

Extinctions? Here?

By Bob Barnett

Who knew that southern Ontario has such a trove of rare, threatened and endangered species? Ontario's Natural Heritage Information Centre says there are 217. Maybe none are as charismatic as White Rhinos, but we do have the Bald Eagle and the Massassauga Rattlesnake on Escarpment Biosphere Conservancy (EBC) reserves. We are losing 300 acres a day of the limited habitat we do have left in southern Ontario to development. Despite the Snapping Turtle being a species of special concern, it was legal to hunt them in Ontario until April of this year. It takes a long time to turn the Titanic, but I can see it veering on a more favourable course.

The best way to protect our rare species is to leave them and the land they occupy, alone. Ontario, Canada and 193 countries have agreed that 17 per cent of our land should be protected as parks or nature reserves to ensure their survival. I got a letter from David Suzuki suggesting we should be protecting the full 50 per cent suggested by biologist E.O. Wilson. Protecting land is where EBC comes in. We are trying to keep pockets of biodiversity natural, expand existing protected areas and connect them all together.

So far we have protected the habitat of 52 rare, threatened and endangered species. We include species of special concern like the Monarch Butterfly and even make it the headline performer in our annual Monarch Festival. We sit outside the doors at the Bruce National Park and tell kids about their remarkable

migration to Mexico. We encourage people to plant Milkweed to counter the GMO fields where they spray Roundup to create monocultures without "weeds" that the Monarchs depend on. We have created 158 nature reserves with 52 square km where nature creates the plants that occur naturally. We are an official Monarch Waystation. So far we've discovered that 62 of our reserves have at least one "tracked" species of special concern or greater importance.

It turns out that everyone thought Queensnakes had been extirpated from the Bruce Peninsula. After we found one, the Park naturalists looked and found more. They are endangered but not extinct.

Judith Jones has found Gattinger's Agilinis way out on the point at our reserve on Manitoulin's north shore. I've looked several times for this late blooming gerardia, but never found it.

Some people question the need to protect the habitat for these endangered species.

to create places where these species can continue to exist. These and the other 45 rare and endangered species we look after improve our lives by their song, the insects they eat, the carbon they sequester and the fact that the entire ecosystem works together. We believe in wild spaces for wild animals, as the editor of this magazine advocates in each issue.

The Monarch Butterfly may survive the loss of its roosting trees in Mexico and the fields where "improved" crops of corn are grown. Our job at EBC is to create enough habitat and awareness to help them and all of nature thrive as much as we can. Awareness helps. We tell people that Ontario's last death from a Massassauga Rattlesnake was 60 years ago when a boy tried to scare his girlfriend and then ignored the bite. It rattles to warn us to stay away. There's no use wasting its venom on us.... we're too big to eat anyway.

For a full list of EBC's endangered, threatened, rare and special concern species, visit our website. If you want more information on the species near you, please give us a call. EBC's way to protect these species is to accept DONATIONS of land from the owners. We only pay for appraisal, legal and sometimes, survey fees to accept the donations. Thus we can often protect 100 acres of forest and wetland for only \$5,000 or \$50 an acre. Such important protection is quite economical and may be the best conservation bargain available.

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Endangered Species

It's hard to paint a picture of all these species we protect. The endangered ones are hard to find. We need experts like Jarmo Jalava and Richard Aaron to help us find them. Ten years ago, I was walking EBC's shoreline with Susan Gibson and an expert from the U.S. Nature Conservancy when we discovered a Queensnake on the northern Bruce. I'm glad he recognized it, because I'd never have known it wasn't just another water snake.

Butternut trees are dying of a fungus, Henslow's Sparrow is threatened by the decreasing open field prairie habitat as land is converted for crops or housing. Our Little Brown Bat is losing roosting places and dying of White Nose Syndrome. The Short-Nosed Cisco is a native whitefish now threatened by over fishing and non-native fish. All these are protected by our reserves.

Protecting Habitat

Other people would say we must do our utmost to ensure these species survive and recover. Our charity can't eradicate the fungus or stop development but we can work