

ra re

Celebrating
20 Years of
rare
Education



2023



REVIEW
FALL-WINTER 2023

Land Acknowledgement

The *rare* Charitable Research Reserve stewards over 1,200 acres of land, but we are not the first to do so. Most of the land currently in our care is located within the Haldimand Tract, which spans six miles on either side of the Grand River and is the territory of the Onkwehon:we Peoples of the Six Nations of the Grand River. It is also territory of the Anishinaabe Peoples Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. In addition, we steward land at the border of the Upper Canada Treaty No. 3 and Treaty 19 from 1818 which is also territory of the Anishinaabe Peoples Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. We honour and respect the sovereignty of these First Nations and their ancestors. The lands we steward are home to many other First Nations, Métis and Inuit who have moved to the area from across Turtle Island.

As a settler-founded and -led organization, we make this land acknowledgement in admission of the cultural and historical harm inflicted by settlers on Indigenous Peoples that has led to generational trauma and systemic injustices that persist to this day, including the dispossession of land. We acknowledge that the lands we live on, work on and derive benefit from were taken away from the original stewards, and it is our goal to restore that connection and to work towards building ethical, reciprocal relationships with the local First Nations of the lands where *rare* is situated.

We commit to learning about and acting on our responsibilities as settlers of these lands and unlearning our cultural and historical biases that contributed to making these systemic injustices possible in what we now call Canada. ■

Who We Are, What We Do and Why We Do It

The *rare* Charitable Research Reserve is a community-based urban land trust and environmental institute which stewards over 1,200 acres of land across eight properties in Waterloo Region and Wellington County.

By working with people throughout our community, including local Indigenous Peoples, *rare's* staff, advisors and volunteers seek to protect environmentally sensitive lands and landscapes for the health and benefit of the local environment, wildlife and current and future generations. Using diverse ways of knowing, we seek to educate the community in the importance that our natural areas have in building climate resilience and fostering the health of the environment, and all who live within it.

We believe in honouring place, in conserving diversity, in embracing Indigenous knowledge and in committing to relationships and Indigenous resurgence. We believe in strengthening science, in building diverse, equitable and inclusive communities and in training the next generation to steward these lands for the benefit of all. We seek to offer the community — including Indigenous Peoples, the international community and future generations — not only a diverse network of connected natural areas, but a model of conservation that demonstrates the link between ecological integrity and economic stability, which is critical for the enhancement and quality of life of the planet. ■

Background Photo: Cormorants in the Grand River, seen from the trail during the 2023 Trail Party on Sunday, September 17, 2023. Photo courtesy Sydney Daniels Photography

Celebrating the Outdoors Together

By James Bow
Communications Officer at *rare*.

Our annual fundraising Trail Party returned for its fourteenth year with dozens of people and many families with children gathering in Riverbluffs Park at the Ancient Mariners Canoe Club boathouse at 9 a.m. There, they shared coffee, donned our spiffy new t-shirts, and prepared for the trek along the Grand Trunk and *rare*'s trails to the Slit Barn.

Many local politicians came to wish everyone well and thank participants for their support of



rare and nature, including Waterloo Regional Chair Karen Redman, Cambridge Mayor Jan Liggett, North Dumfries councillor Rod Rolleman on behalf of Mayor Sue Foxton, Cambridge MP Brian May, and Cambridge regional councillor Pam Wolfe. Other speakers included Kitchener Centre MP Mike Morrice, Ontario Green Party leader Mike Schreiner, and Kitchener councillor Ayo Owodunni on behalf of Mayor Barry Urbanovic.

After Stilt-walker Ryan from Big Smiles engaged the crowd, to the delight of kids and parents alike, MacPherson Builders Director of Finance Brayden Singh rang the starting bell and the walk was on! Along the way, *rare* Education and Research staff hosted Education Stations, presenting on this year's bugs and bubbles theme. At the Slit Barn, people enjoyed live music and a mouth-watering barbecue with sausages and chicken skewers donated by Marcangelo Foods, as well as fresh corn-on-the-cob picked that morning by local farmer Brian Domm. A food truck from Crumby Cookie Dough Company provided dessert. The Silly People put on a performance for the crowd, and prize-winners were announced.



Over 165 people showed up. Between sponsors, donors and fundraisers, we raised close to \$40,000 to *Turn the Map Green*, protecting 20,000 square metres of environmentally sensitive lands. More importantly, we gathered as neighbours and friends to celebrate our natural spaces and commit to their protection.

We have many people to thank for this party, including presenting sponsors MacPherson Builders, the Ancient Mariners Canoe Club, our other sponsors Fusion Homes, Zeifmans and WCO Chartered Professional Accountants, our fundraisers and donors, our staff and volunteers, but most of all everyone who came to celebrate. We look forward to an even bigger party next year, on Sunday, September 15, 2024. ■

Introducing City Kids to Nature

By James Bow
Communications Officer at *rare*.

