



gbt.org

SUMMER 2025

LANDSCRIPT

PROTECTING **GEORGIAN BAY'S** WILDERNESS LANDS

A Georgian Bay mystery:

The Bog Copper Butterfly

Species Spotlight:
River Otter

Tree Care on
Georgian Bay

Welcome Andrew,
Farewell Bill

Photo: Tom Murray

Dear Georgian Bay Community,



Georgian Bay has always been a part of my life. As a child, I have fond memories of cottaging there with my family. My own children have grown up on the Bay as well. From the sandy southern shore to canoe tripping along the eastern coastline, we have spent countless hours exploring the rocks, forests, and waters—creating cherished family memories along the way.

When the opportunity arose to lead the Georgian Bay Land Trust, it felt like the perfect way to merge my background in nonprofit leadership with my deep passion for protecting this remarkable place.

Like many of you, what has always drawn me to Georgian Bay is the feeling of being here—the warm (and sometimes brisk) water, the rugged and unique landscapes. No matter what stressors existed elsewhere, coming to the Bay always stripped them away and helped me recentre. That experience alone is worth protecting.

But since joining the Georgian Bay Land Trust, I've come to appreciate an entirely new dimension of the Bay—one I wasn't fully aware of before. While I always knew nature was worth protecting, I didn't grasp just how rare and ecologically significant the eastern shore truly is. Georgian Bay is home to 50 species at risk and 123 provincially significant species. Because much of the wilderness remains intact, its ecology is unlike anything else in the world—just two hours from the fourth-largest city in North America.

What I have learned so far has only strengthened my passion and commitment to protecting this place. I am honoured to build on the incredible work of those who came before me and to collaborate with our dedicated team, board, stewardship volunteers, and donor community.

I continue to learn so much about the work we do and the people who make it possible. This summer, I look forward to sharing insights and strategies on how we can further our mission. With that in mind, I would love to hear from you. If you have thoughts or ideas about how the Land Trust can better serve Georgian Bay, please reach out.

Together, we can ensure that this extraordinary place remains protected for generations to come.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andrew".

Andrew Young
Executive Director

We're delighted to welcome Andrew Young, who joined us in January as the new Executive Director of the Georgian Bay Land Trust.

Andrew is a skilled non-profit leader with a lifelong passion for the outdoors. He comes to us after five years as Executive Director of Outward Bound Canada, a charity that focuses on empowering youth through outdoor education. Previously, he served as a Vice President of Diabetes Canada. Earlier roles included advocacy work for at-risk communities, outdoor education, and camping programs for youth with complex mental and physical health challenges.

Andrew lives in Toronto with his wife Sarah and their three daughters. He has a family cottage in Tiny Township and has enjoyed many years of camping and canoeing along the eastern shore of Georgian Bay.

We are thrilled to have Andrew on board, and look forward to the energy and leadership that he will bring to the next chapter of the Georgian Bay Land Trust. Please join us in giving him a warm welcome!

Happy Retirement Bill!



This January, we bade a fond farewell to Bill Loughheed as he retired after 11 years as Executive Director of the Georgian Bay Land Trust. Bill leaves behind him a remarkable legacy for the wilderness of Georgian Bay and all those who appreciate it.

Bill led the Land Trust with passion, optimism, and an unmatched work

ethic. He worked closely with hundreds of landowners and funding partners to create 42 new conservation reserves, totalling 8,581 acres of Georgian Bay wilderness that will be protected forever. He also spearheaded the Corridor Project, an ambitious initiative to create a protected habitat corridor along much of eastern Georgian Bay. The first phase of this project was completed in 2024 and totals 32,900 acres. The lands that Bill helped to protect contain some of Georgian Bay's most precious forests, islands, and wetlands, which will safeguard the environmental health and character of our region into the future.

Bill also had a vision for how the Land Trust could contribute to the larger world of conservation science. He developed partnerships with university professors and students who came to conduct research on the habitats and animals of Georgian Bay. As part of this, he began the Land Trust's involvement with the Motus wildlife tracking network, which connects Georgian Bay to international migratory bird research. Bill was also responsible for securing the Land Trust's first field station in Go Home Bay, which allows passionate individuals from outside Georgian Bay to come and contribute to work here.



Bill with visiting researchers

Beyond all this, Bill did exceptional behind-the-scenes work to solidify the position and longevity of the Land Trust. He increased the number of grants we receive for our projects, and his careful financial management has resulted in strong and sustainable stewardship funds that will support our conservation work for the long term.

Finally, Bill put significant effort into collaborating with and strengthening the conservation community beyond Georgian Bay. He served on the board of the Ontario Land Trust Alliance, worked closely with other Executive Directors as part of the Canadian Land Trusts Working Group, and helped found the Alliance of Canadian Land Trusts. With these groups, Bill met with provincial and national decision makers and was instrumental in securing an important role for land trusts within Canada's Nature Fund and Ontario's Greenlands Conservation Partnership. In turn, this led to greater awareness and funding for conservation on Georgian Bay and elsewhere.

Bill has left the Georgian Bay Land Trust in a strong and growing position moving into the future, with many exciting projects underway. He also inspired and nurtured a hardworking team, who are now prepared to carry on the Land Trust's mission. Bill believed in his team and always encouraged people to pursue their interests and develop their abilities in the world of conservation.

