

Report of the President

By John Cameron

At our Annual General Meeting of Friends of Gatineau Park, held at the Visitors Centre on October 29, I tabled the report of our activities during the fiscal year 2004/2005. I will review the highlights here.

In this reporting period, 2004/ 2005, Friends of Gatineau Park made significant progress in developing major programs in interpretation and education, our principal mandate. While membership shrank in the past year or so, it is now climbing and should rise above 120 by year-end, thanks to more vigorous recruiting and the visibility and interest created by new programs and events---like the Dusk series, the canoe raffle, the tree identification workshop and most recently, the Research Day. Research is an area where we want to put more emphasis. The returns from the raffle and the Research Day were intended to be devoted to this cause in the park.

Plans have been made to strengthen the volunteer program and a meeting was held November 12 to discuss the opportunities. Office administration was improved by the contracting with a part-time assistant, Randi Shulman. In addition to her office work, she also serves as a valuable member of the interpretation and education committee. A new guide for the Waterfall and Lauriault Trail was published and there has been more frequent communication with members through a monthly e-bulletin.

There is much more to come, I can promise you, because we have an enthusiastic team planning and delivering new events and activities. If you haven't become a volunteer, I hope you shall and that you will find the work rewarding. ☺

Rare bird species may breed in Gatineau Park

By Justin Peter, Interpretive Naturalist, NCC

What is this feathered hunter that stealthily makes its way through dense habitat in Gatineau Park, easily getting around obstacles in pursuit of its prey? If you thought first of a woodland habitat, you might have guessed some species of hawk. But the park's cattail marshes – so little frequented by us - also harbour birds that hunt with great stealth and agility, including one whose presence was never previously noted, the *Least Bittern*. That is, until recently. *(continued page 2)*

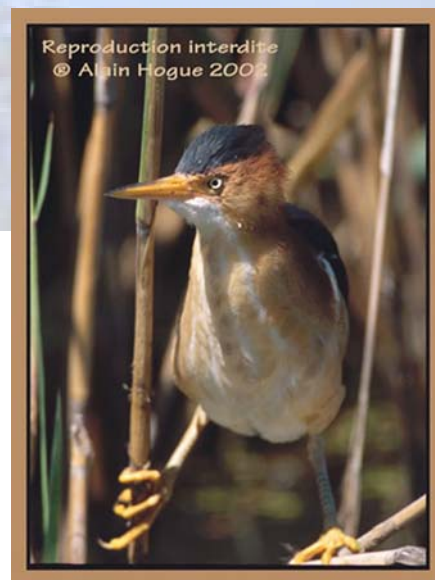


Photo courtesy Alain Hogue

A diminutive yet handsome cousin of the familiar Great Blue Heron, the Least Bittern spends most of its time unseen in large tracts of reeds, where it nests and satisfies its diet of fish, amphibian and insect prey. Catching a casual glimpse of one is difficult. But they can be heard occasionally; and so a member of the *Club des ornithologues de l'Outaouais* confirmed the park's first one ever – a male, making his resonant, hoarse breeding call, “*who-who-who, who-who-who*” - at one of the large marshes along the Gatineau Parkway, in 2004. This was great news!

Why? The Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) designated the Least Bittern a ‘threatened species’ in 2001. For reasons not yet clear, the species’ numbers have been decreasing throughout their range. As well, this region is near the northern edge of their range, where they would not be expected to be so numerous as elsewhere; and their preferred habitat of large cattail marshes is also relatively scarce in the park, compared to some areas in the core of their range.

But with the prospect that Gatineau Park’s few large cattail marshes provide suitable habitat for this bird, the NCC set out to conduct a field survey in the Spring of 2005 to determine possible locations of breeding activity. Two student biologists – hired with money from Environment Canada’s Interdepartmental Recovery Fund – took up the challenge. Over several weeks, they visited the park’s larger marshes by foot (wherever possible) ,or by canoe, and looked and listened for this bittern. Such a task required patience, given the bird’s scarcity, habits and its habitat!