This past August, *rare* hosted 80 teens visiting from Toronto. They were participating in Youthworx, a Toronto Community Housing program to help at-risk youth reduce barriers to employment.

Staff at *rare* welcomed our guests, dividing them into groups and moving them from station to station. At Springbank Farm's Community Gardens, the visitors helped harvest organic produce. The Research Team organized a trail walk and introduced many teens to butterflies and other fascinating insects. During lunch, the Turtle Rescue Team showed off newly hatched Painted Turtles.

Land Management provided one of the biggest hits, taking the teens to an area with invasive buckthorn. There they showed off the tools to remove it and put everyone to work. Many attacked the buckthorn with enthusiasm, posing alongside their trophies for pictures.

For some, this was their first experience with nature outside of the city. It was a privilege to

be a part of these kids' education, allowing them to gain a better understanding of nature.

Other Highlights of the Summer

The Spring Plant Sale returned on Saturday, May 13 with over 5,000 seedlings for sale. The EcoMarket tent was again set up. Community vendors such as Terroir Artisan Bakery did a brisk business as over 700 people attended. In total, over \$15,000 was raised for programs at Springbank Farm. Look for the Spring Plant Sale and EcoMarket to return in May 2024.

We also hosted educational seminars free to the public. Dr. Tom Woodcock gave a pollinator talk and garden walk through Springbank Farm, and Bob Wildfong hosted his popular Garlic Planting workshop. Our Conversations for Conservation series continued with a popular *How to Grow a Pollinator Garden* seminar with Dr. Victoria MacPhail, and a seminar with representatives from TMMC's TERRA Group on Toyota's 2050 sustainability challenges.

A key part of *rare*'s work involves engaging the community, communicating the importance protected natural spaces have for everyone's



health and wellbeing. The *rare* table was active across the community at events such as the Preston Towne Market, the Langs Community Summer Picnic, and the launch of the Waterloo Region Association of Realtors, to name just a few places. The community has welcomed us with open arms and we look forward to more such meets in the coming weeks and months. ■

Photos: (Top right): Ringing the starter bell at the Trail Party Walk. Photo courtesy Sydney Daniels Photography. (Middle) Face painting at the Trail Party. Photo courtesy Sydney Daniels Photography. (Bottom right) TCH youth pull buckthorn from the ground. Photo by James Bow.

Celebrating 20 Years of Environmental Education

Istafa Sufi,
Senior Educator at *rare*.

Since the spring of 2003, *rare*'s Environmental Education Program has gone through a remarkable journey of learning, adventure, and community engagement. What started as a humble pilot initiative to bridge the gap in outdoor environmental education has transformed into a thriving ecosystem of knowledge sharing and environmental stewardship.

The program launched in partnership with several local classes, ranging from elementary to post-secondary schools. At the time, outdoor environmental centres were not able to support the number of students within the Region and hundreds of classes were being turned away.

After this successful test, *rare* built a partnership with Southwood Secondary School's Environmental Magnet Specialist High Skills Major Program where students complete environmental restoration projects alongside researchers and educators at *rare*. These students also mentor younger students by delivering modules they developed for elementary classes, forming our

Mirrored Research Mentorship program. Over the following two years, this grew to include students from Rockway Mennonite Collegiate. With both schools' help, more than 10 acres of conventionally farmed lands were restored to their natural state and 900 trees planted.

In 2006, *rare* created its Chain of Learning, where knowledge, expertise, and ideas are transferred from researchers and Indigenous Knowledge Keepers to students, families, and community members. This concept emphasizes not only learning, but also teaching, as students are encouraged to pass the knowledge on to their families, schools, communities, younger learners as well as back to researchers and Knowledge Keepers, building links in the chain!

In 2008, these pilot projects gave birth to *rare*'s Every Child Outdoors (ECO) Environmental Education Program. Recognizing that time outdoors dramatically improves the health and well-being of children, the name Every Child Outdoors was chosen to describe *rare*'s commitment to delivering curriculum-based environmental education in the out-of-doors and to reflect our aspiration for children and youth everywhere. Since then, ECO has adapted to the needs of the community and expanded to include Summer, March Break and P.D. Day Camps.

During the pandemic *rare* put together Nature School programs that could be experienced online and individually. As pandemic restrictions eased, *rare* has seen a resurgence of field trips from local schools, and our Summer

ECO Camps have added a week for teens. This year, ECO launched the *rare* Environmental Youth Network, encouraging youth aged 15 – 18 to take on environmental challenges in their communities and at *rare*, finding solutions through action.

As we look back on 20 years, we are proud to have touched the lives of over 22,500 students, who have spent more than 145,000 hours immersed in the wonders of nature. Through the dedication of staff, guests and volunteers, and the unwavering support of our community, young learners have been able to explore large tracts of diverse natural habitats, learn about thousands of species of flora and fauna, watch birds up close, hold snakes in their

hands, catch butterflies and bees, take part in monitoring initiatives, plant thousands of trees, harvest thousands of pounds of produce for our food banks, remove countless invasive species and enjoy numerous rounds of camp games, including the favourite, "Wolfpack." These experiences enrich our children's understanding of the environment and instill a deep connection with nature and a sense of environmental stewardship.

