

ALTONA FOREST

Community Newsletter

published by Toronto and Region Conservation and the Altona Forest Stewardship Committee



Fall 2002

VOL. 3 NUMBER 1

Highlights

- Trails Marked and Now Open
- Web Site Now Available

Interpretative Trails Now Open

by Larry Noonan

The long awaited trail system in Altona Forest is now open for hikers. The primary entrances are from Stroud's Lane, Summerpark Crescent and from Altona Road. Secondary entrances are from St. Elizabeth Seton School yard, the hydro property on the north and from Chickadee Ct.

There are two trails which you can hike individually or combine them for a longer hike. The North / South Trail starts at Stroud's Lane and progresses for 1.19 km through a softwood and hardwood forest, past a wet meadow up to the Summerpark entrance. From here it progresses 1.86 km in a loop which passes entrances from Summerpark, Chickadee and Altona Road.

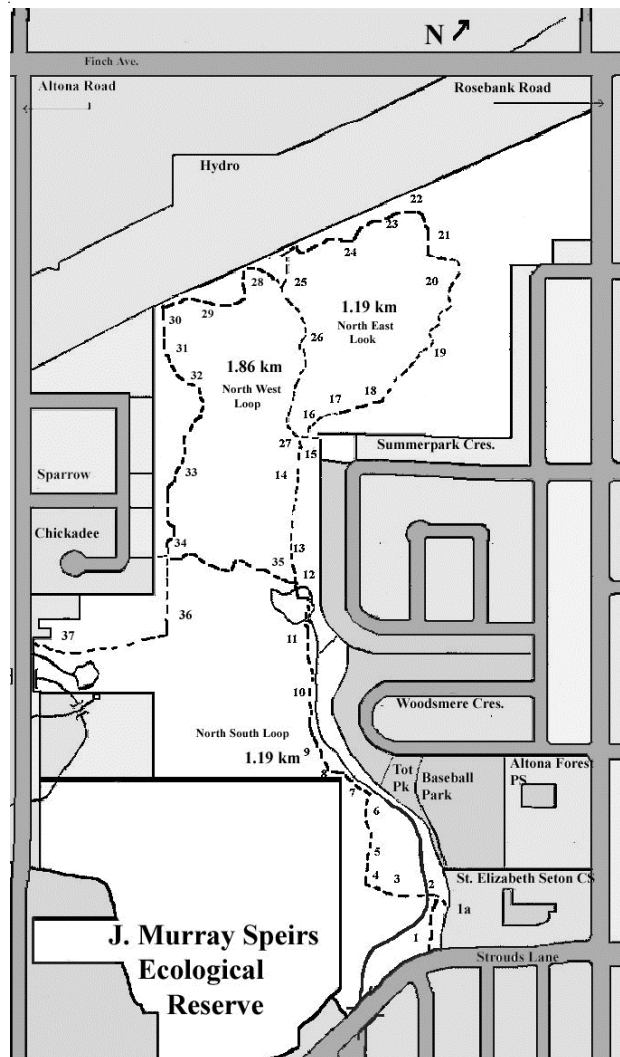
The North East Trail starts at Summerpark Cres and proceeds for 1.19 km in a loop up to the hydro property and then south, back to Summerpark.

Each of these trails will give you a natural forest experience

hike which you might think of as being available only in provincial parks and similar areas. The trails are hiking trails and vary in width from a couple of metres to only 70 cm.

Many mammals and birds live and visit Altona Forest and you may be lucky to see one or find evidence of one of these creatures on your hike. Common in the forest are white tailed deer, owls, hawks, coyotes, foxes, grouse, squirrels and a myriad of song birds. Two excellent bird watching locations are in the wet meadow (site 11 on the accompanying map) near the junction of the North / South Trail and the North West Trail and at the northern section of the North West Trail.

Plant lovers will see a multitude of wild flowers, shrubs and trees along the trails. A guide book and details of the plants and animals are available from our Web site. (See the article in this newsletter about the Web site for further details.)



We encourage you to get out and hike in the forest for exercise and enjoyment. Experience the four seasons and see the changes which occur. Witness the explosion of flowers in the spring, the coolness of summer, the colour of fall and the countless animal tracks visible in the winter snow. Take time off to 'get back to nature' and take a hike in your Altona Forest.