Thank you Bill for your 11 years of outstanding service to conservation, and for the legacy you have left for us all in Georgian Bay's natural places. Here's to many more years enjoying the fruits of your labour in Go Home Bay!



Bill on Parliament Hill with the Canadian Land Trusts Working Group

? Georgian Bay **QUERY:** Tree care

As a property owner on eastern Georgian Bay, I am constantly questioning how to balance the safety and enjoyment of my property while respecting and supporting the natural ecology of the forest. How would you suggest maintaining this balance?

By: Braedon Witt, Program Manager, Tree Trust



Braedon Witt works with the Elora Environment Centre's Tree Trust to support their mission of sustaining mature trees through expert assessment and specialized arborist care. He holds a Master's in Forest Conservation from the University of Toronto. He also has experience around Georgian Bay, having completed an in-depth tree inventory in the Town of the Blue Mountains as a Forest Researcher.

This is a great question—one that deserves a thoughtful and nuanced answer. Finding the right balance between enjoying your property and preserving its natural function starts with one simple step: observation. The more time you spend on your land, the more you start to notice patterns— which species call it home, what trees thrive where, and how the landscape changes.

Observation & Appreciation

Next time you're outside on your property, take a closer look. What types of trees are around you? A great resource to help with identification is *Trees in Canada* by Laird Farrar, or you can use apps like Seek by iNaturalist. But do not just focus on

species — pay attention to individual tree health, too. Trees, like any living thing, have a spectrum of health. A tree's health can be impacted by various human activities, including soil disturbance, root damage from paving, improper pruning, physical damage, and the introduction of invasive pests or pathogens. While trees have natural defense mechanisms to protect themselves, they operate on a much longer timeframe than humans, healing slowly with limited resources.

Before diving into specific management strategies, I also recommend simply appreciating the incredible forest that surrounds us in the Great Lakes–Saint Lawrence region. Understanding its history and structure lays the groundwork for effective management. This forest type spans the province, hosting remarkable biodiversity—from black bears to pileated woodpeckers. Majestic white pines cling to rocky outcrops, while groves of beech and sugar maple create a vibrant landscape in autumn when the foliage changes to brilliant shades of red, orange, and gold. It is truly a breathtaking sight.



Define your Goals

Deciding whether to manage your property—and how to do so—depends on the outcomes you envision for your land. In many cases, the goal is to cultivate a healthy forest that is resilient to extreme weather, supports local wildlife, and regenerates naturally. Good property management can become a legacy—leaving your slice of paradise in a better state than you found it. This could be as simple as stating, “I want to encourage more habitat,” or “I want to remove invasive species to encourage native regeneration.” The key is to make your objectives clear and manageable, calling in the necessary expertise when things become more complex, or safety is a concern.

Work with the Forest

Trees are living organisms that reproduce, and forests regenerate in diverse ways across the globe. The boreal forest to the north, for example, regenerates through large-scale disturbances like fire. These fires trigger the regeneration process, allowing species like Jack pine, which need extreme heat to open their serotinous cones, to set forth the next generation.

On the other hand, the forest around Georgian Bay regenerates more gradually through a process known as Gap Phase Dynamics. In this process, individual or small groups of trees fall, creating “gaps” in the canopy. These gaps allow sunlight to reach the forest floor, encouraging new trees to grow. This results in uneven-aged stands, with different cohorts of trees growing together in the same area.

As a property owner, understanding this natural process is key. If the trees within your property are safely away from structures or trails, one effective way to encourage

biodiversity is by maintaining standing dead trees, or what is known as a “snag.” These dead trees provide valuable habitats for various animals, giving them a place to live (aside from your cozy cottage!). In addition to offering shelter, snags benefit soil health by contributing organic matter and nutrients that help nourish the next generation of trees. The additional sunlight from the gaps also promotes further growth.

Ensuring Safety and Limiting Tree Removals

If you are concerned about the potential risk of falling trees, it is a good idea to hire a certified arborist to assess the trees around your property. Specifically, seek out an arborist who specializes in conservation arboriculture, as they focus on maintaining trees as opposed to unnecessary removals. A qualified arborist will examine the tree’s structure, health, and rooting environment—key factors in preventing damage to your property.

If a particular tree raises concern, they can use tomography technology that employs sound waves to assess the internal condition of the tree. This allows them to determine how much structural wood remains, helping them to decide whether the tree is stable or in need of removal. This tool not only provides peace of mind but also supports the preservation of trees that do not pose an immediate risk, striking a perfect balance between safety and ecology.

Bringing it all Together

Balancing enjoyment with ecological stewardship starts with careful observation. Take time to understand the trees and wildlife on your property. Identify your goals—whether it is promoting tree health, preserving habitats by retaining snags, or managing invasive species—and seeking expert guidance when necessary. Support natural regeneration processes, such as Gap Phase Dynamics, and consider leaving dead trees to enhance biodiversity. By prioritizing both safety and ecology, you can appreciate your property while ensuring its long-term health.



*Wildlife like this Saw-Whet Owl may make use of the trees on your property
Photo by Sandra Lucas*

Grenville Volunteer Award: Shannon Beddoe



We are so pleased to recognize Shannon Beddoe with this year's Grenville Volunteer Award.

