Library, and will be accessible to community members.

This year, the Springbank Food Bank Garden and the Fresh Food Drives donated thousands of pounds of organic produce to the Cambridge Self Help Food Bank. A second year without large volunteer groups due to the pandemic still allowed us to harvest hundreds of organic vegetables each week in Summer and Fall.



20 Years of *rare*

2004

Name changed to *rare* Charitable Research Reserve, highlighting uniqueness of *rare*'s lands and programs.

4 *rare* review



2005

Lamb's Inn acquired as *rare*'s main office. A Natural Investment fundraising campaign launched with an initial goal of \$17 million.



County of *rare*



When the Idea Exchange initiates free seed distribution they lend their abilities and expertise so that the community has the means to grow their own food. Seeds of Diversity Canada is another organization that shares seed-saving methods, and knowledge about why diversity matters. Their efforts help CSHFB distribute food literacy in our community and we are grateful to partner with such leaders of food sovereignty in the region.

We are also grateful to all the local gardeners who dropped off fresh food during September. Their kindness reminds us that we can expand our community of growers to feed the community we're embedded in.

As we save seed for future harvests and partner with regional leaders in seed-saving initiatives, we are investing in the health of our community. In collaboration, *rare* is reaching out to community gardeners to help build a supportive, growing network.

Don't Unleash Your Dogs

Tom Woodcock,
Planning Ecologist for *rare*

Dog walking is a popular recreational use of the trails at *rare*. However, these activities must not compromise *rare*'s primary mission to conserve and protect the lands. Dogs can have an impact on natural areas, for example by disturbing wildlife, or inadvertently spreading of the seeds of invasive species to environmentally sensitive lands. An off-leash dog could also impact other trail users, surprising those who may be fearful of dogs, or have mobility or balance issues, or have young children. This is why visitors to *rare*, must keep their pets on a leash at all times. Not only is this common courtesy, it is a rule for using our trails, and it is the law. This summer, *rare* staff embarked on a campaign to educate guests with dogs about their responsibilities when visiting a nature reserve.

Humans are often unaware of the effects that their presence has on wildlife. Animals are generally aware of people long before the people are aware of them, and move away from the perceived threat when the distance closes to about 100 metres, on average. Research has shown that dogs, even those on leash, can double this reaction distance. Unleashed dogs can stress wildlife, causing them to bolt and use more energy (a particular concern in winter), or accidentally expose themselves to predators. Off-leash dogs have the potential to injure or kill wildlife directly, disrupt their behaviour, and trample off-trail vegetation.

The safety of the pet is also at risk. Frightened wildlife may become aggressive and attack an unleashed dog. There is also potential for wildlife to spread disease to pets, such as leptospirosis, raccoon roundworm, distemper, rabies, in addition to possible emergent issues such as Echinococcus tapeworms. Some of



these diseases can also be health hazards to dog owners.

Dogs on leash are acceptable on *rare*'s Grand Allée and Maple Lane, the Neuman Field trail, and the City of Cambridge permits dogs on leash on the Grand Trunk Trail (For more information about our trails, visit raresites.org/trails/). The remaining trails are in areas where the presence of dogs would adversely impact the natural habitat. There are no off-leash areas anywhere on *rare* property. As always, *rare* works hard to balance wildlife, trail users, and many other activities related to conservation, research, and education, and we appreciate everyone's support and help to make this happen.

Photos this spread, clockwise from middle left: 1. Baby Snapping Turtles, by Alissa Fraser; 2. Donated Produce, by J. O'Connell; 3. Produce and *rare* Pickup Truck, by J. O'Connell; 4. Dog on a Leash, by L. Klein; 5. School Program at Gardens, Anonymous; 6. Raised Bed Gardens, Anonymous; 7. A Natural Investment Campaign Launch, Anonymous; 8. *rare* Cake, 2004, Anonymous

20 Years of *rare*

2007

Community gardens program initiated, as well as a youth education garden and a native plant demonstration garden.



2009

ECO Program initiated. More than 19,500 children and youth have participated in the program since then.



A Return to Outdoor Education

By Istafa Sufi,
Educator for *rare*

This year saw the return of our annual *rare* ECO Summer Camp. After last year's pause due to COVID-19 restrictions, this year saw 112 children from our local communities, aged 6-12, come out to spend their days immersed in the local environment. Our *rare* Education Team were joined by summer staff Helmi Hess and Michelle MacMillan. Together, the team facilitated an exciting camp experience, bringing with them activities from their backgrounds in environmental education, natural art and scientific research.

