



**Red-breasted Nuthatch**  
(photo: B Gallagher)

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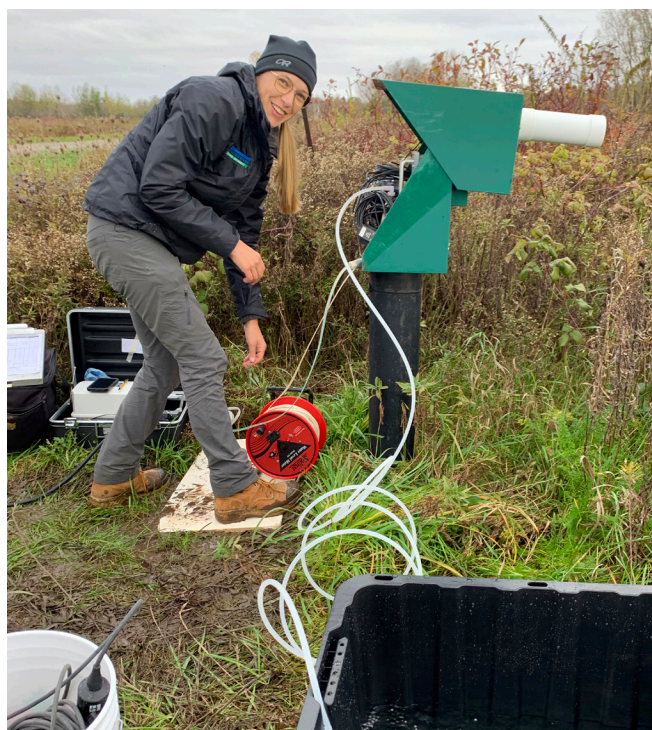
## Autumn Groundwater Well Sampling is Well Underway

October and November are a busy time for staff collecting water samples and groundwater supply data at monitoring wells across the Upper Thames watershed. The UTRCA has 28 groundwater monitoring wells that are part of the Provincial Groundwater Monitoring Network (PGMN), and additional monitoring wells with the City of London at sites including Sifton Bog.

The wells are sampled for a suite of water quality parameters to assist in understanding emerging issues in local groundwater quality. Each well station is also instrumented to take continuous water level measurements.

The Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks launched the province-wide groundwater monitoring program as a result of the significant drought years in 1998 and 1999. A comprehensive system of groundwater monitoring wells was installed across the upper Thames River watershed as part of this effort. The data is used in-house by the Low Water Response Team for the Ontario Low Water Response Program. The water quality and quantity data is used for plan review and is available at the [PGMN website](#).

This year, wet weather from August to October (approximately 50% to 75% above normal precipitation) created good conditions for water to recharge local aquifers and well supplies. This recharge is important as groundwater levels, measured at our monitoring wells, were lower



*Kaela Orton, Monitoring Technician, takes water samples and collects continuous water level data at a groundwater monitoring well at Golspie Swamp.*

at the end of 2020 and continued to be below normal levels this past spring as a result of reduced precipitation.

Groundwater is an important resource as a drinking water supply for municipal and private wells across the watershed. It is also vital to the supply of water in the Thames River system and for natural areas, such as wetlands.

**Contact:** [Karen Maaskant](#), Water Quality Specialist, or [Kaela Orton](#), Monitoring Technician

## Perth Children's Water Festival

The [Perth Children's Water Festival](#) was launched virtually in mid October. The festival, which is normally a multi-day outdoor event, is a fun and educational way for students in grades 4 and 5 to learn about the importance of water in their daily lives. [See Water Festival video.](#)

This year, the Festival Organizing Committee is excited to share virtual opportunities and resources with classes across Perth County. Each month, from October to April, a new Google activity slide will be released, with teachers getting early access to the slides to help with planning.

The [first slide](#) was released to students on October 18, with links to fun and educational activities. The water festival slides are being created by different community partner organizations to showcase how they protect, conserve, and/or use water, and will be available until the end of the school year.

Funding for the festival is from the TD Friends of the Environment Foundation and UTRCA, and supported by many community organizations including:

- Avon Maitland District School Board
- City of Stratford
- Huron Perth Catholic School Board
- Huron Perth Public Health
- Ontario Clean Water Agency
- Ontario Federation of Agriculture
- RBC Wealth Management Dominion Securities
- St Marys Cement

- Stratford Perth Museum
- Thames River Clean Up
- Upper Thames River Conservation Authority

**Contact:** [Linda Smith](#), Community Partnership Specialist

## OMAFRA ONFARM Tour

On a cold and very wet Friday afternoon, UTRCA staff assisted with a tour for the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) Assistant Deputy Minister. The tour visited a number of farm demonstration sites across our region. The upper Thames River watershed stop was in the Upper Medway Creek subwatershed and showcased the many ongoing projects under the OMAFRA-funded ONFARM (On-Farm Applied Research and Monitoring) program. The Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association (OSCIA) delivers the program on behalf of the province.