Shannon has been a hardworking and dependable member of our Board of Directors for the past twelve years. She first joined in 2013,

two years into her career as a lawyer, and was quickly asked to take on the role of legal secretary – a role she continued to serve in diligently while her career and her family grew.

As Secretary, Shannon took on the crucial and unglamorous task of keeping our Board of Directors organized and in line with the law. We have called on Shannon many times for her professional expertise and advice, which she has always been generous with. For a time, the Georgian Bay Land Trust's office was just around the corner from hers, and it was not unusual to run over during the day to get her signature on official documents, and her unofficial encouragement.

Shannon's enthusiasm has spilled over into other contributions as well. For several years she was a core part of our "Scotiabank 5k Charity Challenge" team, adding a lot of fun and even once taking part while nine months pregnant with her first child, Michael! Shannon signed on as a volunteer steward for our Tadenac Coastal Lots property

when it needed some looking after. To top it off, she has always been a much-appreciated cheerleader, advocate, and sounding board for staff.

Shannon, as you prepare to wrap up your tenure on the board, we are so grateful that you have chosen to give your time and talents to the Land Trust. Thank you for your many years of enthusiasm, advice, and commitment to the cause of conservation on Georgian Bay.



Shannon bidding at the Bayscapes auction in 2013

Thank You for a Fantastic Bayscapes!

November may feel like a distant memory, but we didn't want to miss the opportunity to thank everyone who made Bayscapes 2024 a success.

This was our first year since 2019 hosting the Bayscapes Party at Toronto's Wychwood Barns. We had a wonderful time back in the old space with live music by Fried Up Fred & Co., beautiful artwork, great food by the Food Dudes, and fabulous company from all of you who joined us.

The online auction was a big hit as well, attracting bidders from throughout Canada and the United States, and even a few from overseas! It's wonderful to see how far our Georgian Bay community stretches.

Thank you especially to the donors and volunteers who contributed to the event, and to our sponsors who made the evening possible.

Bayscapes was sponsored by:



Diary of a Whip-poor-will

Photo: Tom Murray



The Georgian Bay Land Trust has been studying Eastern Whip-poor-wills over the past two summers, and learning more about their daily lives on Georgian Bay. Here's a snapshot of what life is like for one of the Whip-poor-wills in our study.

8:45pm – Hello world! What a nap. I picked a particularly good swamp to sleep in today. Comfiest tree branch I've rested on in a while, and my camouflage did its job well – no disturbances. Nice to roost somewhere a little different than my usual forest.

9:15pm – Now it's time to make my presence known. Territories don't establish themselves. I need to sing my name really loudly over some open rocks, so as many birds as possible can hear that I live here. *deep breath* Whip-poor-will! Whip-poor-will! Whip-poor-will! Gosh, what a nice voice I have – I sound great!

10:00pm – The moon is out, and so are the bugs. Time to catch dinner! The full moon is beautiful in the forest, and really illuminates all the moths I'm trying to hunt. Yum – just got a Sphinx Moth! I think I'll stay out a little longer than usual tonight, and have a really good dinner.

Midnight – Time to take a turn on the nest. My partner has been there with the eggs all day, and she needs a break to go get some food. They are so well camouflaged, even I don't see them right away! But I know where they are, past a few junipers, atop a little pile of leaves on the ground. One brown bird and two speckled eggs. We're a simple family. No need for a nest or a home in the trees – just a place on the rock, not too exposed to the elements. Home sweet home – at least for the next month. I settle in for the night, taking my guard duties seriously.

12:30am – Movement! Something big and loud approaches. I stay silent and alert – camouflage and stillness are the best

ways to protect myself and my eggs, unless the beings get very close.

Wait a minute. I recognize these people, with their headlamps and notebooks! They're the same ones I had an encounter with a few days ago, when I thought I heard another Whip-poor-will singing on my turf. I swooped in to investigate, and next thing I knew, was caught in some sort of mesh and being gently extracted by a pair of hands. The next few minutes passed in a blur, but they left me with a new ankle bracelet and a tiny tag on my back.

Tonight they seem to be walking around with some sort of handheld metal antenna.

What could they be doing? They don't stay long, and don't get close enough to scare me off the nest. They seem to write something down and continue on walking – I'm grateful they've left me in peace.

2:00am – While sitting on the nest, I spend some time dreaming about my family's future. Soon, the eggs will hatch, and within a matter of days our two fluffy little babies will be running around. I have so much to teach them, so quickly. They'll learn how to fly, hunt for insects, and blend into the landscape. I also need to practice the defensive dance I'll do to protect them, if predators get too close while they're young.

In only a month or two, it will be time to leave this stage of life behind, and make the long journey south to our wintering grounds. The kids will grow up, and get ready to start their own families – but I'll be right back here, in the same place next year. I can't imagine a better place to be!



Fairwood Nature Preserve



We're happy to celebrate the creation of the Fairwood Nature Preserve in Pointe au Baril! This 30-acre property is the Georgian Bay Land Trust's newest conservation easement, donated anonymously by its generous landowners.

The Fairwood Nature Preserve is now a significant refuge for nature in the heart of Pointe au Baril. It includes the southwestern portion of a large island, as well as a smaller one-acre island just offshore from the main property. Together, these two areas include 14 different vegetation community types, and provide habitat to at least six (and very likely more) species of conservation concern.