ECO campers had the opportunity to work with researchers at *rare*, exploring and interacting with topics ranging from insects to crab apples, electro-fishing, eDNA, squirrels, reptiles, amphibians and more. The campers were also joined by *rare*'s Indigenous Education Consultant and Indigenous Knowledge Keeper, Christine Lefebvre (Karonhyakatste). Christine shared cultural teachings and a traditional craft with the budding environmentalists.

The Springbank Garden was a hit with the campers. They got a real taste of the farm-to-table experience. Campers harvested fresh organic produce which they then turned into a nutritious and delicious salad. They also got to assist our garden staff by planting seeds and

weeding, learning all about growing fresh organic produce for the local food banks along the way. Goats at the barn helped teach the young naturalists about the Common Reed and natural methods for controlling invasive species.

For many campers, being active through games and hikes was the highlight of the week. Fun activities and games like Wolfpack, Bat and Moth, and Forest Fire were used to teach the young naturalists about ecological concepts of population dynamics, nutrient cycles, and predator/prey relations. Opportunities for discovery on a hike can be limitless, and this was exactly the case as campers found swooping ospreys mid-hunt, snakes, and many beautiful flowers and plants along the way!

While the campers are back in school now, we hope their time at *rare* has inspired them on their individual paths of lifelong learning, scientific inquiry, and land stewardship. Olivia S., age 8, shared this on day two of *rare* Summer ECO Camp: "I'm not really a nature person but after yesterday, I think I'm going to be!"

If you are interested in immersing your child in the natural world, registration for the *rare* Nature School and March Break ECO Camp is now open at raresites.org/education/natureschool and raresites.org/education/eco-camps/march-break-camp!



Working Against Racism and For Equity

By Laura Klein
Gosling Engagement Coordinator for *rare*
& Catherine Becsky
Administrative Assistant for *rare*

In response to anti-Black racism and systemic discrimination, in early 2020, the *rare* Charitable Research Reserve created an Anti-Racism and Equity Taskforce. As per Nature Canada's recent *Race and Nature in the City Report*, systemic racism is a barrier to access to nature, and achieving racial justice is critical for the well-being of nature.

The Task Force works to strengthen inclusivity through board, staff, and volunteer practices. Members have come together monthly since early 2020 to discuss equity building, set goals, and hold each other accountable to meet those goals.

The Task Force includes members from each department at *rare*, and has resulted in first actions, recognizing that these are only small steps towards creating more equitable and diverse spaces and that a lot more learning and deeper work is needed. For example, in early 2021, *rare* implemented a new anonymous review selection process to address potential hiring biases, including removing names and identifying information from resumes and cover letters.

Moreover, through discussion sparked during Task Force meetings, *rare* staff took the steps to make a BIPOC research scholarship program available, which became a reality in March 2021. One of the next steps of the task force is to continue to support local and BIPOC vendors through the development of ethical purchasing policy.

20 Years of *rare*



2012

Restoration of 1840s slit barn and companion farmhouse – becomes ECO Centre – 4-season program.



2013

Installation of North House at Springbank Farm.



Thanks to the Great Sponsors Who Supported the Walk & Run for *rare*

By Chris Ainsworth,
Sponsorship & Events Manager at *rare*

We would like to thank the amazing sponsors that supported this year's Walk & Run for *rare*. We are extremely grateful to work in a community with organizations that understand the importance of protecting environmentally sensitive lands in our region. We owe our sponsors a big thank you for helping to ensure the annual Walk & Run for *rare* is such a success each year.

One of those sponsors is Fiix. Headquartered in Toronto, they are simplifying the journey to modern maintenance. They offer the first open Computerized Maintenance Management System (CMMS) platform that mixes innovative technology with a focus on partnering with customers to make buying, implementing, and using maintenance software easier than ever. Fiix has been a strong supporter of *rare* since 2016. They are not only a sponsor of the Walk & Run for *rare* but, they are also one of our Corporations for Conservation and the official sponsor of *rare*'s 1,000 Gardens Project.

Thanks to Fiix and all sponsors of the 2021 Walk & Run for *rare*! We hope to celebrate *Turning the Map Green* with you in-person next year!



For more information on sponsorship opportunities with *rare*, please contact Chris Ainsworth at Chris.Ainsworth@rarsites.org, or by phone at (226) 989-8838

And Thanks to Everyone Who Walked and Ran for *rare*

By Laura Klein,
Gosling Engagement Coordinator at *rare*

The 2021 Walk & Run for *rare* successfully raised over \$33,000 by the final day of the event, and more donations have rolled in since, bringing the total to \$35,356.58. That protects over 17,500 square metres of environmentally sensitive land in perpetuity.