The results came eventually. After many early morning forays, the biologists found one breeding pair of bitterns, at Lac La Pêche. The nest wasn’t located, so we can’t tell if they raised any young. Nevertheless, what we learned was positive and encouraging. With ever fewer Least Bitterns around, one pair underscores how protected areas such as Gatineau Park may be crucial in providing a refuge for this threatened species.

Friends Launch First Research Forum

Friends of Gatineau Park launched its first annual research forum on October 22, in the Visitors centre on Scott Road, Chelsea. There were five presentations by scientists, specialists and park managers in the all-day event. They dealt with the place of research in park management, forest studies, wildlife and park history. Reports of these presentations will be published in this newsletter, some in this edition, others later. ☀

How to measure ice storms impact

The 1998 ice storm that swept across northeastern North America deposited 40-60mm of ice on trees in the Gatineau Park, resulting in many broken crowns and snapped trunks. As most of the forest was left to adapt naturally, an excellent opportunity was created to study forest change following the storm.



Dr. Doug King of the Department of Geography and Environmental Studies at Carleton University, whose research focuses on developing methods to model, map and monitor forest structure and health using remote sensing, set up 70 study plots in the park, each being 20 x 20m. In several summers since 1998, measurements of tree health and structure as well as ground vegetation abundance have been taken.

In October, Doug gave a presentation on the methods and results of both the field and remote sensing work to the FOG annual research day meeting. He has found that damage depends on species. For example, sugar maple and oak were more resilient to the storm ,while other species such as ash, aspen, and black cherry were highly damaged. Damage was higher for larger trees, in more open forests, at higher elevations, and on slopes facing east to southwest. Since 1998, most trees have recovered well, but severely damaged trees have had a rate of mortality twice as large as trees with less damage. The amount of trunk diameter growth has been significantly less for more damaged trees. Those less damaged have grown more than those that were more damaged. Composition has also changed; for example, sugar maple has significantly increased in the plots while white ash has decreased by almost 50%. Both intermediate trees and ground vegetation increased dramatically due to increased light levels penetrating through the upper canopy, but signs of declined growth are beginning to appear as the overhead canopy closes over. In remote sensing research, Doug’s team has developed models relating image spectral and spatial measures to field measures of tree health and structure. In 2005, they acquired digital camera airborne imagery with 80 cm resolution for the MSc research of Robby Bemrose. (continued p 3)



Ice-damaged trees in Gatineau Park

Duncan Marshall of Marshall-Maruska Aerial Images in Chelsea and Aviation 5-50 at the Gatineau Airport were collaborators, along with pilot Ali Nazari and camera operator Jon Pasher (PhD student). A custom-built door with a mount for digital cameras was used with a Cessna 172. The door can be installed in 5 minutes on any Cessna 172 worldwide. Future plans are to develop this low-cost remote sensing capability for forest monitoring of local woodlots to aid landowner management.

Expert Canoeist Wins Canoe Raffle!

Monique Goyette, an avid canoeist from Montebello, Québec, won The Friends of Gatineau Park's first canoe raffle this past Labour Day. "We are very pleased with the support this effort received from local residents and business owners," said Graeme Roderick, secretary/treasurer for the Friends, and raffle organizer

"We wish to thank our sponsors, Lafleur de la Capitale, Trailhead, Desjardins Saint-Raymond in Hull, Bustukah, Mountain Equipment Co-op, Langford Paddlesports, our volunteer ticket sales persons; and all those canoe enthusiasts who bought raffle tickets!

"The funds raised will be used to support education and research projects in the Park," Graeme said. The winner was a professional river guide for many years, and has canoed over 4,000 kilometers on Quebec rivers, but she had been without a canoe of her own for 10 years. She was delighted to have won the raffle, favouring the Lotto Québec slogan "It only takes one ticket to win". She intends to name her canoe "Geronimo 3".