The property contains extensive rock barrens which provide excellent snake habitat. We've documented both Prairie Warblers and Eastern Whip-poor-wills making use of the junipers that dot these barrens. These rocky areas are also home to the rare Marbled Grasshopper. Amidst the rocks are large areas of forest, with predominant species being white pine, red oak, red maple, and white cedar. The at-risk Eastern Wood-Pewee can be heard singing in the forest.

The Fairwood Nature Preserve also contains a number of swamps, marshes, and fens, both in the interior of the property and along its shoreline. The area in between the main portion of the property and the small island contains extensive wetlands, which provide important habitat for species at risk, including the Midland Painted Turtle.

The protection of this property contributes to the larger environmental health of the surrounding region. There are several shoreline wetland ecosystems just outside the boundaries of the property, which are effectively protected now that the neighbouring landmass is conserved. This island also exists in relatively close proximity to other conservation

reserves in the Pointe au Baril area, allowing the species that use those areas to continue to move freely through the landscape.

We are so grateful to the owners of the Fairwood Nature Preserve for their conservation vision, and the legacy they've chosen to leave for nature in Pointe au Baril.

What is a Conservation Easement?

A Conservation Easement Agreement is a legal agreement between a landowner and the Georgian Bay Land Trust. It allows the landowner to maintain ownership of their land, while designating some or all of it to be protected as undeveloped wilderness forever. The landowner receives a charitable tax receipt in return for the agreement, and the Georgian Bay Land Trust monitors the land annually to ensure the easement conditions are being met.

We work with landowners who wish to preserve the land they love and leave a legacy for the future. If you own land that you would like to preserve in its natural state forever, we would be happy to speak to you about conservation options. Please visit gbt.org/landowner, or contact Jenn LeMesurier at jenn.lemesurier@gbt.org or (416) 440-1519 x111.

Welcome New Staff

We're delighted to welcome four new staff members to our growing team! Rhythm, Jenn, Karen, and Joseph will help us move ahead on the ambitious Georgian Bay Corridor Project, strengthen our work with landowners, accelerate new land protection projects, and improve our ecosystem mapping.



Rhythm Verma – GIS Technician

Rhythm Verma is a GIS and environmental data specialist with a passion for conservation. She holds a Masters of Geomatics for Environmental Management from the University of British Columbia, and a Masters of Science in

Botany from Punjab Agricultural University. Her past projects include using GIS to map the environmental impacts of truck accidents, modeling Saskatoon Berry and Red Huckleberry distribution in response to climate change, and analyzing stream networks to identify suitable habitats for pacific salmon spawning. In her spare time, Rhythm volunteers with citizen science and wildlife monitoring projects.

Rhythm joins the Georgian Bay Land Trust as our first-ever GIS Technician. She is working on updating our ecosystem mapping, supporting conservation research, and helping us plan for future conservation projects.



Joseph Kohut – Corridor Project Ecologist

Joseph Kohut is an experienced field technician with a keen interest in research and conservation of species at risk. He has a Bachelor of Biological Sciences with a Minor in Earth Sciences from Brock University,

and has worked in a number of hands-on conservation roles. Joseph has led remote field teams conducting research on at-risk reptiles and amphibians in Muskoka through the S.T.A.R.T. and C.A.R.E.S. projects, worked as the Primary Wildlife Biologist at Lake Louise Ski Resort, and conducted a variety of reptile surveys with Scales Nature Park in Orillia. He is also experienced in nature interpretation and education.

Joseph will be our Corridor Project Ecologist for the Sans Souci region, leading surveying and planning for lands that are being considered for protection as part of the Corridor Project.



Karen Koornneef – Corridor Project Ecologist

Karen Koornneef is a longtime boater on Georgian Bay who is passionate about the outdoors, particularly wetlands. She recently completed a Masters of Science at Lakehead University researching water quality in

Ontario fens, and has since been in a consulting role with George Langman Sanctuary/Orillia Fish and Game Club. Karen is a skilled ecologist and aquatic biologist, with a strong background in research, field data collection, and ecological restoration. She has experience working in community engagement and outreach, including for the Ontario Youth Master Naturalist Program, and has volunteered with the Couchiching Conservancy and Nature Conservancy of Canada.

Karen is taking on the role of Corridor Project Ecologist for the Pointe au Baril region, and will begin by leading a team of summer staff in surveying lands that may be incorporated into the Corridor Project.