*The group listened with great interest as Tatianna, Tracy, and Mike presented information about the past, ongoing, and future work and opportunities in the Upper Medway Creek watershed.*

The UTRCA's Tatianna Lozier and Mike Funk led the presentations, along with Aaron Briemer of Deveron Farm Management Inc., Kevin McKague from OMAFRA, and Angela Straathof from OSCIA. UTRCA General Manager, Tracy Annett, welcomed the group and participated in the discussions along with OSCIA provincial directors and staff, as well as OMAFRA management, office, and field staff.



The information being generated by the Upper Medway watershed projects is of great interest to all. The projects are providing excellent details on the best management practices utilized and their ability to protect and enhance our water resources while improving soil health.

More about the Upper Medway projects:

- [Measuring Stream Flow in the Upper Medway Watershed](#)
- [Medway Watershed Cover Crops](#)

Contact: [Brad Glasman](#), Manager, Conservation Services

## Pine Plantation Restoration

A pine plantation in Fanshawe Conservation Area, south of the UTRCA's Watershed Conservation Centre, will be the target of ecological restoration work over the next couple of years, starting this fall. The plan is to transition this overly dense pine stand into a more open and diverse pine-oak-hickory savanna and tallgrass prairie habitat.



The 4 acre plot includes a treed area between the trailhead by the visitor's parking lot to the west, and the rowing club road to the east. Staff identified this highly visible area for ecological restoration as part of the UTRCA's Environmental Targets. The area is dominated by 40-year old planted Red and White Pines that are overly dense, stagnant, and ecologically uninteresting. Invasive plants such as Chinese Elm, Russian Olive, and buckthorn have spread throughout the area as well.

Approximately 20 years ago, staff planted a plot of native tallgrass prairie at the edge of the parking lot. Since then, the grasses have self-seeded to openings in the pine plantation, indicating prairie/savanna is an appropriate habitat for this gravelly, dry area.



*Prairie grasses, which are thriving in sunny openings, will be expanded.*

The work will be phased in over a few years as staff time and resources permit. With some matching private funding secured, Phase 1 starts this fall. The exotic trees, shrubs, and plants will be treated with herbicide. Later, the dead standing trees and shrubs and small dying pines will be cut down and chipped. With the canopy opened up, prairie grass and flower seeds will be hand broadcasted. Additional pine thinning will take place in the next phase. An educational sign will be installed to explain this unique project to visitors and trail users.

Contact: [Cathy Quinlan](#), Terrestrial Biologist

## Fanshawe Community Education Update

It's been a very busy fall for the Fanshawe Community Education team! We look forward to offering more engaging and inclusive programs this winter for local students and community members. We're especially excited to transition to more in-person learning opportunities.

### Virtual Sifton Bog Program

We had great success launching a new virtual [Sifton Bog](#) program for grade 3, 4 and 6 classes in the Thames Valley District School Board

(TVDSB) and London Catholic District School Board (LCDSB). Our staff were thrilled to be able to offer a “Live from the Bog” session with education staff filming on location from [Sifton Bog Environmentally Significant Area \(ESA\)](#). In total, 1400 students from both school boards participated in the program.



During our synchronous sessions with students, Fiona Navickas, Kim Gilbert, and Heather Hawkins Jensen offered students and teachers a 360 degree view of this locally rare habitat, including close-up views of the carnivorous Round-leaved Sundew, Sphagnum mosses, and some of the benthic invertebrates and amphibians that live in Redmond's Pond.

Participating classes also received access to a “Guided Tour of Sifton Bog” video and a “Runoff Race” video, which highlight the importance and functions of wetlands, as well as a resource package full of curriculum-connected lesson plans and extensions to support more in-depth learning about the amazing bog ecosystem.

The virtual Sifton Bog program owes some of its successful to the support and funding provided by the two school boards, as well as filming support from UTRCA's Steve Sauder.

### **Students learn about Water Testing**

In another partnership with the TVDSB, Erin Mutch, the school board's Learning Coordinator, distributed water-testing kit backpacks to grade 9 classes, giving students the opportunity to investigate the quality of water bodies near their own school and providing them with valuable hands-on experience.

UTRCA Community Education staff created a series of instructional videos at Medway Creek, to help students learn how to use the kit equipment, better understand the meaning of each test, and connect to the local watershed. In the videos, staff demonstrate how to conduct each test and provide background information on water quality metrics including dissolved oxygen, benthic invertebrate diversity, conductivity, and pH.

