

MARIE CURTIS PARK: KEY NATURAL HERITAGE FEATURES AND FUNCTIONS

On the waterfront... that location alone immediately signals unique importance to migrating birds and bats; for organisms that benefit from the proximity of land and water habitats for their life cycles and for the potential dynamic interface on the coast of Lake Ontario. But beyond that, the forested slope that frames the park is also unique in terms of the age of the trees and the presence of several Butternut, an Endangered tree in Ontario and Canada due to the ravages of a lethal fungus that threatens to eliminate this species from our flora.

Marie Curtis East features mature treed parkland framed by the neighbourhood, Lake Ontario and Etobicoke Creek. The Park character changes with the crossing of the Creek to include a wilder, natural landscape at Marie Curtis West. Maintaining and enhancing habitat for native species is an important principle underlying the redevelopment of Marie Curtis Park. It is an important ecological reserve for local plant and wildlife species, as well as a prime community resource for outdoor educational and leisurely activities.

Summary of Features

- A large, coastal forest provides a prime refuge area for migratory bird and bat species;
- Two drainage features on site, with Applewood Creek immediately to the west
- Central drainage provides water supply for wetlands and connects to ponds on the Arsenal lands
- Etobicoke Creek provides habitat for twenty-four species of fish in a complex food web of insect eating, fish eating and plant eating members including Coho and Chinook Salmon, and a spring migratory species, White Sucker.
- Diversity of more than 12 vegetation communities that vary from wetland through to mature Red Oak and Red Maple forest that provide a wide range of wildlife habitats;
- Plant diversity:
 - Over 150 species have been documented of which 24 are considered to be “species of concern” by Toronto and Region Conservation;
 - Includes outstanding specimens of Butternut (*Juglans cinerea*) considered an endangered species in Canada and Ontario;
 - Specimens of ancient Red Oak that date to the founding of York;
 - Red and Bur Oak “nursery” in southwest corner.



Red Oak – 132 cm (52 inches) in diameter

- Bird Diversity¹:
 - 58 species documented of which a third are likely to breed in the park;
 - Bobolink recorded on the Arsenal Lands now a Threatened Species under the Endangered Species Act;
 - 30 species are considered “species of concern” by Toronto and Region Conservation or Credit Valley Conservation;
 - 8 species of raptors (15 have been recorded in High Park);
 - 4 species of waterfowl;
 - Warbler species lacking in the data – likely have been overlooked.
- Other wildlife¹:
 - Two amphibians (*American Toad* and *Northern Leopard Frog*);
 - 8 Mammals (every urban tolerant species except for Striped Skunk)
 - 3 Reptiles (*Dekay’s* and *Eastern Garter Snakes*; *Midland Painted Turtle* – photo at right)
 - 4 species are considered “species of concern” by Toronto and Region Conservation (in italics plus Muskrat and Eastern Chipmunk)
- A large site (>25 ha, almost 64 A) that provides landscape linkages along the Lake Ontario Coast and upstream in the watersheds of the Applewood Creek and Etobicoke Creeks.



What to do about the Canada Geese?

In spite of their patriotic name, this subspecies of goose was recently introduced to southern Ontario from the United States². The changes wrought by settlers and agriculture provided excellent habitat and the population exploded. The experience at Marie Curtis Park is no different, where the Canada Geese enjoy the shelter of the Etobicoke Creek, loafing on Lake Ontario and feeding on the extensive, open grasslands. Unfortunately, “loose as a goose” is no exaggeration, and in recreational areas it is what creates conflicts between the birds and humans.



**Canada Goose Extended Family
at Marie Curtis**

The individual birds are very faithful to their nesting and feeding locations. Therefore, if they are to be discouraged, it is important to make the habitat less comfortable to them, and/or even hostile by actively interfering with their nests.

Elements of the goose control strategy at Marie Curtis Park may include:

- Rehabilitation of erosion sites on Etobicoke Creek (see Concept Plan);
- Strategic plantings (shrubs, native grasses) to increase cover and discourage foraging; increases opportunities for predators;
- Trial use of manufactured fish/cedar compost that may discourage geese and beaver.
- Intensive egg-oiling for three to five years (subject to permitting from the Canadian Wildlife Service)

¹ Includes data from the Arsenal Lands

² See <http://www.on.ec.gc.ca/wildlife/brochures/canadageese-e.html> for further information