The *rare* Chain of Learning continues to thrive, with alumni returning as volunteers, interns, co-ops, and even staff members, passing on their knowledge and passion to a new generation of learners. Youth that have spent time at *rare* have even been inspired to pursue post-secondary education in environmental science.

We are grateful for the support of the community, staff, researchers, Indigenous Knowledge Keepers, and the many students who have made *rare*'s ECO Program a beacon of environmental stewardship and outdoor learning. We look forward to the years ahead, where we will continue to foster a love for nature, inspire change-makers, and contribute to a brighter, more sustainable future. ■

Photos: (Top) A newsletter page from 2003 announcing the launch of the first education program at *rare*. (Bottom Left) Grade 4 students from Mother Teresa Catholic School in the Waterloo Region District School Board visit *rare* in 2012. Photo by Allison Walker.



Learning Outside the Box — a *rare* Summer at ECO Camp

By John Ciancio
Education Assistant at *rare*.

Another summer at *rare* has come and gone, and with that, another season of ECO camps. This summer our education team, including Educators Istafa Sufi and Michelle MacMillan and Education Assistants Kimiko Chhappyan and John Ciancio, were busy running our youth (6-12) and teen (12-16) ECO camps for 170 campers. Our campers participated in Indigenous education, hands-on, play-based learning, and visits from guest speakers and science professionals who shared their stories and experiences.

This summer, our campers were joined by Moccasin Identifier, a project initiated in 2011 by Carolyn King of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, which aims to promote public awareness of treaties and significant cultural historic sites and traditional lands of First Nations, Métis and Indigenous Communities across Canada. Our campers painted Moccasin stencils representing the four Indigenous language groups in Ontario, learned about the history of Indigenous Peoples' relationship with Canada, and learned about their important role as treaty partners with Indigenous Peoples.

We were also grateful to have been joined by Haudenosaunee Knowledge Keeper Bill Woodsworth, an elder of the Deer Clan of the Onkwehon:we Peoples. Through Bill, our campers learned about Haudenosaunee culture and traditions, including the creation story of Turtle Island, the Thanksgiving Address, and the banding of Nations to form the Haudenosaunee Confederacy through the work of the Peacemaker. Through these experiences, our campers are on the path to truth and reconciliation and are better prepared to build strong and enduring relationships with local Indigenous communities.

Unlike the traditional classroom, *rare* ECO camp offers a unique opportunity for place-based learning. Campers explored the 24 different landscapes and habitats at *rare*, including globally-rare alvars and remnant old growth forest, while discovering more

about the local flora and fauna. At ECO camp, campers participated in a wide range of hands-on activities including benthic invertebrate sampling, butterfly catching, interpretive hikes, gardening at Springbank Farm, and more.

A classroom isn't the only place learning can happen. Through outdoor games, our campers learned about predator-prey interactions, animal survival strategies, adaptations, and behaviours, nutrient cycling, the importance of forest fires for ecosystem health, and more. Play-based-learning keeps our campers actively engaged and allows them to take control of their own learning to develop deeper and more meaningful connections to new content and concepts.

We treat our campers like the adventurers and scientists that they are and encourage them to think and ask questions about the world around them, whether that's on a hike or playing in

the backyard – learning is for everyone and can happen anywhere!



Other special guests at ECO Camp this year included scientists from across southern Ontario sharing their research and showing our campers the different things they can accomplish themselves in the future. Lauren Witterick shared her work in studying fear and stress responses in birds and rodents; Student Art Innovation Lab (S.A.I.L.) led our campers in several art activities

including paper making, indigo dyeing, and plant pressing; *rare* alumnus Helmi Hess returned to share her research on the Eastern Loggerhead Shrike; and Wild Ontario joined us several times (along with several special bird guests!) to teach our campers about raptors.

Thank you to everyone who contributed to another successful summer of ECO camp, especially our awesome campers! Keep on adventuring, and we hope to see you all at *rare* again soon! ■

Photos: (Left) An ECO Camper touches the beads of a moccasin during a visit by Moccasin Identifier. Photo by Michelle MacMillan. (Above) ECO Campers set off to catch and identify butterflies. Photo by Michelle MacMillan.



Introducing *rare*'s Environmental Youth Network

By Istafa Sufi
Senior Educator at *rare*.

The *rare* Environmental Youth Network is a youth-led project aimed at empowering youth aged 15-18 from across the Waterloo Region to take climate action into their own hands. Through a series of meetings, youth will collaborate with other like-minded youth through community mapping, to figure out challenges facing their local communities across the Waterloo Region and at *rare*.

The Network will then put together a plan to tackle these challenges by working with local researchers, and *rare* staff. Projects undertaken by the Network may include community clean ups, community awareness campaigns, invasive species removal, species monitoring, research and land stewardship activities, and networking opportunities like workshops and conferences and much more!