This project was a great opportunity to highlight the many career possibilities for students interested in water. We hope using these kits will spark the interest of some future scientists and encourage water stewardship for everyone.

### **In-person Programs at Fanshawe CA!**

Community Education staff have also been fortunate to be able to lead some in-person programming at Fanshawe Conservation Area for community groups and private schools this fall. We booked popular programs such as Orienteering, Sensory Nature Walk, Ecosystems, and Pond, Field and Forest.

We also hosted our first official Girl Guide Adventure Day at Fanshawe CA in collaboration with Rachel Kent, the Outdoor Experiences Coordinator from Girl Guides of Canada. Girls from smaller local units came out for a full Saturday in October to participate in a variety of activities including pond-dipping for aquatic invertebrates and exploring the trails. We are excited to deepen this relationship with Girl Guides of Canada in 2022.

### **Witchy Walk**

UTRCA staff got a little spooky when we hosted a Witchy Walk at Fanshawe CA on October 30. This free community event highlighted some



of the scarier inhabitants of the forest and discussed how they might not be so scary after all, once you get to know them!



The Witchy Walk received an enthusiastic community turnout from families with young children. Participants enjoyed climbing through a spider's web between the trees, listening for coyote howls, spotting Halloween items hidden in the forest, and hopping like toads, before being sent home with a sweet treat. Thanks to all the ghouls and goblins who came out to play!

### Accessible Birding Event

Lastly, in continuing with efforts to make our programming more inclusive, Julie Read recently led a free Accessible Birding event on October 24 at Kilally Meadows ESA to celebrate [Birdability Week 2021](#). Birdability Week is a celebration



of birders with disabilities or health concerns and includes sharing resources to help the birding community be accessible, inclusive, and welcoming to everybody and every body!

This event was put on in partnership with the [London Bird team](#), in particular Coordinator Brendon Samuels, who helped London become certified as a Bird Friendly City with Nature Canada last spring.

The free event sold out and we received a lot of positive feedback, along with requests for future events. Julie was even [interviewed on CBC Radio's "Fresh Air"](#) to talk about the event.

**Contact: [Julie Read](#), Acting Community Education Supervisor (Fanshawe)**

### Communities for Nature Updates

Staff have had a busy fall with several [Communities for Nature](#) projects.

#### Trees for Bill and for Boler

Members of Boler Mountain in London joined forces with the family of the late Bill Kunz, initiator of London Hydro's Tree Power Program, to plant 200 native trees and shrubs on Saturday, October 16, at Boler Mountain.

Boler Mountain is celebrating its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year. Bill's family members were able to gather from far and wide to celebrate Bill's life and the legacy he helped to create.

Thank you to Boler staff Marty Thode and Jessika Gunton, who welcomed all of the volunteers and continue to be strong environmental supporters. Thanks also to TD Friends of the Environment Foundation and all those who made memorial donations in Bill's name, for funding this project.



*Boler Mountain volunteers and members of Bill Kunz's family.*



### **Stratford's TJ Dolan Natural Area Gets a Boost**

Stratford Girl Guides, their parents, and enthusiastic Stratford Rotary members gathered on Saturday, October 23 at the TJ Dolan Natural Area to plant nearly 200 trees. This beautiful space is a gem to walk through on the trails.

Efforts to naturalize this area began in 1992, with hundreds of local students and the City of Stratford working together over many years in partnership with the UTRCA.

Ash trees were a staple for planting projects in the 1990s. Those trees have since died due to the Emerald Ash Borer, and Rotary Club and Girl Guide efforts are helping to replace the dead ash.

Thank you to Christy Bertrand, past president of Stratford Rotary, and the City of Stratford for creating this opportunity for the Girl Guides, Rotary Club, and UTRCA to work together for the benefit of our environment.

### **Mighty Mission in Mitchell**

Local students from Mitchell District High School and Upper Thames Public School did an excellent job of planting 150 native trees and shrubs at the Husky Flats on October 27.

The site is along Whirl Creek, where efforts have continued over the past several years to naturalize and create a buffer. The UTRCA has also worked in partnership with the Municipality of West Perth to eradicate Japanese Knotweed along Whirl Creek. All of this work is helping to increase tree cover, create habitat for wildlife, protect the soil, and improve water quality.

A teacher was quick to send a message on the



same day, writing "It was great working and learning with you today! Thanks for the lesson, motivation and positivity as the students planted trees. The activity suited our learning about community involvement and support very well."

Thank you to TD Friends of the Environment Foundation for making this project possible.

### **St Marys Students See the Green Future**

A total of 90 grade 7 and 11 students walked to Southvale Park on October 28 and completed the planting of 450 native trees and shrubs. With the support and foresight of staff from the Town of St Marys and Rotary Club members, the UTRCA joined in the initiative with the help of funding from TD Friends of the Environment Foundation and St Marys Rotary.