This year, due to COVID regulations, participants again had a week in September to do their 5 km walk or run at their own convenience, and in the location of their choosing. Many shared images of their successful walk and runs. Participants also turned out at our four pop-up walks held throughout the week, such as the coffee walk in Uptown Waterloo, the tour of our Edgewood property in Wellington County, and the trash clean-up walk on our *rare* trails. This event saw young and old come out to enjoy and protect the natural areas around them.

This would not have been possible without the hard work of our participants, our donors, and our sponsors. We'd also like to thank our staff and volunteers for keeping the event on track, generating excitement. And, of course, we want to thank everyone who came out to walk or run and helped make it such a success.

We look forward to seeing everyone next year for the 2022 Walk & Run for *rare* event. Hopefully, we can all be together for the closing announcements, with the pandemic behind us.

Photos this spread, clockwise from top right: 1. Walk & Run for *rare*, 2019, by D. Klein; 2. 2021 Sponsorship Banner, by C. Ainsworth; 3. Lamb's Inn Open House 2019, by J. Quinn; 4. BIOblitz Montage, by C. Richardson; 5. North House, Anonymous; 6. ECO Centre 2009 Aerial View, by D. Crowell; 7. Slit Barn Before Restoration, by M&D DeBruin; 8. 2021 ECO Camp Drone View, by R. Verma.



20 Years of *rare*

2015

Community Gardens grows from 72 plots to 110 plots. First annual BIOblitz – 70 international participants as part of a Guelph conference.



2018

Phase 1 rehabilitation of Lamb's Inn.



Monitoring After Dark

By Emily Lupton,
Ecological Intern at *rare*

Working as an Ecological Intern at *rare* this year meant gaining valuable hands-on skills in the field and participating in meaningful monitoring projects – including acoustic bat surveys this past summer.

Several bat species have experienced population declines over the years and four of these species — Eastern Small-footed Myotis, Little Brown Myotis, Northern Myotis, and Tri-coloured bat — are listed as Endangered under the *Endangered Species Act, 2007*, due to White-Nose Syndrome (WNS). This syndrome is caused by a non-native fungus that wakes bats in torpor (a state of physical inactivity) more frequently and can lead to dehydration, starvation, and death. Other threats to bat populations include wind turbines, habitat loss, and pesticides.

In the past, very little was known about our eight species of bats in Ontario, because monitoring and surveying was difficult due to their nocturnal nature. However, taking recordings of bat echolocation has proven to be a cost-effective and non-invasive method for detecting bat activity.

Acoustic bat monitoring occurred at two *rare* sites in Wellington County (Property 1 and Edgewood) this past July and August. Approximately thirty minutes after sunset, surveying was conducted along a pre-determined route using a digital recorder to capture recordings of bat activity. Personally, I enjoyed conducting surveys at night, because my partner and I observed a bat flying overhead on my first survey and came across a porcupine during my second survey! Once monitoring was complete for the season, recordings were sent to a trained professional for bat call analysis and identification.

As a land trust and environmental institute, some of *rare's* goals are to conduct ecological monitoring and build relationships with people

and organizations to assist with larger projects. According to Jeffrey Driscoll, the Program and Communicators Coordinator at the Ontario

Land Trust Alliance, “since 2016, the OLTA has been working with land trusts to monitor bats on land trust properties through OLTA’s Conserving Species at Risk Program (CSAR). In 2021, we have worked with *rare* and other land trusts to train their staff and volunteers in bioacoustics monitoring techniques to help better understand bat activity and species diversity occurring on their properties. The results from this work will help inform stewardship practices of bat habitat and increase our knowledge of overall trends and distribution of bats.”



2021 Ages Foundation Scholarship Recipients Announced

By Jenna Quinn,
Program Scientist at *rare*

For over 10 years, *rare* has awarded financial support to graduate students pursuing post graduate studies in the environmental realm. In 2021, the program launched a BIPOC award created in recognition of the systemic barriers that disadvantage BIPOC graduate students, with the goal of supporting those students making environmental contributions through science, art, and diverse inquiry. We are grateful to the Ages Foundation for their support of this program and are thrilled to announce this year’s fellowship and bursary recipients:

Allen Tian is a PhD Candidate at Queens University, who aims to develop an easy-to-use community science oriented environmental DNA (eDNA) sampling kit and protocol. He will field-test the sampling kit protocol, comparing it with traditional lab sampling protocols, by examining what species are present in the Grand River at *rare*.

Carolyn Morris is pursuing her PhD at the University of British Columbia studying physiology and aquatic toxicology. Her research is focused on the effects of dissolved organic carbon — an abundant naturally occurring complex compound in freshwaters — on ionoregulation (blood salt regulation) in freshwater fish.