Open To Ages 15 - 18

Environmental Youth Network

HELP WITH MONITORING AND RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

NETWORK WITH OTHER YOUTH PASSIONATE ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENT

MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN YOUR COMMUNITY

EARN VOLUNTEER HOURS

FREE TO JOIN!

Email istafa.sufi@raresites.org to register!



Youth Network members will have the opportunity to earn volunteer hours through participation in the Network's activities. A snack or a meal will be provided at each meeting. Please contact Istafa at Istafa.sufi@raresites.org to register. ■

Ages Foundation: supporting 15 years of research at *rare*

By Aleksandra Dolezal,
Conservation Scientist — Research Priorities,
Partnerships & Monitoring at *rare*.

Over the past seven years, the Ages Foundation Fellowship has awarded over \$100,000 in scholarships and bursaries to graduate school researchers conducting research at *rare*. This year, four students received awards ranging from \$1,000 to \$5,000.

Navjot Dhaliwal received a \$5,000 fellowship for their project *Co-Governance in Lake Nipigon: Braiding Western Science and Indigenous Knowledge*. Navjot's research encourages insights into collective resource management

between the First Nations communities of Lake Nipigon Basin and the federal and provincial governments, to identify guiding principles and practices that promote Canadian reconciliation with Indigenous communities. "Collaborating on initiatives with *rare* will allow exposures to integrated resource management between Western and Indigenous governance methodologies. There are distinct threads of correlation between *rare* and my research project, both of which can be developed through a collaborative initiative," says Navjot.

Danielle Green, an MSc student at the University of Waterloo

Department of Earth and Environmental Science, also received \$5,000 towards her project entitled *Quantifying and characterizing dissolved organic matter (DOM) in aquatic ecosystems*. Her objective is to determine the chemical and biological characteristics of carbon in browning lakes and rivers and develop methods for these analyses.

Cameron Butler, a PhD student at York University Department of Social Anthropology, received a \$1,000 bursary towards their project looking into the dynamics of fertilization in Southern Ontario. "My project follows phosphorus, an essential fertilizer component,

through agribusiness commodity chains in southern Ontario, to explore how their practices shape planetary mineral cycles," Cameron explains. "I trace how value chain operations are changing in response to growing public scrutiny around the unethical, colonial sourcing of phosphate rock, the unsustainable depletion of phosphate reserves, and the worsening eutrophication of water systems caused by phosphorus-rich farm runoff."

Lake Ellsworth, a MSc student at the University of Guelph Department of Integrative Biology, received a \$1,000 bursary for their project, *Factors driving the abundance of insectivorous bats over agricultural field margins — Mist-netting capture surveys and nocturnal insect sampling*. Lake explains, "The only mammals capable of true flight, bats are unique and highly specialized animals. Eight species of bat can be found in Southern Ontario, and they all have a ravenous appetite for insects, capable of eating 70-100% of their body weight per night."

"I am excited to have the opportunity to conduct research at *rare*," Lake adds. "This will allow for a comparison of bat activity across a gradient of landscapes, from intensely managed agricultural fields to restored and protected conservation areas. I'm honoured to have received the Ages Foundation Scholarship and know it will help me in my research efforts!" ■

Photos: (Inset): NSE researchers Patrick Strzalkowski and Sarah Ahmed collect environmental data on a field at *rare*. Photo courtesy North South Environmental Inc., (Above): Danielle Green exploring an aquatic ecosystem in her canoe. Photographer unknown.

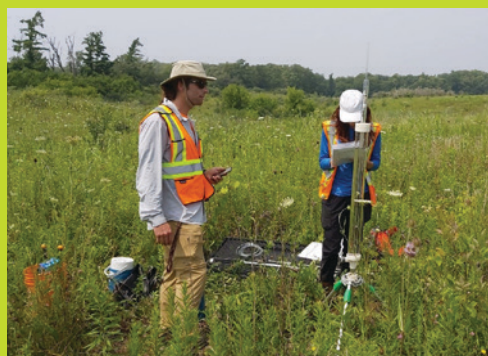
rare Research Highlight: Creating a digital twin for Sustainable Airport Facilities and Landscapes Science

By James Bow,
Communications Officer at *rare* and
Sal Spitale, Principal, Senior Ecologist
at North-South Environmental Inc.

Ecologists at North South Environmental Inc. (NSE) are working on a research project led by Dr. Derek Robinson from the Department of Geography and Environmental Management at the University of Waterloo, investigating the impact of air travel on the environment. The Waterloo Institute for Sustainable Aeronautics (WISA) hopes to mitigate the impact of airports and air travel and help make the aeronautics industry more sustainable.

Recently WISA acquired funding from the Federal Economic Development Agency for southern Ontario, fostering \$4 million in research projects bringing together industry, government, NGOs and academia to address the issue of sustainability in aviation. One of these projects, led by Dr. Robinson, is generating a 3D digital model — a twin — of the Region of Waterloo International Airport. The digital model collects different types of data that not only explains current carbon emissions and sequestration at the airport, but tests how different land management practices, solar panel placements, and other changes could reduce those emissions.