Jenn LeMesurier – Land Securement Coordinator

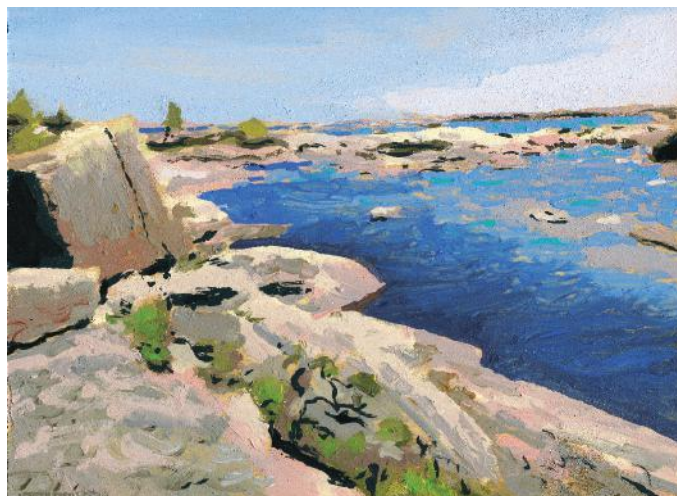
Jenn LeMesurier has a wealth of experience in conservation and ecology, and is enthusiastic about getting people involved with the natural world. She has most recently been working as an ecologist and arborist

at RiverStone Environmental Solutions in Bracebridge, and previously was the Land Stewardship Coordinator at the Muskoka Conservancy. Jenn has an honours Bachelor of Environmental Studies from Lakehead University, and a Masters of Integrated and Adaptive Water Resources Planning and Management from McGill University. She has also worked several jobs in outdoor education and interpretation for provincial parks and camps.

Jenn will take the lead on our Land Protection program, working with landowners throughout eastern Georgian Bay and the North Channel to create new conservation reserves and protect what is most important in our shared environment.

King Family Bursary Winner: Peter B. Mills

Congratulations to Peter B. Mills, recipient of our 2025 King Family Bursary for *Letters from the Broken Coast*

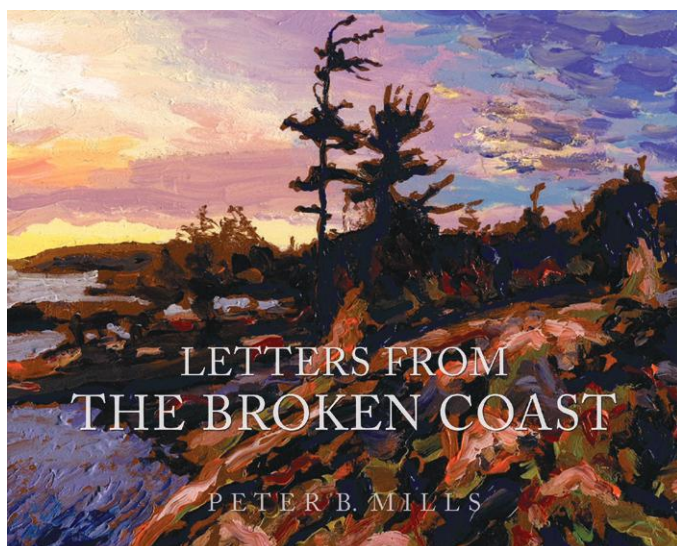


Foxsnake Country by Peter Mills

Peter B. Mills is an ecologist and artist based in Huntsville, Ontario. He works for Ontario Parks and regularly spends time exploring the Georgian Bay coast, including the French River and Massasauga Provincial Parks. Mills will use the bursary funding to produce a print run of a book that details his experiences with the natural world of Georgian Bay, reflecting on the value of wilderness, solitude, and the preservation of beauty.

Called *Letters from the Broken Coast*, the book is an anthology of five letters written by Mills while canoe tripping on Georgian Bay, accompanied by his own painted illustrations. Each letter takes its inspiration from a different element of the Georgian Bay environment, and draws on Mills' knowledge in the realms of geology, spatial ecology, herpetology, plant dispersal, and the post-glacial history of the Georgian Bay basin.

The book will be sold in bookstores, at events, and through Mills' business Boghaunter Studio. One of the intended outcomes of the book is to foster an appreciation for the Georgian Bay landscape and inspire its stewardship.



You can see Peter Mills' work at boghaunterstudio.ca and on Instagram [@peterbmillsart](https://www.instagram.com/peterbmillsart).

Welcome Back, Janny!



We are delighted to welcome Janny Vincent back to our Board of Directors!

Janny previously served on the board from 2010-2018, and was Board Chair from 2014-2017. She is an incredibly committed, hardworking, and thoughtful

board member, who goes above and beyond to support the Land Trust and its people. During her first term on the board Janny spearheaded the creation of the *Georgian Bay* book,

hosted numerous events, and served on the fundraising and communications committees, as well as the long term stewardship task force.

Janny's professional expertise is in the field of financial information and data management. She is the President and Founder of Vincent Associates Inc. and President of Fundata Canada. Janny has been enjoying Georgian Bay since she was 7 years old, when her family started coming up to an island in the Sans Souci area. She shares her cottage with husband Peter McCann, her children, grandchildren, and her golden retriever, Sadie.

The Bog Copper Butterfly

The next time you find yourself near cranberry plants on Georgian Bay, have a look for a pale, low-flying butterfly. It just might be a Bog Copper!

Bog Coppers are small, delicate butterflies that are highly specific in their habitat needs. They can spend their entire lives in the vicinity of a single patch of cranberry plants, which they use for food, nectar, and shelter for their eggs.

These are the smallest members of the copper family in North America, with a wingspan of just 2-2.5 cm. Their name is a reflection of the fact that cranberries are most often found in bogs, but it is the cranberry itself that is most important to this species, not the bog. Bog Coppers have been found alongside cranberry plants in a variety of habitats, including fens, wet meadows, and depressions on Georgian Bay islands (more on that below).

