



I recently moved back to Southern Ontario from New York City and I remember reading your magazine in the past (when

I lived in St. Catharines). But I was particularly blown away by how much I enjoyed the latest Gardens issue of *Niagara Escarpment Views*. Keep up the great work! It was such a delight to read. I pride myself in consuming outstanding media, and your magazine is now up there with some my favorite reading materials, such as *Spacing* magazine, *FT Weekend*, *Apartment Therapy*, *Dr. Oz*, *Guideposts*, *New York By Rail*, etc...

Paxton Allewell, by email



We received our copy today of NEV. You and Mike did a fabulous job on the story and photos - thank you so much! Wonderful to see those photos in the middle of the winter! Might it be possible for us to obtain (or buy) a few extra copies of this issue as we would like to share it with family? Many thanks!

Alba Dicenso, Hamilton

I always enjoy the wonderful pictures and articles in *Niagara Escarpment Views*, but I have to take issue with the section on Endangered Species in the article on a rural Hamilton property in Spring 2017.

In this section, Honey Bees are listed. This is a domesticated species that is not endangered, unlike some

of our native wild bumblebees. Introducing honeybees to a woodland setting is like putting sheep or cows in a meadow. It can actually inhibit the native pollinators who do need our help.

Even worse were the comments regarding wood ducks and hooded mergansers. Wood Ducks are not endangered. In fact they are the second-most common species of dabbling duck in Canada (after the ubiquitous Mallard). Hooded Mergansers on the other hand are quite heavily hunted and are considered to be one of our least common waterfowl, with a limited range, mostly breeding in Ontario and Quebec. I would be absolutely thrilled if Hooded Mergansers were

to successfully breed in my ponds, in Wood Duck boxes, and there is absolutely no justification for destroying the eggs of this lovely duck. Both Hooded Mergansers and Wood Duck are native species with glorious-looking adult males. I would hope the Dicensos, who have carried out excellent conservation work, will not carry through with their plans to destroy eggs of this elusive duck.

More information can be found online, and a search under COSEWIC (Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada) is an easy way to find listings for endangered species in Canada. Wood Ducks are not listed, but are noted as a species of Least Concern.

Fiona Reid, Halton Hills

I read with pleasure and admiration of the on-going conservation successes Alba Dicenso and Brian Hutchison are achieving. I am acquainted with them, and familiar with some of their conservation and restoration projects through my work for Conservation Halton.

Speaking as a Conservation Halton ecologist, however, I read with concern the proposal that Hooded Merganser eggs are planned to be removed and destroyed, in an effort to encourage Wood Duck nesting instead. The article mentions that Ms. Dicenso has been told that this approach will attract Wood Ducks, without detailing the source of this information.

This is not an approach that I would support or that Conservation Halton would recommend. In point of fact, I would like to strongly discourage this approach. Primarily because Mergansers are a native species with their own ecological, beauty and intrinsic value. While Wood Ducks were once of conservation concern, they have recovered to the point of

being second only to Mallards in their abundance. There is little or no need, from an ecological perspective, to support Wood Ducks at the expense of Hooded Mergansers.

Moreover, Hooded Mergansers are protected by law. They are listed as a migratory game bird species under the Migratory Bird Convention Act (MBCA). This Act prohibits the disturbance or destruction of most native bird species, including their eggs and nests. It explicitly includes duck boxes and shelters. Wood Ducks may be the desired species when we put habitat features like nesting boxes in place, but we cannot control what species makes use of them.

The same problem exists for "Bluebird Boxes". The article mentions the need to manage House Sparrows when they take over Bluebird Boxes. In the case of House Sparrows, as an exception to the rule, this is actually a viable strategy, since they are an exotic, invasive species and are not protected by either the MBCA, or the Ontario Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act (FWCA). In fact, they are one of only a few species specifically excluded from protection under the FWCA.

However, House Sparrows are not the only species which may take over Bluebird Boxes. These boxes are frequently used by Tree Swallows, House Wrens and other species which are protected by the MBCA. Some species can be encouraged (e.g. Placement of two boxes within three metres of each other permits both Tree Swallows and Bluebirds to nest and reduces competition - and therefore conflict - between these species), but others may yet take the space intended for Bluebirds (e.g. House Wrens are still a common occupant of such boxes). Once they have nested, native

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READERS & VIEWERS

species and their eggs may not legally be disturbed.

If or when they do take up residence, I would encourage anyone to allow native species (Hooded Mergansers, Tree Swallows, House Wrens, etc.) to complete their brooding cycle undisturbed and without interference; and to enjoy and appreciate their presence in the ecosystem, in addition to Wood Ducks and Bluebirds.

**Yves Scholten,
Conservation Halton**

We would like to thank Ms. Reid for her comments regarding endangered species. We appreciate that honey bees are not endangered. Last year was our first experience with duck nesting boxes. We were advised

by someone who worked hard over several decades to provide nesting boxes for wood ducks whose numbers had been reduced by hunting and habitat loss. We now realize that both wood ducks and hooded mergansers are listed as "least concern" by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Accordingly, we have decided to use a "finder's keeper's" approach with our nesting boxes. As of April 2017, three of our five boxes have 30 eggs, all laid by hooded mergansers. We find it interesting that numerous wood ducks visit our streams and pond but so far have not chosen to lay eggs in our boxes.

**Alba DiCenso
& Brian Hutchison,
Hamilton**



On page 51 of your Spring 2017 issue...

I was alarmed at seeing a Bluebird nest removed

from its nesting box. We have Bluebirds come every year and found they are very private birds. When we have visitors, the Bluebirds just disappear and don't come back until the visitors are gone. We have discovered that even opening the door to check the eggs will usually stop them from returning to the nest. I wonder how many of those 5 or 6 eggs in the nest will actually hatch?

I understand the Wrens are also enemies of Bluebirds. They will build their nest on top of the Bluebird eggs. Another note which the Bluebird people are probably aware: I have heard, leave the nest up all winter, as the migrating Bluebirds check out future nesting areas in the Autumn.

Thanks for your time and

keep up the good work.

Cameron Dolson, Erin

Editor's note: Thank you for your concern about bluebirds. You make good points about them. The man in the photo is Dan Welsh, an expert on the Eastern Bluebird, and the eggs in the nest were not viable when they were used as a teaching aid. Watch this magazine for a future feature article on bluebirds!



There is a woman in New Jersey who received the *Niagara Escarpment Views* [Winter 2016-17] (she used to live in Windsor) and she saw the article on me in the Worth the Visit column and she called and placed an order with me. :-)

**Betty-Anne Whipp,
Georgetown Yarn, Georgetown**