NSE has teamed up with *rare* and others to work with Dr. Robinson's project to measure and test the different proposed land management practices within different grassland and



meadow ecosystems. Sal Spitale, a principal of NSE, noted that, "not only is the project providing NSE with an exciting opportunity to work with the aviation sector and academia on researching how different land management activities affect carbon storage, this project gives our team an opportunity to contribute to knowledge that can form part of the solution to achieving a more sustainable and healthy natural environment which aligns with our vision as an environmental consulting firm."

NSE will conduct field plot sampling within *rare* over the next few months. They will measure both above-ground biomass and carbon as well as carbon in the soil. The naturalized landscapes of *rare* will provide NSE and Robinson with a much-needed benchmark to compare more heavily managed grasslands. They hope the project will foster discussion with Waterloo Region's airport about potential ways they can increase carbon storage and sequestration within their property.

The results of this research project will be revealed in 2024! ■

Unexpected Visitors at *rare*

By Jade Anderson

Ecological Monitoring Intern at *rare*.

Wildlife monitoring at *rare* provides a snapshot of the health of native species and local ecosystems. This year, *rare's* monitors again went out into the field, counting butterfly and salamander species, coming back with some interesting results. These species are extremely susceptible to environmental changes and, with their short lifespans, these changes can be seen through the generations.



This year, 4,613 individual butterflies were sighted within 46 species, with most being Cabbage White (36%), Inornate Ringlet (12%), Little Wood-Satyr (9%), Clouded Sulphur (7%) and Common Wood-Nymph (6%). Unexpected visitors included the Broad-winged Skipper, seen for the first time since 2014, and the Baltimore Checkerspot and the Hackberry Emperor.

Monarch butterflies have been in decline compared to the last five years, but they remain above their lowest points between 2013 and 2016. The Red Admirals have seen an increase in numbers, as have the Silvery Blue.

Our salamanders are showing a recovery from last year, where dry weather kept numbers

down. We are on track to doubling last year's numbers, with the lion's share being Eastern Red-Backed Salamanders (97%) followed by Blue Spotted, Yellow Spotted, and Four-toed salamanders.

This past year, the many wildfires in Northern Ontario and across Canada resulted in smoke or haze during monitoring. Air Quality Health Index (AQHI) numbers were recorded during these days, helping to build understanding of how wildfire smoke affects butterfly populations.



Overall, the butterfly and salamander populations at *rare* have remained stable, both in numbers and in diversity. The health of these species, and the unexpected arrivals highlights the importance of *rare* giving space to these precious creatures. Butterfly and salamander monitoring will continue next year, helping build understanding of the health of *rare's* habitats and ecosystems. ■

Photos: (Left): Red and Blue-Spotted Salamanders. Photo by Jade Anderson. (Top Middle): A Red Admiral butterfly. Photo by Erin Sonser. (Top Right) Newly-hatched Blanding's Turtles, swimming at *rare* before their release. Photo by Alissa Fraser. (Bottom Right) The silo of *rare's* Slit Barn in the sunset, taken September 2023. Photo by James Bow.

Rescuing *rare's* First Blanding's Turtles

By James Bow

Communications officer at *rare*.

This summer, *rare's* Turtle Team rescued over 2,000 eggs from vulnerable turtle nests across Waterloo Region and Wellington County, incubating them for hatching and release in

August. Special thanks go to members of the community who helped put together nest protectors for nests that couldn't be collected.



Most eggs were common snapping turtles, while a smaller number were painted

turtles. This year, there was a *rare* newcomer: a nest of Blanding's Turtles.

Blanding's Turtles are found in shallow lakes and wetlands. They're identifiable by a bright yellow throat and chin as well as a domed shell resembling an army helmet. Blanding's Turtles are threatened in the wild due to habitat loss, conflict with motor vehicles, predation of their eggs by raccoons and foxes, and being slow to reach breeding age. Worse, they are also often collected illegally for the pet trade.

The nest of Blanding's Turtles was collected, hatched, and successfully released into the wild near where the nest was collected. The discovery delighted everyone at *rare*, giving hope that we can support this endangered species with our work and help it to thrive in the region. ■

Photography at *rare*

The *rare* Charitable Research Reserve maintains its trails free to use by the community between sunrise and sunset. We welcome individual photographs taken on the trails for non-commercial use, as long as photographers remain on the designated trails, and do not disrupt sensitive landscapes, habitats, or research projects happening at *rare*. We invite photographers to share their experiences at *rare* across their social media platforms, tagging @*rare_sites*.

Commercial and event photographers are required to book the site and pay a minimum fee of \$60 for a 45-minute session — similar to what is paid to take photographs at public parks. To learn more about holding a commercial or event

photography session at *rare*, please contact rare@reresites.org.

