

Report on the Cambridge AMCC Legacy Pollinator Park Project

By: Jim Dyer, 28 October, 2009

One of the projects that the AMCC approved at the fall 2009 AGM is to create a pollinator Park. The idea for doing this project came about when the club was offered the opportunity to propose an alternative use of the decommissioned dog run in the Riverbluffs Park. The AMCC canoe boathouse is in very close proximity to the designated park area. In the spring of 2009, a small planning team was recruited from AMCC members to explore this possibility. This team is currently drafting a formal proposal to the City for this use of the site, designing the park layout and an education centre (described below), and creating the project plan, including the cost estimates. The main guideline is that all costs will be covered by outside sources.



AMCC volunteers cleaned and removed discarded steel posts from the old dog run fence, which were then stored for re-use to mark the boundaries of the pollinator park (LF).

Discussion among AMCC members has addressed what would be a fitting memorial to past members and to current members who have lost close family members. Out of such discussion evolved the related question of what will, or should, be the club's legacy. To the community the most enduring legacy of AMCC will be the voluntary environmental initiatives that give something back in appreciation for the recreational benefits provided by the Grand River.

The planning team has adopted this interpretation of our legacy as the mission statement for the creation of the Pollinator Park Legacy Project. AMCC members have already demonstrated an environmental commitment through other green projects, particularly tree planting days along the adjacent Grand River shoreline and annual riverbank clean-up days.

The planning team includes Bob Fraser (past President), Lorna Ferguson, Valerie Simpson Donna Whittier and Jim Dyer. After the fall 2009 AGM, the team was joined by Fred Fraser and Bill Cowdy.

Pollination is the process by which pollen, the male side of plant seeds, is transported to the ovules, the plant equivalent of eggs. Pollen is how genetic material is dispersed among a plant community. Pollen transfer is essential to the survival of such communities. Since flowers are attached to the plants from which they grow, they need help in moving their pollen to other flowers, and sometimes even within the same flower (self-pollination). Without pollination flowers will not bear fruit. Many plants use the wind, but those plants must generate very large quantities of fine pollen that can float on the air (the kind of pollen that makes you sneeze). However, most plants, especially most of our fruits and vegetables, rely on the animals they can attract by offering pollen and nectar as food. The most common animal pollinators are insects, and the most effective insects are bees - many kinds of bees.



A typical small wild bee, that few people recognize as such, is seen on a common aster (JD).

The pollinator park concept was inspired by research at the University of Guelph Environmental Science department. The park requires a piece of land that is available over a long period of time

without the risk of development, and on which flowering plants, including flowering trees, shrubs and herbaceous plants, can be planted and protected.

Wild bees, as well as honeybees, are threatened by many environmental stresses. The most basic natural resource that bees and other pollinating insects need to survive is forage. For bees in particular, forage means a steady and diverse supply of flowers in bloom throughout the summer. Through a diversity of flowering plants, bees have a better chance of finding the pollen and nectar they need through the growing season. A variety of flowers means a variety of bees and other insects, and a better chance that the bees we need when our food and ornamental plants come into bloom will be available. A pollinator park will provide such forage.

The pollinator park will have a second, but equally important function - to raise public awareness about the existence, the role and the plight of insect pollinators, particularly bees. While the threats facing honeybees are well known, there is much less appreciation for wild bees. The site would also function as an outdoor education centre and could become a local eco-tourist attraction. If this project succeeds, the pollinator park will be a living legacy to AMCC.