Michelle Bomberry is a PhD Candidate at Brock University studying in the Department of Education. She is exploring Haudenosaunee earth-based pedagogies as a culturally relevant learning model for Indigenous students. Using the Tree of Peace methodology symbolic to Haudenosaunee epistemology, the research will draw on conversational circles with parents, earth-based educators, children, and knowledge holders.

Alannah Grant is an MSc Candidate at the University of Guelph. Her study examines the affects of the urban environment on eastern grey squirrel stress and brain development in mother squirrels and their pups. To do this, she

is comparing the physiology of squirrels found in urban locations to squirrels in non-urban locations, like *rare*, that provide a non-disturbed organic habitat in the midst of urbanization.

Erika Myler is also pursuing her MSc at the University of Guelph. She is using an eDNA approach to collect and analyze water samples in the Eramosa and Grand Rivers to characterize local fish communities, including species at risk and invasive alien species.

Grant Jensen is a PhD Candidate at the University of Waterloo, assessing the impact of a warming climate on agricultural soils throughout the winter transition and non-growing season through changes to the soil’s geochemical and biological processes. Soil is collected from *rare* and brought to the lab for further experimentation.

Congratulations to this year’s Ages Foundation Fellowship and Bursary recipients. We look forward to following their work and sharing their success with *rare* friends along the way.

20 Years of *rare*

2019

- First land purchase outside of Waterloo Region.
- Property 1 – 82 acres along the Eramosa River.
- Species inventory exceeds 4,000.



2020

Today, *rare* protects 7 properties and over 1,200 acres of land.

Featured Donors: Hennie & Mike Stork

By Christine Thompson,
Major Gifts Manager for *rare*

Hennie and Mike Stork support many organizations across the Region. They first contributed to *rare* more than ten years ago, helping to ensure the Food Bank Gardens had necessary equipment and supplies. More recently, their support has helped ensure that the lands in Cambridge are protected by *rare* intact and in perpetuity. They often attend *rare* events to learn more about what we are doing in various programs, and how their support makes an impact to the health and well-being of the community.

Thank you, Hennie and Mike, for your generosity, and for making *rare* part of your philanthropic goals.



Photos this spread, clockwise from top left: 1. Emily and Jasmine, Bat Monitoring, by Anonymous; 2. (Inset) A Porcupine Bat, by Anonymous; 3. Hennie and Mike Stork; 4. *rare* Lands Map; 5. BIOblitz 2018 Award Ceremony, by Alan Zeberek. From left to right: Natalia Brajak, her partner, and her son Shai Brajak, Board Chair Joy Roberts, Mayor of Guelph-Eramosa Township Chris White, Stephanie Sobek-Swant, Senator Robert Black and MP Michael Chong.



Looking Back, Looking Forward

By Stephanie Sobek-Swant
Executive Director at *rare*

As we celebrate the 20th anniversary of *rare*'s inception, we look back and ahead with reflection and hope. Much has changed since community members carried coffins to the University of Guelph, objecting to the felling of old-growth trees and the fragmentation of natural lands to make way for golf courses and gravel pits. Today, conservation is recognized not just for protecting ecologically significant land but, in light of climate change and Truth and Reconciliation, community perspectives on conservation methods are shifting.

At *rare*, we define conservation by our intention to be caretakers of the land and its biodiversity. This is not "fortress conservation", which believes that biodiversity is best protected by isolating ecosystems from all human activity. Instead, many areas we consider natural landscapes are landscapes that have been used and modified by humans for millennia. While many alterations to landscapes and habitat in Canada, particularly since European settlement, have been detrimental to biodiversity, we believe sustainability can be achieved by recognizing people as part of the environment and working together towards responsible stewardship. To this end, community education and engagement is key to our conservation philosophy.

Over the past decade *rare* has progressed from a volunteer-led organization to a certified living wage employer, with 14 permanent full-time staff and a growing number of research fellows, visiting artists and summer students. Every year, *rare* engages over 200 volunteers. It has hosted and hosts 108 research projects. Our gardens have donated over 31,000 pounds of organically grown produce to local food banks. Close to 20,000 children have enjoyed hands-on learning in *rare*'s Every Child Outdoors program. Our network of 14.5 km of trails is free and open for community members to visit during daylight hours.