Please note that we do not permit off-trail usage of *rare* property for photography. ■



Springbank Farm: More Than a Garden

By Taryn Jarvis

Gill Ratcliffe Gardens & Facilities Coordinator
at *rare*.

Springbank Farm continues to grow more than just plants and produce. The gardens grow community engagement, foster education, assist in research, and enhance the health and vitality of all who take part.

Our garden season at *rare* started in the “dead” of winter. Not even a heavy snowstorm could deter the more than 50 gardeners who gathered for Seedy Saturday, our annual free seed swap. As snow fell, Seedy Saturday lit a spark in many gardeners’ hearts as they planned and dreamed about the

season to come. Early March is also when we started the propagation of plants for the Spring Plant Sale and EcoMarket.

With an early start to the

growing season, and plenty of work to be done, we warmly welcomed back returning garden volunteers and showed new volunteers the ropes. This year we hosted 18 corporate groups and over 100 individual volunteers who, along with school groups, contributed well over 1,000 hours to the production of healthy produce to support local food security.

Each week this summer we welcomed young campers from *rare*’s ECO program, where they learned about organic food growing, composting, companion planting, and received teachings in the gardens from an Indigenous Elder.

The Great Canadian Garlic Collection was again grown at Springbank Farm, with over 70 varieties of garlic grown and collected by Seeds of Diversity Canada. Their goal is to grow as many varieties of garlic as possible in all of Canada’s major agricultural areas and to record their success and characteristics.

This year also saw the return of Yoga in the Garden with free yoga sessions held under the trees with donations collected for the Cambridge Food Bank. More sessions are planned for 2024.

Winter preparations are underway as we write this and we are already planning the 2024 season. We hope to roll out a garden



mentorship program where we help make community gardening something that can be a part of people’s lives, no matter what their circumstances are. For more information about volunteering at our garden, please contact taryn.jarvis@raresites.org (519) 650-9336 ext 115. ■

Photos: (Left): Springbank summer produce. Photo by James Bow; (Right): Kean Pienaar picks raspberries at Springbank. Photo by James Bow. (Bottom left): Lambs quarters plant, photographer unknown; (Bottom right) Purslane plant, photographer unknown;

Garden Weeds – Friends or Foes?

By Emily Emptage,

Libro Food Access Steward at *rare*.

Building food security is a top priority at *rare*, and why we operate the Springbank Farm organic food bank garden as well as making 110 community garden plots available to individuals across the region.

However, tending plants can be a never-ending task, battling weeds, pests and the weather. While the fruits and vegetables we grow are delicious and vital to our diets, it is worth learning about other edible plants that grow between our rows, requiring no watering, weeding or pruning to provide nutritious food. Two such plants are lamb’s quarters, and purslane.

Before we go further, ***never eat any plant that hasn’t been properly identified.*** Avoid picking plants from beside roadways or areas where they may have been sprayed with chemicals.

Common lamb’s quarters (*Chenopodium album*, pictured left) is a summer annual that thrives in disturbed soils, such as your garden beds. It can grow up to 5 feet tall, and has triangular, toothed leaves covered in a fine white powder that can be rubbed

off. This nutritious leafy green is also known as wild spinach or white goosefoot and is in the same family as spinach and quinoa. Lamb’s quarters offers

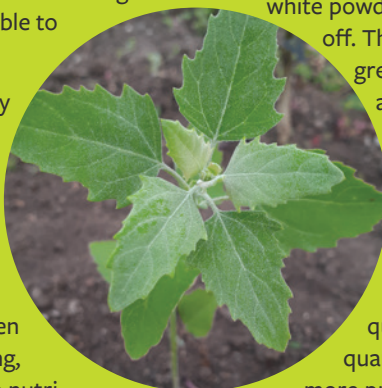
more protein, iron, vitamin C, vitamin A and calcium than spinach. The seedlings, leaves and stems can be eaten

fresh or prepared any way that you would use spinach.

Another common “weed” is purslane (*Portulaca oleracea*, pictured right), a low-growing succulent with bright green fleshy leaves and reddish stems that has been used as food and medicine for millennia. It has been identified as one of the highest green plant source of omega-3s and also contains high

levels of antioxidants, minerals and other vitamins. Purslane has a slightly salty, citrusy taste that adds a fresh crunch to salads and sandwiches and can be cooked in stir-fries, soups or stews.

These are just two of many uninvited plants that you can add to your diet with just a little bit of know-how. Instead of fighting the weeds, identify those that offer taste and nutrients and welcome them as part of your garden. If you can’t beat them, eat them! ■



rare and TMMC: Forging a New Relationship With Sponsors

By James Bow
Communications Officer at *rare*.

Over the past year, Toyota Motor Manufacturing Canada (TMMC) has joined with *rare* to forge a closer relationship through their mutual commitment to fighting climate change and improving the environment.