Election of Officers

At a meeting of the board of directors, November 16, the following officers were elected:

president: John Cameron
vice-president: Jo Ann Gagnon
secretary/treasurer: Graeme Roderick

Herridge Lodge Undergoes Repairs

Herridge Lodge has been closed for repairs since the end of the last ski season. Concern about this much loved and popular lodge has caused anxious enquiries. Will it be open this ski season? Yes, how could they be denied access to this fine old, square-timbered lodge? But there are some serious problems with rotted beams and other decay. On an urgent basis, the NCC engaged a contractor who specializes in such work to make temporary repairs. Next summer, the NCC says, the lodge will be closed again to do a major renovation that will ensure its availability to future generations of hikers and skiers.

Coming to the Park in 2006!

By Catherine Dumouchel

The Interpretation Committee is gearing up for another busy year in 2006.

The popular Dusk Series will be back with seven programmes including: Snowshoe under the Stars, Wolf Howl (offered in winter and fall), Owl Prowl, Frog Chorus, Nocturnal Insects and Creatures of the Night. A new "Dusk at the Lake" series will be introduced at Lac Philippe. These programmes provide unique opportunities for participants to experience nature in the evening, helping to create a new appreciation and awareness of the Park and to develop a special sense of belonging.

Working with naturalist extraordinaire, Justin Peter, the Friends are planning a new Workshop Series. Identification of birds through songs and calls will be the topic of the spring workshop to coincide with the Wildlife Festival and International Migratory Bird Day. The popular Tree Identification workshop will be back in the fall as we celebrate National Forest Week.

The school programme "The Outdoor Classroom" will continue with a choice of four curriculum-based excursions for students from Grades K to 6. We are also seeking funding for a snowshoe programme. The committee has developed seasonal activity sheets that are distributed at the Visitor Centre to facilitate (see page 4)

self-guided exploration of the park and observation of natural phenomena. A new activity on winter birds will be available early in the coming year.

Other activities are also considered for the Visitor Centre including an interpretation station that would be staffed by volunteers. Whether the theme is linked to the topics of the Dusk Series or the activity sheets, we hope to enhance the visitor experience.

Keep your eyes open for further details about these activities. Please join us and tell your friends about it!

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Wolf Howl Magic

By Randi Shulman, Office staff member

As someone who helps organize activities for the **Dusk Series**, I have been lucky to have participated in many of the Friends' outings. While I have enjoyed them all, there is something magical about the wolf howl that sets it apart from the other programs. I have been trying to understand why. I love hearing birds sing and frogs call. I like seeing the unusual night insects; but I suppose I relate more strongly to animals when we call, and they respond. Wolves remain so truly wild and I sense a strong resonance from this inter-species communication.

On the first wolf howl last year, a single wolf gave back a lonely howl. It took him a while to respond but when he called, it sounded like a siren in the still night. On the second wolf howl



Rhonda O'Grady

last year, a *chorus* of wolves and coyotes responded. It was so powerful, my knees went weak.

This year, once again, Rhonda O'Grady impressed us with her presentation at the Visitors Centre. Then we went outside and she wowed us with her howling. Before we boarded the bus and headed north into the park, Rhonda had showed us how to howl and try a

few calls. We then went to a location where she and her dog had found some fresh wolf scat.

The night was crisp, clear and starry. We walked only a short distance from where the bus was parked because we try to make these programs accessible to as many people as possible. Then Rhonda let out her howl. A dog barked at this human howl, and this triggered a wolf to call. We were successful once more!

What impresses me about these encounters is that we can still hear the slight hum of cars from Highway 105, while these wild animals call. Rhonda told us that the wolf was less than a kilometer away (responses from further away would be beyond our hearing range).

The park is large enough to support wolf habitat, but we live so close, and frequent it so often; it seems fragile, vulnerable. Maybe that is what adds to my amazement: that we and wolves can co-exist so close together. I only hope that this relationship endures; that the wolves will always be there; and that this balance between wildlife, nature and us will always be maintained. ☼

The Friends of the Gatineau Park is a registered charity dedicated to offering activities and literature that enhance public appreciation and enjoyment of the heritage of the Park

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