Bog Coppers are less orange than other members of the copper family, and tend to have a purplish sheen and black dots on their wings. One of the best ways to distinguish them from similar species is simply to look at the habitat you've found them in. If there are cranberries present, it's likely a Bog Copper.

Bog Coppers are usually observed fluttering low around cranberry plants, and they frequently alight to drink nectar from the plant's flowers, and dewdrops from the leaves. The female lays her eggs on the underside of cranberry leaves, where they will remain through the summer, fall, and winter before emerging in the spring. These eggs are tough, and can withstand flooding and winters spent frozen under ice. When spring arrives, out come chunky green caterpillars

covered in tiny white hairs. They'll spend some time feeding on cranberry leaves before disappearing into chrysalises to become butterflies.

Bog Coppers exist in a variety of locations throughout the Great Lakes region, eastern Canada, and the north-eastern United States, and are not under any significant conservation threat as a whole. However, because of their localized nature and highly specific needs, individual populations are very vulnerable to wetland draining or destruction. Yet another reason to protect wetlands – you never know what beautiful little creatures may depend on them being there!

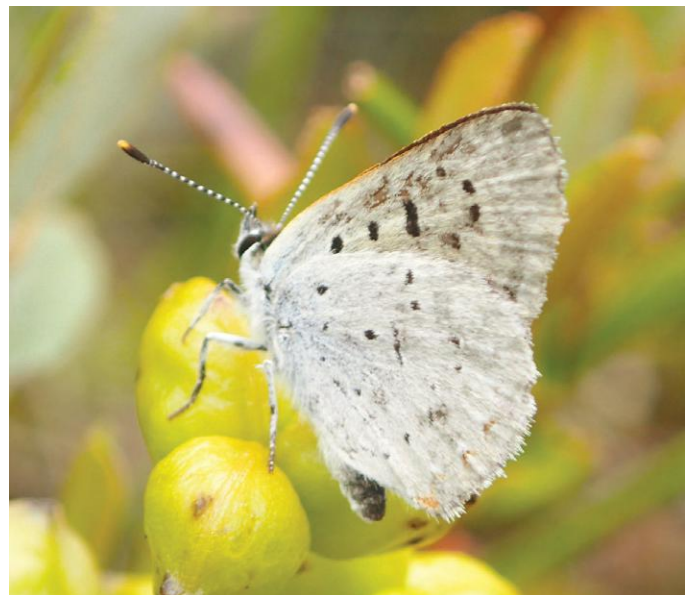


Photo: Allan Harris

The Research Project: Unravelling a Georgian Bay Mystery

Given how little Bog Coppers travel, it's very interesting that we find them in cranberry patches on Georgian Bay's isolated outer islands. How did they get here, and how long ago?

This summer, the Georgian Bay Land Trust will be attempting to answer parts of that question in partnership with Western University. MSc candidate Madison Robinson will be taking DNA samples from mainland and island populations of Bog Coppers, and comparing them to see whether the island populations are genetically distinct. Here's how Madison summarizes her work:

"My project looks at Bog Copper (*Tharsalea epixanthe*) populations found on islands in Georgian Bay that do not resemble their typical habitats. Usually, Bog Coppers are found in peatlands containing sphagnum moss and interspersed cranberries, however, these island populations have very densely packed cranberries with small amounts of water. Bog Coppers are poor dispersers, and thus, it is odd that they are found far from their mainland habitats on these islands.

My research focuses on the genetic differentiation between the mainland and island populations of Bog Coppers, using microsatellite markers to determine genetic similarity or difference. I aim to establish whether these populations have diverged from their mainland counterparts, or whether these islands have recently been colonized. If I see little differentiation between the island and mainland populations, that would infer recent colonization and/or gene flow between populations, whereas seeing large differentiation would infer distant colonization and/or little gene flow."

Species Spotlight: **North American River Otter** (*Lontra canadensis*)



Photo: Jon Nelson

Probably one of the most consistently fun wildlife sightings on Georgian Bay is the River Otter. They're a rare enough sight during the daytime to be exciting, and when you do see them, odds are they'll be doing something playful.

River Otters are widespread across North America, living almost everywhere in Canada and the United States except for the high Arctic, deserts, and some grasslands. They occur not only in rivers, but also in lakes, marshes, and along saltwater shorelines – anywhere they can find a den and enough food. Otters are non-migratory and do not hibernate, and in fact they seem to thrive in harsh Canadian winters.

Otters live in burrows on the water's edge, and often move into homes that have been left behind by other animals, including beaver lodges. In spring, expectant mothers will look for a den, where they'll give birth to a litter usually consisting of 2-3 pups. The babies are born blind, and spend the first three months of their lives in the den. At around 10 weeks old, their mother will guide them out into the world, teaching them to swim and hunt. The family will usually stay together until the next litter of pups is born, which may be 1 or 2 years later.

The diet of a River Otter mostly consists of fish, or crustaceans when they can get them. Otters are highly skilled aquatic hunters, and they have a number of physical adaptations that help them with this work. Their webbed feet and powerful tails

allow them to move quickly and precisely through the water, and long, sensitive whiskers (called "vibrissae") help them find prey in murky settings. Otters are able to close their ears and nostrils to keep water out, and they can even shut down the blood supply to certain parts of their body to extend the time they're able to spend underwater. They have transparent inner eyelids that protect their eyes while hunting for prey, and water repellent fur over a thick layer of fat that helps keep them warm in the water. River Otters can swim at speeds of up to 13 km/hr, hold their breath for up to 8 minutes, and dive up to 20 metres. They continue to find their food underwater even in winter, using ice holes to breathe as they hunt beneath the surface. Because most of this hunting takes place at night, humans often aren't aware of it, except to see the remains of fish and shells on the shoreline in the morning.