For TMMC, *rare* had been on their radar for some time. “Not only are we nearby and interested in conserving the land, but we also had a past general manager that was passionate about *rare*,” says Lynn Hall, External Affairs at Toyota Motor Manufacturing Canada. “We started off by sponsoring some events, smaller donations over the years, plus putting together volunteer teams to help as needed. As *rare* grew, so did our interest.”

TMMC’s sponsorship heralds a new relationship between *rare* and its sponsors. Rather than be simply logos on banners, *rare* and its sponsors can work on common interests, building sustainability and enhancing local climate resilience, while reaching similar audiences.

“We appreciate that *rare* took the time to understand our priorities and tailor the sponsorship,” says Suzanne Baal, Senior Manager, Communications and Team Member Relations at TMMC. “We realize this was a lot of extra work, but it was something we appreciated. We donate to many different causes and it’s nice when the benefits of the sponsorship line up with things we really value. I would say that partnering with *rare* is a great opportunity because they did this for us and it was great!”

In return for TMMC’s sponsorship TMMC received recognition on trail signage. As well, *rare* made space available at its PD Day Camps for the children of TMMC team members and coordinated a special ECO Camp Day for women team members to get a feel for what *rare* does with children and school groups. Representatives of TMMC’s TERRA Group also came to *rare* as a Conversations for Conservation presenter, sharing TMMC’s environmental sustainability initiatives with *rare*’s constituents – demonstrating how the corporations across our community are making a difference.

TMMC has worked hard to improve the sustainability of its processes. “We ensure that

any kind of packaging our suppliers send us parts in can be returned, so we don’t have the boxes and wrappers we all get with our home deliveries,” says Baal. “We expect our suppliers to reuse this packaging. We audit the manufacturing process to avoid waste and identify opportunities to reduce our carbon footprint.”

“We’re very proud that we send zero waste to the landfill,” Baal adds. “Given the size of our manufacturing facility, that’s no small feat. Relationships like the one we have with *rare* lift up and build the community, as well as helping us ensure that we’re on track with our environmental goals.”

“This new sponsorship method is a lot of fun. Sitting down with potential sponsors, understanding their goals and priorities and how we can help them achieve that through what we have to offer, while supporting *rare*’s conservation, research and education programs,” says Christine Thompson. “It’s a win-win-win!”



Thank you TMMC for being our first – helping us also understand what we have to offer here at *rare*. There are so many opportunities from trail sponsorships, signage sponsorships, event sponsorships, and more!”

For more information on how *rare* can help your corporation advance its goals, whether it be marketing, CSR, ESG, or otherwise, contact Christine.Thompson@raredsites.org or 519.650.9336 x118. ■

Millpond Lands in Eden Mills Now Under *rare* Stewardship

By James Bow
Communications Officer at *rare*.

This past June, lands straddling the west branch of the Eramosa River stretching back from Eden Mills historic Millpond dam were placed under *rare*’s stewardship, after years of work within the community.

The lands were donated by Charles and Anna Simon. Charles Simon is an architect known as a pioneer in sustainable building design. Years ago, the Simons purchased Eden Mills’ historic Mill as well as the lands behind it and renovated the mill to be their home. They also spearheaded projects championing sustainability with the backing of their community, including efforts since 2007 to make Eden Mills carbon neutral.

To protect the land, the Simons and the community established the Eden Mills Eramosa River Conservation Association in 1990, as a charitable organization to preserve the Eramosa River’s ecosystem while they looked for a permanent steward. For this, they turned to *rare*. The Simons and their neighbours worked to sever the land behind the historic dam and donate it to *rare* through the Ecological Gifts Program managed by the Government of Canada.

The Millpond property encompasses the floodplain around the Eramosa River behind the historic Millpond dam, featuring wetlands, but also some dry forest. While the property does not have any trails, visitors will be able to appreciate the pond at the viewing and interpretive area at its south end.

The Simons were honoured at a community event at Eden Mills which celebrated the land transfer. The agreement was the culmination of years of work, negotiating between the community of Eden Mills, the Township of Guelph-Eramosa, *rare*, and the outgoing Eden Mills Eramosa River Conservation Association.

We are grateful to the Simons and the community of Eden Mills for their tremendous stewardship of their land over the past few decades. We are humbled by what has been placed in *rare*’s trust, and we will ensure that these lands remain protected. ■

Photos: (Above) *rare* Educators lead TMMC members on the trails during a special ECO Day. Photo by Michelle MacMillan; (Below) View of the Millpond from the public viewing area. Photo by Tom Woodcock.

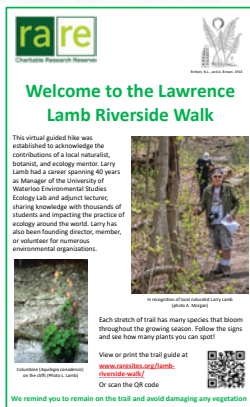


Walking in Lawrence Lamb's Footsteps

By James Bow
Communications Officer at *rare*.