From its inception, *rare* was envisioned as stewarding multiple sites across Waterloo Region and its surrounding areas for the benefit of the community at large, intact and in perpetuity. In 2014 *rare* became a qualified recipient under the Ecological Gifts Program (EcoGifts), allowing it to receive donations of sensitive lands, becoming the first non-governmental agency in the Region to earn this designation. This broader effort, known as *rare*sites, expands the philosophy of *rare* to additional properties, improving the function of the landscape and reaching more members of the community. Our Land Securement Team, a group of expert advisors

associated with various environmental groups and other key institutions, communities and municipalities, meets regularly to advise on potential acquisition projects.

The benefits of intact habitats are enormous, and go beyond aesthetic beauty, or the benefits to human health, or the health of flora and fauna – *rare*'s original property alone provides an annual benefit of more than \$10,000 per acre in ecological services, including groundwater storage, flood mitigation, nutrient and waste management, and carbon sequestration.

Building green infrastructure that supports the Region's climate change resilience and adopting adaptive strategies through environmental research, biodiversity and passive recreation for a growing population will continue to be the focus of *rare*'s work. As pointed out by the Near Urban Nature Network in their most recent report, urban areas such as Waterloo Region and Guelph face serious challenges from fragmented landscapes, fragmented ownership, and competing visions for land use and that, without more protection, southwestern Ontario faces a twin crisis of biodiversity loss and disruptive climate change. This is why Canada has committed to set aside 30% of its land as protected areas by 2030, and why the *rare* Charitable Research Reserve continues to secure land, sustainably manage its conservation, and assist in environmental research, and community education.

The *rare* Charitable Research Reserve will continue to set up initiatives that work towards building meaningful relationships with Indigenous colleagues and advisors on decolonizing efforts. This is not only in response to the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the longstanding Indigenous histories of this territory, but as a settler organization embedded in colonial systems that knows we still have much to learn about braiding Western science with Indigenous knowledges and rights and responsibilities in caring for the land.

At our recent 20-year anniversary celebration, keynote speaker Kehkashan Basu said it best when she stressed that "building back better" makes little sense, because we can see damage across all areas of life that demonstrate clearly what we built before didn't work. Instead, let's follow her suggestion to "build forward better", for the benefit of our environment and our communities. Thank you to the many community members and supporters who have contributed to *rare* and its programs and thank you for the community members and supporters who will take that work into the future for the benefit of all.

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Ignition Point

By Mike Weissmann,
Photographer

The ignition point of my interest in wildlife photography, was the image of a bright green Praying Mantis against a weathered barn-board wall under a glorious, “dog-days of summer” sun.

As a young child, having recently arrived from Germany with my parents and trying to find my place in a strange new world, I think that moment of feeling at one with this mesmerizing creature might have given me a natural sense of belonging that transcended acceptance by other people.

If I was a stranger, I was a stranger in a world of strangers. And they were fascinating.

So maybe that little mid-day epiphany



explains why I photograph individual animals a little bit out of context, and why I do so at high noon, when real wildlife photographers are more likely to be enjoying a siesta, like much of the wildlife!

And also why my most memorable moment photographing wildlife at **rare**, began with noticing the mid-section of a Smooth-scaled Green Snake clinging vertically to the gray-brown

bark of what I think was an Eastern Hemlock tree, beside the Alvar Trail.

I saw neither the snake’s head nor its tail, but recognized its midsection as fauna and not flora, even though the snake remained as still against the tree trunk as the vertical green stem of a vine.

I tried to see its head by looking around to the other side of the tree trunk, but at that the snake dropped suddenly to the ground and disappeared into the undergrowth.

I knew how hard it was to find a snake that was trying to hide, and that it might also have a hole it could slip into nearby, so rather than risk unintentionally stepping on it in the undergrowth, I just stood on the path for a few minutes hoping it would give me another chance.

And sure enough, before long the



beautiful lime-coloured creature emerged from the undergrowth to cross the path right in front of me, even pausing for a moment, flicking its tongue to take its bearings, giving me all the opportunity I needed to fully enjoy my moment of success.

I’d been hoping for years to see a snake of that lovely species, maybe because of its resemblance in color to that of the long ago Praying Mantis, and my wish finally came true along the Alvar Trail at **rare**.

The Smooth-scaled Green Snake is still my favourite species to cross paths with when I’m out walking the trails of **rare**, and with **rare’s** efforts to preserve the land trust “in perpetuity,” there might even be a chance for future generations to enjoy what I’ve been able to enjoy.

And to find the uncured validation of personal belonging that the natural world recognizes as a birthright.



To send in a donation, fill in form and cut here.



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FWN2021

rare review 11



Annabelle, Age 10



Owen, Age 10

View from Toboggan Hill; Photo by Devon Crowell



Review Fall/Winter 2021

