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September 2022

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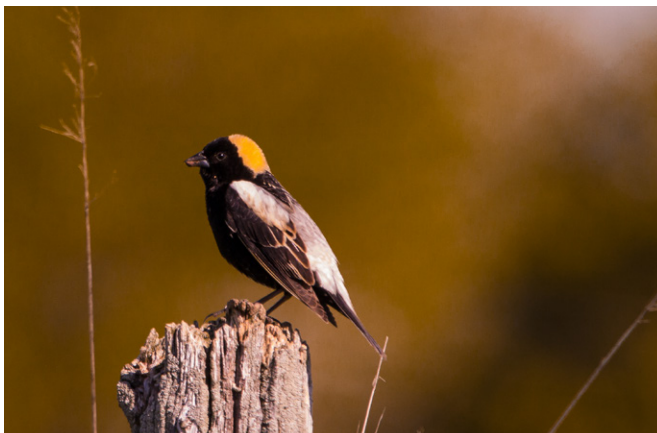


Summer education program at Fanshawe Conservation Area.

UTRCA to Establish Prairie for Grassland Birds under MTO Contract

The UTRCA has signed a 20 year agreement with the Ontario Ministry of Transportation (MTO) to establish, maintain, and monitor 22.6 hectares of tallgrass prairie habitat for Eastern Meadowlarks and Bobolinks. These grassland birds are Species at Risk classified as threatened in Ontario.

The new tallgrass prairies will compensate for habitat that will be lost due to highway improvements undertaken by the MTO in southwestern Ontario. MTO is providing the project funding and the UTRCA is providing the land, expertise, and project management.



Bobolink nest in tallgrass prairie habitat.

The UTRCA will establish the prairies at two sites: a field at Wildwood Conservation Area (CA) and two fields, including the former Cricket Club field, at Fanshawe CA. Over the next two years, the fields will be prepared by removing the existing vegetation cover, and then seeded with a native tallgrass prairie seed mix. Afterwards, the sites will be monitored and managed to ensure good germination, growth, and weed control. Once the prairies are established, staff will undertake yearly checks to see if Bobolinks and Eastern Meadowlarks are using the sites.

Tallgrass prairies provide habitat for a wide range of plant and animal species, including many insect pollinators. Establishing this important habitat will help boost the populations of Eastern Meadowlarks and Bobolinks as well as helping the UTRCA meet its environmental target of establishing and restoring 1500 hectares of natural vegetation cover in the upper Thames River watershed by 2037.

Contact: [Cathy Quinlan](mailto:Cathy.Quinlan@utrca.on.ca), Terrestrial Biologist

New and Returning Tree Power!

Residents of Perth South can purchase a tree for their property through the Tree Power program again this fall. It's the second year that the UTRCA and Municipality of Perth South have partnered to provide residents with affordable trees. Last year's inaugural program was very well received by residents.

The 300 tree available this year include Autumn Fantasy Maple, Black Cherry, Downy Serviceberry, Hackberry, Red Maple, Red Oak, and Sugar Maple.

Perth South residents can purchase trees at www.perthsouthtreepower.ca. The trees will be available for pick up on October 1.



Last year's tree pick up day for Perth South Tree Power.

In nearby St. Marys, the Town of St. Marys and the UTRCA have partnered to make 300 native hardwood trees available and affordable for residents of St. Marys with the first St. Marys Tree Power!

St. Marys residents can purchase trees online at www.stmarystreepower.ca. The trees will be available for pick up in St. Marys on October 15.

The goal of this project is to create a greener and more beautiful community by adding native trees. The project partners that contributed funding and in-kind donations include the Town of St. Marys, St. Marys Green Committee, and UTRCA.

Contact: [Emily Chandler](#), Communications and Marketing Specialist, or [Karen Pugh](#), Resource Specialist

Living Lab - Ontario Summer Series

UTRCA staff attended a Living Lab – Ontario event in early August. The day showcased joint research between Greg Vermeersch, who farms near Tillsonburg, and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) on the impact of relay cropping vs. double cropping soybeans, after both cereal rye and barley, on a variety of soil health indicators.

Relay cropping at this field trial involved planting soybeans into the standing cereal rye or barley crop before harvest, whereas double cropped plots had the soybeans planted after the winter cereals were harvested.

The event was part of the Living Lab – Ontario Summer Series, which showcased research projects across the Lake Erie basin.

Dr. Lori Phillips from AAFC provided an overview of some preliminary research findings, revealing there was an increase in microbial respiration (biological activity) in the relay crop system compared to the baseline soil data. The amount of biological activity in the soil can be a measure of soil health and impacts soil functions such as building organic matter, nutrient cycling, and soil resilience. Initial results show great promise for the positive impact that changes in management can have on the soil microbial community and soil health.



Greg Vermeersch discussing lessons learned around the logistics of harvesting the cereals vs. planting soybeans in relay and double cropping systems.

The UTRCA is a partner in Living Lab – Ontario, which is one of the original four living labs across the country, formed under the Living Laboratories Initiative. Earlier this year, AAFC introduced nine new living labs under the Agricultural Climate Solutions program. Each living lab focuses on an integrated approach to agricultural innovation that brings farmers, scientists, and other partners together to co-develop, test, and monitor new practices and technologies in a real-life context. The UTRCA's role is to collect water quality and quantity monitoring data and information on local adoption of Beneficial Management Practices, which will be used to assist scientists in their research.

The Living Lab – Ontario project is constantly evolving as the project progresses. For more information go to:

- [Living Laboratories Initiative](#)
- [Living Lab – Ontario](#) (AAFC)
- [Living Lab - Ontario](#) (OSCIA)

Contact: [Tatianna Lozier](#), Stewardship Services Coordinator

Summer Education Programs

What do an Eastern Screech Owl, fuzzy young groundhogs, and a giant mayfly nymph have in common? They were all spotted this year during summer programs at Fanshawe and Pittock Conservation Areas! With 12 different free events, Fanshawe Community Education staff offered a range of options for the public to enjoy including evening firefly walks, sunny bug hunts, and creative family play in the forest. Staff were also happy to provide more events at Pittock this year and highlight the natural heritage of Woodstock. (Insider tip: If you're interested in owls, check out Pittock Conservation Area!)



Summer events are a fun, inexpensive way for community members to connect with their local conservation area and discover interesting environmental facts from

outdoor educators. If you missed out on a summer event, follow the UTRCA on Eventbrite to be notified of any upcoming community programs.

Contact: [Heather Hawkins Jensen](#), Community Education Technician

On the Board Agenda

The next Board of Directors meeting will be held virtually on September 27, 2022. Please visit the "Board Agendas and Minutes" page at www.thamesriver.on.ca for agendas, reports, audio/video links and recordings, and approved minutes.

- Correspondence from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry
- 2023 Draft Budget Concepts Memo
- Strathroy-Caradoc Boundary Adjustment/Enlargement
- Progress Report #2 – Inventory of Programs and Services
- Administration and Enforcement – Section 28 Status Report
- Organization Modernization Overview

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