Lawrence Lamb, known as “Larry” to his friends, has had a career spanning 40 years as Manager of the University of Waterloo Environmental Studies Ecology Lab and adjunct lecturer. He has shared his knowledge with thousands of students and had a great impact in the field of ecology around the world. Larry has also been a founding director, member, or volunteer for numerous environmental organizations, and has been a long-time friend of *rare*.

Above all else, Larry loved to walk in nature. He led numerous treks through forests and fields, pointing out special flora and fauna along the way. Walking with Larry exercised the mind and the spirit as well as the body, and he took great pleasure in showing off the hidden and unexpected treasures that could be found along the trails.



In honour of Larry’s contributions to the field of ecology and to *rare*, a special walk was established in September this year along *rare*’s River Trail along the Grand River. Starting from *rare*’s trail junction with the Grand Trunk Trail and extending to where it meets the Woodland Trail, the Lawrence Lamb Riverside Walk features five stations, marked with signs, at particularly scenic or ecologically significant stops along the journey.

Signs identifying these stops offer access to a special web page on *rare*’s website (rarsites.org/lamb-riverside-walk), describing the unique features of the setting as well as highlighting particular plant species and other “special features” that Larry himself identified. The River Trail is one of *rare*’s seasonal trails, and is open from March 15 to November 15, closing over the winter for safety reasons and to protect overwintering wildlife.

We invite everyone to walk in Larry Lamb’s footsteps, to take time to examine nature closely, see the forest *and* the trees and



everything that lives and grows within. The Lawrence Lamb Riverside Walk serves as a lasting legacy of a long-time friend of *rare*, reminding everyone of the importance healthy natural spaces have in the health and wellbeing of all. Thank you, Larry, for educating so many of us to become plant and outdoor enthusiasts who care deeply about our environment. ■

Bold Goals Ahead – on Course for *rare* 2030

By Stephanie Sobek-Swant
Executive Director at *rare*.

Summer has been rejuvenating. For me, this past year I learned both cross country skiing and paddling any small vessel you can imagine – and while I’m still savouring memories of Lake Huron sunsets and beaver encounters while paddleboarding on the Grand River at *rare*, I’m also looking forward for the first snow to get me back into my ski booties and on lands that hopefully soon will become part of *rare*.

You may have seen a major article in *The Record* featuring the Schneider family, who is in the process of making a significant land donation to *rare*. After much work behind the scenes, including a large-scale wetland restoration project and now building a boardwalk with the help of the Savvas Chamberlain Family Foundation to protect said wetland and to get the trails ready for cross country skiing, excitement about this incredible gift is mounting in the community.

However, not all is said and done — we are working through the final stages of the planning process to finalize the project and we need everyone’s help to support the stewardship endowment which will ensure that the lands are protected for conservation, forever. I am humbled by the generosity of the Schneider family and the other donors who have already stepped up with large and small gifts.

Much has been said about “getting ready for 2030”, including the 2022 UN biodiversity conference, COP15’s goal to protect at least 30% of the planet’s land and water by 2030. And locally, *rare* is on it. After the threat of the Greenbelt being dismantled, it is apparent now more than ever, that *rare*’s work is relevant and desperately needed if we want to make sure that nature remains intact.

Nature is what sustains us, and we need to connect with it and protect it for future generations as much as for our own health and wellbeing. As an organization that is a land trust and environmental institute, more is tied to this 2030 goal than simply protecting the land alone. We will protect these lands through making new research opportunities possible,



providing exciting new learning opportunities for youths, and creating a bold masterplan and vision for our facilities. There is so much to be excited about, and I can’t wait to dedicate 2024 to engage you all into the planning process for the years to come. We have done so much together already, and I’m confident we can tackle all that is to come!

Thank you for your unwavering support in making sure our environment comes first. ■

Photos: (Background) Lawrence Lamb Riverside Walk in the woods around the River Trail, taken September 26, 2023, by Tom Woodcock, (Above) Larry Lamb leads a walk on the River Trail in summer 2023. Photo by A. Morgan. (Middle) Stephanie Sobek-Swant takes a selfie as she skis on the Schneider Lands.

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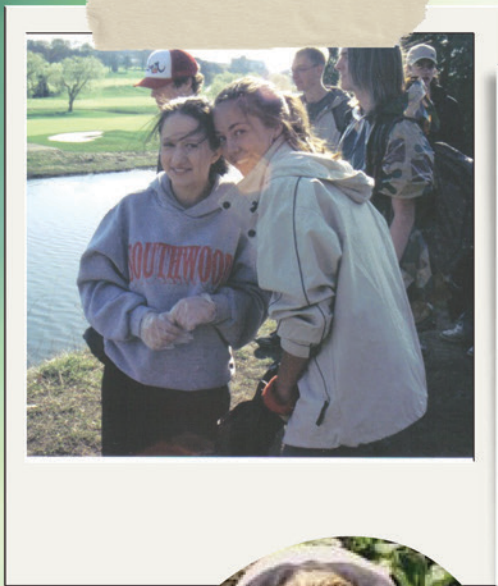
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