Otters are renowned for their playfulness, and they do spend a lot of time having fun together in social groups. Pups begin to play at 5-6 weeks old while still in the den, and otters of all ages can be observed engaging in chasing and wrestling games. They create "slides" in hillsides and riverbanks that they use over and over again, sometimes for practical purposes of getting from A to B, but often seemingly just for fun. And of course, otters are masters of the playful-looking belly slide across snow and ice, which they use to increase their winter travel speeds. An otter's usual running speed is 16 km/hr, but gliding can increase their overall speed to 25 km/hr.



Despite their sociability, River Otters do possess the skills to live and hunt on their own, and they will do this at various times during their lives. Otters can live in a variety of social arrangements, including on their own, in pairs, as an immediate family of parent(s) and young, in so-called "bachelor groups" of adult males, or as a group of siblings. Otters are frequently on the move, with home territories in the range of 10-40 km², or occasionally as big as 80km². Travel and hunting arrangements change depending on the season and the availability of prey.

Because River Otters are at the top of the aquatic food chain, they are especially susceptible to the effects of pollution in an ecosystem. Any contamination that occurs in fish and

smaller aquatic organisms will become concentrated in otters as they consume hundreds of fish, through a process called bioaccumulation. Because of this, otters are often used as an indicator species by scientists to measure the overall health of an ecosystem. If otters start to disappear, it can be a sign that pollution is reaching problematic levels.

River Otter populations are generally doing well across North America, and have stabilized after the significant declines they suffered due to overhunting and pollution during the early industrialization era. Thanks to restoration efforts, they have recently returned to areas that they were previously extirpated from, including Toronto and Prince Edward Island. However, they do depend upon intact habitat and relatively pollution-free environments. The number of places they occupy is smaller than it once was, and their current success is dependent upon maintaining water quality standards and responsible natural resource management practices.

We're lucky to have otters on Georgian Bay, and to have a number of organizations and community members dedicated to preserving our environment in such a way that it will always support them. Here's to many more years of enjoying their playfulness!



Do you have a species you'd like to see spotlighted in an upcoming issue? Send your suggestion to info@gbt.org.

In Memory: Carolyn Rymell



This past November, we said goodbye to long-serving Land Trust volunteer Carolyn Rymell.

Carolyn was an active and community-minded person, who cared deeply about the environment and her cottage community of Blackstone Lake. She served in numerous

volunteer roles with the Georgian Bay Land Trust and other organizations, including as President of the Blackstone Lake Cottagers Association, and a board member of the Georgian Bay Association.

Carolyn's involvement with the Georgian Bay Land Trust began in 1997, when she supported the creation of the Oldfield Lake Reserve. At that time it was our largest protected property, spanning 247 acres and protecting a portion of the Blackstone Lake shoreline as well as the smaller Oldfield

Lake. When we sought volunteers to help look after it, Carolyn signed on enthusiastically as one of the property's Lead Stewards. Carolyn knew the Oldfield Lake property and its species well. She prepared detailed stewardship reports, arranged tours for visiting scientists, and was always happy to hike the property with staff and volunteers.

In 2007, Carolyn joined the Georgian Bay Land Trust board and became an active member of our stewardship committee, helping to shape policy and steer priorities as the Land Trust grew. After retiring from the board in 2013, Carolyn remained highly engaged with the Land Trust, and served as our local champion in the Blackstone Lake community for the rest of her life. She was extremely helpful in arranging introductions, spreading the word about conservation amongst her neighbours on the lake, and always keeping a caring eye on the Oldfield Lake Reserve.

Carolyn was part of a generation of Land Trust volunteers whose passion and hard work built the organization when we had a very small number of staff. We are so grateful to her for her hard work and enthusiasm over many years, and we send our sympathy to her family and friends.

Welcome Summer Students

We have 10 fantastic students joining us this summer – our most ever! Conservation interns will conduct stewardship tasks on Georgian Bay Land Trust properties; research students will continue our studies on Prairie Warblers and Eastern Whip-poor-wills; and finally corridor students will survey the flora and fauna of existing and potential Corridor Project lands.

Conservation Interns



Abigail Cowan is currently enrolled in International Development Studies with an emphasis on Environment and Sustainable Development at the University of Guelph. She is looking forward to participating in conservation work in a place as meaningful as Georgian Bay.



Wesley Przyłowicz, hailing from Switzerland, will be enrolling in Chemistry at Queen's University this fall. They have a passion for learning, community and cultural engagement and a deep-seated love for nature inspired by their many summers in the Cognashene area.

Research Students



Lauren Sideris is a current Master of Wildlife Biology student at the University of Guelph. She is passionate about species at risk conservation in Ontario and is excited to join the GBLT team as a research student for the 2025 field season.