Adopt a Trail

by Larry Noonan

With the Altona Forest Interpretive Trails now open, the Altona Forest Stewardship Committee and Toronto and Region Conservation (TRCA) are instituting an Adopt A Trail program. This program will see volunteers take on the responsibility to monitor a short section of one of the trails within the forest. Responsibilities would include a commitment to walk your portion of the trail twice a month and clean any rubbish which has accumulated at the site. You would also report any major problems to Toronto and Region Conservation. There would be an initial meeting to select your portion of the trail that you wish to adopt and to receive further information. If you are interested, please contact Mike Bender at the TRCA at (416) 661-6600 x 5287.



The Altona Forest Reaches the Internet

by Jeff Bowers

The Altona Forest trail system development is well underway. People's awareness, usage and appreciation of the forest are going to begin to increase steadily in the coming months and years. The time to place the Altona Forest onto the Internet is upon us.

I am a member of the Altona Forest Stewardship Committee. One day the thought struck myself that the Altona Forest had no Internet presence. At the next Altona Forest Stewardship Committee meeting that followed, I tabled the idea to my fellow committee members of developing a Web site for the Altona Forest. The committee was very interested and supportive of the idea. I decided to volunteer to design and build the Web site. Being an IT (Information Technology) professional by day, I was able to construct the Web site in my spare time over the winter of 2001. With the gracious support of fellow committee members for content, a modest yet content rich Web site was developed. The site currently includes information such as:

- Location of the forest
- The trail system
- History of the area
- Issues in the forest
- A picture gallery of shots taken in the forest

You'll even find a trail map and trail guide you can download. Also note, the aerial photographs taken of the forest earlier this year. Expect the site to see further enhancements and improvements over time. Why don't you visit the Web site and see for yourself? The address is:

<http://members.rogers.com/altonaforest>

If you have any comments on the Web site please let me know. Also, if you have content material that could enhance the Web site I would appreciate hearing about it. You can contact me, Jeff Bowers, via email at the address noted below.

bowersjeff@rogers.com

Good Neighbours to the Altona Forest

by Rosemary Speirs

Girdled on three sides by urban development and on the north by the Hydro corridor, the Altona Forest won't survive as a green refuge for wildlife – and a wild solitude for our grandchildren – unless we protect it now.

That means everyone living around the forest must be an Altona Forest steward.

Don't pick or dig the wildflowers; don't let your dogs and especially your cats roam free; don't let your teenagers use the forest as a drug hideout, and don't dump garbage or despoil the forest-edge ponds.

That's a lot of Don'ts.

Probably, when you bought a property adjacent to the forest, you were thinking of enjoying it, not of the Don'ts. But the Altona Forest is an experiment, and a fragile one. We are used to urban parks which are basically lawns with areas of groomed trees and bushes. An unspoiled urban forest, with dirt pathways for hiking and nature-watching, is different. The best way to protect it is to leave it alone. The Toronto area has its green ravines and valley lands, most obviously the Rouge Valley park. But preserving a forest on prime development land, as the Ontario government did by setting aside \$11 million to buy the Altona Forest lands, is a breakthrough. Altona is meant to be a green stepping stone, for birds and wildlife trying to cling to existence where as so much of southern Ontario's other forests fall to the bulldozers. Its survival means Pickering residents can have their bit of wilderness without having to join the gridlock of cars travelling north on Highway 400 to Muskoka and Haliburton every summer weekend. We could gaze up into a White Pine, glimpse a deer, or listen to the sweet piercing songs of warblers from our own backyards.

But can we actually protect a 50-hectare wild woodland in the midst of urban sprawl? Already, we know the Forest and its inhabitants are under stress. Brian Henshaw, a well-known bird expert and environmental consultant, studied the birds and other wildlife in the

Altona Forest in the spring of 2000 and 2001. By comparing his findings to records on the forests' birds kept by my uncle J. Murray Speirs over a period of fifty years, Henshaw showed what happens when a small forest is ringed by heavy development. While subdivisions were going up around the forest, the number of migratory songbirds reproducing within the woodlands declined sharply. It wasn't true for all birds. Year-round resident species such as Chickadees, Cardinals and Blue Jays are still living in the forest, or mostly on the forest edge, in healthy numbers. But the songbirds that used to migrate from the tropics to nest in the Forest – Pewees, Thrushes, Scarlet Tanagers, Grosbeaks, Orioles – are almost gone.

Bird experts think that human pets, cats and dogs, disturb or destroy nests and young of those bird species that nest close to the ground, or on the ground. Squirrels, racoons, and Jays which benefit from urban bird feeders, also prey on the eggs and young of smaller songbirds.