The students transformed the open grassy field into a naturalized area that will buffer already existing woods and help to protect water quality in nearby Trout Creek. Increased tree cover, species diversity, wildlife habitat, food sources, and reduced mowing are just some of the reasons why planting trees in this park will benefit the community and the environment. A new trail will be extended along the edge of the planting. Plans are in the works to continue the planting in the spring of 2022.

### **In Harmony with Society and Nature**

On October 29 and 30, Aisin employees in Stratford supported the planting of 501 trees and shrubs (representing 500 employees and one dedication tree) in a wooded area that is part of the off leash dog park. The woodlot has suffered the loss of hundreds of ash trees to the Emerald

Ash Borer. The new plant material will help to fill in the gaps.

Keen grade 10 Green Initiatives students from Stratford District High School planted 150 of the trees on October 29. It was a challenging project, given the amount of rain this fall and having to work around stumps and fallen logs.



Aisin produces automotive parts for Toyota plants. The UTRCA is pleased to partner with Aisin and the City of Stratford on this project in the community. Thanks to the UTRCA's Chair, Alan Dale, for coming out to support the event and plant trees. See [video](#) and [photos](#).

Contact: [Karen Pugh](#), Resource Specialist

## Conservation Field Day

On a snowy November 3, the UTRCA's Conservation Services Unit held a second [Field Day at the new Thorndale Demonstration Farm](#), with assistance from Community Partnerships and Conservation Areas staff. The property is owned by the UTRCA and leased as one of our agricultural lands to a nearby landowner. The 58 acre farm was chosen to showcase a number of [agricultural best management practices \(BMPs\)](#), all working together to improve and protect soil health and water quality while increasing crop yield.

Many of the BMPs were installed last fall and winter and into this spring and summer. They include a controlled drainage system, water and sediment control basins demonstrating different intake options, woody fencerow management, a rock chute/tile outlet system, and tree seeding, planting and tending.

The farm will be managed to include regular use of cover crops and residue management/strip tillage, and will also utilize profitability mapping.

In June 2021, a field day demonstrated tile installation and the controlled drainage features. The November field day featured six information stations where visitors learned about the various BMPs demonstrated on the farm. The event was well attended and helped transfer information to the local farming community and agriculture industry, among others.



*Local farmers, industry representatives, and local politicians from all levels of government attended.*

The demonstration farm project has received financial support from many sources, including the Government of Canada through the federal Department of Environment and Climate Change, and the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, as well as ADS Canada (formerly Ideal Drain Tile), Agri Drain Corporation, Bluewater Pipe Inc, Hickenbottom Drain Inlets/ Maaskant Brothers, McCutcheon Farm Drainage, and VanGorp Drainage. Other supporters include Land Improvement Contractors of Ontario, Middlesex Federation of Agriculture, and Middlesex Soil and Crop Improvement Association.

More about the Thorndale Demonstration Farm:

- [Thorndale Demonstration Farm \(June 2021\)](#)
- [Thorndale Demonstration Farm \(May 2021\)](#)

Contact: [Craig Merkley](#), Conservation Services Specialist





## Varnishing "Stream of Dreams" Fish

After a hiatus due to COVID-19 restrictions, staff have been able to go back to local schools to help them varnish their [Stream of Dreams](#) murals, keeping the fish protected from the elements and looking great!

We were fortunate to be able to involve many groups and organizations to help with this task:

- Students during Western Orientation Serves
- Youth from the Cross Cultural Learners Centre
- Signal Boost Initiative
- Dorchester Mill Pond Committee
- UTRCA staff

**Contact:** [Linda Smith](#), Community Partnership Specialist



## Litter Clean Ups

UTRCA staff coordinated and participated in litter clean ups to assist with cleaning various locations in London this fall.

*Youth from the Cross Cultural Learners Centre helped clean up Westminster Ponds ESA.*



*The Friends of Stoney Creek, supported by the City of London's Adopt a Park program, cleaned up a portion of the trail along the Stoney Creek.*

**Contact:** [Linda Smith](#), Community Partnership Specialist

## On the Agenda

The next UTRCA Board of Directors meeting will be held virtually on November 23, 2021. The following items are on the draft agenda:

- Correspondence: Concerns about Continued Dumping of Sewage into the Thames River
- Transition Plan
- 2022 Fees Policy and Fees Schedule Updates
- 2022 Board of Directors Meeting Dates
- John Street Weir Removal Position
- Investment Policy Revision
- Administration and Enforcement - Section 28 Status Report
- 2022 UTRCA Elections Preparations
- Draft Budget Progress Update

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**Contact:** [Michelle Viglianti](#), Administrative Assistant