Rishona Vemulapalli is an Environmental Biology graduate from Queen's University and an incoming Master of Environmental Science student at the University of Toronto. As an avid photographer and naturalist, she's passionate about land and wildlife conservation and excited to explore Georgian Bay.

Corridor Students



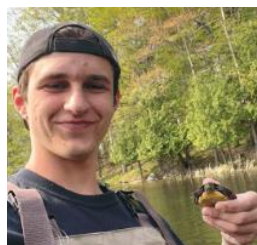
Riley Bowman recently graduated from Trent University with a BSc in Biology. He is passionate about the conservation of Ontario's wildlife, both big and small, and enjoys spending time hiking around Georgian Bay.



Estelle Scott is currently completing a double major in International Development and Biology at McGill University. She has a family cottage in Pointe au Baril, and is passionate about community-based conservation and protecting the region's unique ecosystems for future generations.



Hayden O'Brien is a student of environmental science at Queen's university with a specific focus on coastal wetland plant communities in Georgian Bay. Hayden grew up cottaging in Go Home Bay and is excited to return to the community for another summer.



Joey Trusler recently completed a major in Biology and a minor in Geography at Queen's University. He is excited to explore the unique habitats of Georgian Bay and is passionate about learning new things and connecting with the natural environment.



Aaron Paynter grew up spending summers at his family's cottage on Georgian Bay near Parry Sound. He recently finished a Geological Science degree from the University of British Columbia and is excited to expand his knowledge on local wildlife this summer.



Kylie MacEachern has completed an Honours BSc in Wildlife Biology and Conservation at the University of Guelph. She is passionate about combining science, photography, and illustration to inspire a wider audience to engage in conservation action.

Georgian Bay Snapshot

"Big Day 2025"
by Sarah Koetsier



This photo was taken towards the end of Aaron's Big Day, our fourth-annual birdathon fundraiser led by our Conservation Director Aaron Rusak and assisted by Conservation and Protected Areas Coordinator Stefani Matis. Thank you so much to everyone who followed along and made pledges - you helped us raise over \$7,000 to support bird research and conservation! Read more about the Big Day at gblt.org/news.



Tribute GIFTS

Received from September 24 2024 – April 11 2025

In Memory

Saille Abbott
James Bacque
Audrey and Allan Baker
Fred Beck
Nancy M. Bell
Sean C. Belshaw
Dorothy and Jim Bennett
Taylor Binnington and
Parry Lake
John Birnbaum
Gloria Boyd
Sandy Boyd
Kelly Buckingham
Anthony Burt
John Catto
Koady Chaisson
Peter Conacher
Barbara Bell Cooper
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Dora Louise Halpenny
Barry Haywood
Wendy Hoogeveen
Laurie Hornell
Judy Hurlburt
John Paul Jeffrey
Wally and Marilyn King
August and Ann Kloppenburg
Dorothy and Bill Leonard
Robert C. Ludwig
Molly Anne Macdonald
Madelon Macleod

Mary Martin
Ted McCormick
Patty G. Muir
Polly E. Naughton
Douglas Ross Norris
A.J. Ormsby
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Peter Russell
Carolyn Rymell
Mary Sarjeant
Colin Shepherd
Geoffrey Simpson Tait
Charlie Thomas
Heather J. Trusler
Mary Jane, Maggie,
and Peter Tushingham
Terry Ukrainec
Ronald Webb
Alix Hall Whalen
George White

In Honour

Douglas Alexander
Clair Balfour
Kerry and Brenda
Benson
Derek Bowen
Kristin Clark
Marc Cooper
Sondra Cornett
Barbara Crabtree
Doug and Sue Ironside
Stephen Jarvis
Terry Keenleyside

Paul Kennedy
Rob and Pam
Kennedy
Bill Lougheed
Gail and Barry
McKenna
Llewellyn Matthews
Frances Reinholdt
Mark Samuel
Kevin Sanford
Marcia Sweet



gbt.org

SUMMER 2025

SUMMEREVENTS

PROTECTING **GEORGIAN BAY'S** WILDERNESS LANDS

Nature Walks



Join us for a naturalist's tour of Georgian Bay Land Trust properties.

July 13, 10am – MacCallum Reserve, Go Home Bay
July 19, 10am – American Camp Island, Wah Wah Taysee
July 26, 10am – Rose Island Nature Reserve
August 16, 10am – Price Island, Pointe au Baril

Cocktails on the Lizard



Bring your afternoon cocktails to the Lizard and enjoy this beautiful island with friends.

July 11, 3–5pm
The Lizard, Cognashene

Bird Banding Drop-Ins



Observe our research team in action as they set up mist nets, band birds, and answer your questions.

August 6, 8–10am – Honey Harbour Public Library, 2586 Honey Harbour Road
August 11, 9–11am – Robertson Nature Reserve, Go Home Bay

Fall Bird Migration Walk



Join us for a hike to check out some of the birds migrating through at this time of year.

September 13, 10am–12pm – Sans Souci



For more information about any of these events, and to register, please visit gbt.org/events.

Sponsors

Thanks to our generous sponsor



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The Georgian Bay Land Trust acts to preserve the wilderness lands of eastern Georgian Bay and the North Channel through strategic conservation planning, land securement, stewardship, conservation research, and education.



We are a registered Canadian charity (#13195 8811 RR0001)