

# Hamilton's New Nature Sanctuary

By Bruce Mackenzie Photos by Mike Davis

On June 11, Hamilton Naturalists' Club (HNC) celebrated the opening of Vinemount Meadows Sanctuary in Stoney Creek. The property is located in the midst of an important area for breeding birds on Stoney Creek Mountain, north of the Vinemount Quarry and between the Eramosa Escarpment and the Niagara Escarpment.

**A** lease agreement has been signed between HNC and Waterford Sand and Gravel Ltd., owners and operators of Vinemount Quarries. The lease agreement covers a 65-acre property for 24 years for a nominal annual sum. Waterford will supply \$20,000 in services and materials to assist the HNC with habitat improvements on the property. The leased property is to the north of the Dofasco 2000 Trail on the west side of 10th Road East. This farmland and surrounding meadow habitats were all originally part of the Vinemount Swamp Forest, the largest natural area on the Stoney Creek mountain and now traversed by the longest boardwalk in Ontario, a part of the Dofasco 2000 Trail.

These lands will become the seventh nature sanctuary owned or administrated by the HNC. It is the first sanctuary that the club is leasing. Other sanctuaries owned by the HNC are located throughout Hamilton and southern Ontario.

"The company is very pleased to find a partner like the HNC to take over the management of this property with a 24-year lease," says Bill Kester of Waterford. "Waterford is a family-owned business. The Cameron family recognizes the significant habitat in the area and the rare and threatened bird species that breed here and they are very pleased to start this new relationship with a prominent naturalist club in southern Ontario. The company and its employees are excited and looking forward to participating in transforming

these lands into an improved nature preserve with the HNC."

Michael Fischer, President of the HNC said, "The HNC Board and the members of the Club are thrilled at the opportunities that start with having a place like this in the community. HNC will start to work on a wildlife and habitat enhancement plan. The Club hopes to increase the public's knowledge of the natural environment of the southern Ontario meadow habitat and the birds found here."

The area around the sanctuary is well known for excellent birding opportunities. Rare nesting birds in this area include Upland Sandpiper (locally declining), Peregrine Falcon ("special concern" in Ontario), Bobolink ("threatened" in Ontario), Eastern Meadowlark ("threatened" in Ontario), Short-eared Owl ("special concern" in Ontario), Northern Harrier (rare local nester) and Common Raven

(rare to uncommon nester).

A Peregrine Falcon's nest site is now the third nest site for the Peregrine Falcon in Hamilton. In 2014, three young peregrines were fledged from the local nest. The raven's nest here, marks one of the most southern nesting locations in Canada. Both have nested in the quarry for the last two years.

The new nature preserve will also be an important sanctuary throughout the year. This area is very important to wintering hawks and owls as a feeding and roosting area. As well, the land under lease is primarily southern Ontario meadow

habitat. Southern Ontario meadow habitats are becoming better known for their important role in providing critical areas for butterflies, especially for adult Monarchs.

We are beginning to observe a growing critical mass of lands on this part of the Escarpment, whether they involve the HNC directly, the City of Hamilton, or one of the conservation authorities.

*Bruce Mackenzie is a director of the Hamilton Naturalists' Club. A longer version of this article was first published March 2015 in The Wood Duck, the journal of the Hamilton Naturalists' Club.*



▲ The Vinemount nature reserve is bordered by the Dofasco 2000 Trail.



▲ Members and guests of Hamilton Naturalists' Club celebrate the June 11 opening of Vinemount Meadows Sanctuary.