Walking the Forest, Henshaw saw that some residents have erected lights that shine into the woods or loudspeakers that blare music. Kids drive mountain bikes into the forest, or cut trees to make forts. They've built firepits and drug houses in the interior. In some areas, vandals have cut trees, and in others, small cedars have been dug up and stolen.

The Altona Forest won't survive unless the Pickering residents living around it decide to protect the woods and its creatures. Many more people will be walking Altona's paths now that Toronto and Region Conservation has established official trails, bringing more watchful eyes into the interior, and hopefully ousting the vandals.

The vanishing neotropical migrant songbirds may not return, but the forest still has wonderful patches of wildflowers, deer, foxes and other animals, towering trees and ponds full of life. This spring, a couple of wild turkeys were heard making their gobbling cries in the forest – a sign that the Altona Forest has life in it yet.



Our Precious Resource

by Nancy Drynan, Principal

St. Elizabeth Seton Catholic School is situated in an ideal location. We border Altona Forest on the west and a park on the north. Part of our responsibility as a school and as citizens is to accept stewardship for the forest and to teach our students the importance of maintaining the natural beauty and integrity of the forest. Under the direction and guidance of Larry Noonan, co-chair of the Altona Forest Stewardship Committee, classes have been involved in many activities such as walking the trails, relocating indigenous trees, and picking up garbage. For the last few years many students have been involved in a "TREE BEE" competition which encourages them to be able to not only identify many trees but also to become more aware of their environment and the positive impact trees have on their lives. This year an Environment Club has been formed to further encourage and develop the students' interest and knowledge of environmental issues. It is our goal to encourage students to have a love of nature and a sense of ownership and responsibility in preserving it for themselves and future generations.

Tree and Shrub Buds

(Winter & Early Spring Enjoyment)

by Doug Lockrey

Surprise yourself as you walk along the Altona Trail paths when the deciduous woody plants have no leaves. Close examination of twigs limits you to understory plants or low-hanging branches. **Take a moment to study a sprig which has buds.**

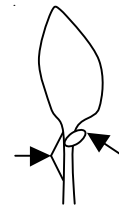
- 1) Look even closer – AT THE BASE OF AN END-BUD look for 1 or 2 small triangular leaf scars (labelled L below)- the previous year's leaf stalk was severed here. A round scar is likely a twig scar (T).

The bud is **TERMINAL**
2 TERMINAL BUDS
PSEUDOTERMINAL BUD

- 2) Next, locate buds that are along the twig; they are called **LATERAL BUDS**.
- 3) Determine the positioning of these Lateral Buds:



- a) **OPPOSITE** — any 2 buds are opposite one another
- b) **ALTERNATE** — buds alternate along the twig **AND** are on the same plane
- c) **SPIRAL** — buds alternate **AND** spiral around the twig



- 4) You are now ready to apply this to a simplistic key to place at least some of the woody plants which prevail in Altona Forest into artificial groups based on the position of their lateral buds:

GROUPING OF WOODY PLANTS **based on positioning of their buds**

LATERAL BUDS OPPOSITE

- 1 Terminal Bud – maple, ash, red-osier dogwood, honeysuckle, Viburnum species
- 2 Terminal Buds – buckthorn (look for a tiny pliable thorn between the 2 terminal buds) Pseudoterminal Bud – elder, lilac

LATERAL BUDS ALTERNATE

- 1 Terminal Bud – beech, alternate-leaved dogwood, Russian olive Pseudoterminal Bud – ironwood, blue beech, elm, grape, basswood

LATERAL BUDS SPIRAL

- 1 Terminal Bud Lateral Buds project noticeably from the twig – oak, hawthorn, raspberry, balsam poplar, largetooth aspen

Lateral Buds pressed close to twig – black cherry, chokecherry, currant, mountain-ash, trembling aspen, eastern cottonwood, apple, serviceberry Pseudoterminal Bud – speckled alder, birch, willow, staghorn sumac, raspberry

Altona Forest **Community Clean-up**

The Altona Forest Clean-up on Oct. 27 went very well-thanks to all the people who attended. There were Beavers, Cubs and Adventurers from Scouts as well as three high school students from Dunbarton along with a number of parents and children from the neighbourhood and four students from the Tree Bee club at St. Elizabeth Seton School.

A truck load of garbage was collected but there was not as much as there has been in previous years. This is good news as there seems to be more care taken by visitors. There was also garbage missing from areas where I had seen it previously so some other group has been in cleaning up – also good news.

Thanks to all who attended.