



# Friends of Awenda

2013 Newsletter

## Friends of Awenda Lichen Project

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Giant's Tomb Island field trip, October 6th, 2013  
Pictured Volunteer Kyra Howes, OMNR Conservation Officer Bruce Ward, Graduate Student Jose Maloles, Lichenologist Roman Olaszewski, Graduate Student Katherine Drotos, Dr. Troy McMullin

Nancy Ironside of the Orillia Naturalists Club approached the Park Naturalist last winter to see if the Friends had any interest in completing a lichen inventory at Awenda. The Club had just coordinated a similar inventory at Copeland Forest with Dr. Troy McMullin, a lichenologist at the University of Guelph. A generous private donor from the club offered to pay \$5000.00 for two weeks of field work with the same research scientist. The Friends enthusiastically accepted the offer.

No lichen research had ever been undertaken in the Park so it was a fascinating opportunity to learn more about an entirely neglected and fundamentally important group of organisms. Troy provided the following summary to date:

A lichen inventory was completed at Awenda during the summer of 2013. Lichens can be complex to identify so many are still being processed, but there are currently 140 species known. Several species discovered are rare in Ontario, including *Bacidia rubella* (Frosty-rimmed dot lichen), *Cresponea chloroconia* (no known common name), *Dermatocarpon dolomiticum* (stippleback lichen), *Flavopunctelia soredica* (powder-edged speckled greenshield), *Melanelixia fuliginosa* (shiny camouflage lichen) and

*Xanthoparmelia angustiphylla* (shingled rock lichen). The stippleback lichen was previously known only from the Bruce Peninsula. It requires calcareous rock to grow, such as limestone, which is rare at Awenda, but there is a large calcareous boulder on 4th beach where it can be found. The shingled rock lichen was collected for the third time in Ontario. The first collection was near Lake Superior Provincial Park and the second was in the nearby Copeland Forest.

The lichen diversity at Awenda is rich. Part of the reason for the large number of species is because many lichens require very specialized habitats to grow. The park contains coastal environments around the beaches, wetlands around Kettle Lake, old-growth forests, bogs, that provide habitats for many different species. Keep an eye out for these colourful and interesting organisms next time you are in the park. Many of them are small, but once you get an eye for them they are hard to miss!

We're 'lichen it' in 2013! We look forward to learning more about the species encountered and the role they play in the Awenda's ecosystem. Dr. McMullin will be incorporating his research in the first identification guide for the **Lichens of Ontario**. Look for the publication sometime in 2015.



Dr. Troy McMullin and research student.

## NOW IS THE TIME!

### A message from the President

A new chapter will unfold in the coming year for the Friends of Awenda Park! A chapter that will include new initiatives, with a focus on developing a strategic plan, cultivating new fundraising initiatives, and finding ways to increase our support to the Natural Heritage Education program. If you have ever considered becoming a member to stay connected and truly support our goals; or be more involved with bigger decisions at the Board of Directors level – **now is the time!**

The Friends of Awenda is a "charitable, non-profit" organization which has contributed approximately \$400,000 over the last 21 years in support of Awenda's Natural Heritage Education program and research. The Friends hire summer interpretive staff, conduct scientific and historical research, as well as fund trail panels, special events, guest speakers, department equipment, and support capital projects (ie. Kettle's Lake Viewing platform and Nature Shop renovation). The Board of Directors consists of 10 dedicated volunteers who meet 5 times a year. We love Awenda Provincial Park and everything we support focuses on improvements and opportunities within the park that are not currently funded by the provincial government. The recently revised goals (objects) of the Friends of Awenda as a charitable non-profit organization are:

1. To educate and increase the public's understanding of the environment and its importance by offering courses, seminars, conferences and meetings about Awenda Provincial Park;
2. To organize or participate in environmental projects designed to: preserve and protect flora and fauna; and preserve, protect and restore wetlands and watercourses;
3. To conduct environmental and historical research relating to Awenda Provincial Park and to the environment and to disseminate the results of such research;
4. To advance the public's appreciation of the arts by producing public art exhibitions, presentations, and performance art(s) events, and by providing a forum

for qualified artists to exhibit, present, or perform their artistic works through participation in such events;

5. To advance education by providing structured learning activities such as courses, instructional seminars, and workshops about contemporary landscape painting, and by providing opportunities for students to publicly exhibit, present, or perform their works, or develop their crafts or skills in conjunction with these learning activities

6. To restore and preserve archaeological and historical sites of cultural significant within Awenda Provincial Park with a view to educate and commemorate the sites.

Be sure to visit our website at [www.awendapark.ca](http://www.awendapark.ca). As well, we are connected in the social media world on Facebook. Be sure to 'Like' our page at Friends of Awenda. Thank you for your continued support! For more information please email us at [awenda@csolve.net](mailto:awenda@csolve.net).

Follow us on Facebook and Twitter.



Those who can, do. Those who can do more, volunteer! ~Author Unknown

### Remembering of Two Very Special "Friends"....

The Friends of Awenda Park would like to pay a special tribute to two special friends who passed away this year and last. Both were directors on the Board of Directors with the Friends of Awenda for several years and contributed in many capacities. Marnie Hacker who passed on May 25, 2013, lived very close to the park boundary for many years, on Champlain Road, and was often seen daily at the park on the dog beach with her two lovable furry companions. Her love for Awenda Park went far beyond attending Board meetings; in fact Marnie could almost be considered an unofficial Awenda greeter. She was always willing to provide campers and day users with help along the trails and really enjoyed sharing her love for the park with others. We will surely miss Marnie's passionate and

unwavering support; and moreover her spirited personality at the Board table. The Board of Directors plans to honour Marnie with a bench, in her name, possibly at the dog beach.



Marnie's favourite view

Peter Page who passed away September 24, 2012, lived on the beautiful shores of Georgian Bay in Penetanguishene. Peter filled a very important role on our board as Treasurer. Peter was the "numbers guy" and we surely counted on him to provide expertise and advice when we needed it most. Peter and his partner were avid lawn bowlers competing all over the world. If Peter was not on a journey lawn bowling with his partner Nell, he was soaking up the sun somewhere in the south! We miss Peter's gentle manner and positive reinforcement. Peter would be very pleased and proud to know that our hard work has paid off, literally; and now with our charitable status reinstated we are full steam ahead, looking eagerly forward to the future of the Friends of Awenda Park. A similar dedication is planned for Peter in 2014.

Marnie and Peter touched the lives of everyone on the Board; their dedication to Awenda will long be remembered. They will both be greatly missed.

## Awenda Inspired! Update

**Awenda Inspired!** continued this year as a group of students from the Ontario College of Art and Design University returned to Awenda on September 21st. Despite poor weather in neighbouring Penetanguishene, the rain held off and a group of 35 students and faculty managed to squeeze in a day of painting and drawing. An art exhibition will be held later in the academic year at OCAD. The Friends of Awenda are currently seeking volunteers who would like to help with special events like Awenda Inspired! and others planned for the 2014 season. Call the Park at 705-549-2231 Ext. 221 or email us [awenda@csolve.net](mailto:awenda@csolve.net) if you would like to help or share an idea!



## The Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake: Cold-Blooded Killer or Innocent Georgian Bay Wallflower?

By Carly Robillard

Is there a cold-blooded killer in our midst plotting to sink its fangs into the tender flesh of the next unsuspecting camper or cottager it encounters? That's often the rap on one of Georgian Bay's most infamous inhabitants- the Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake. Just this spring Ontario media attention was whipped into a near frenzy by the fact that the number of Massasauga bites had reached the yearly average of six bites unusually early- by the end of June. The truth about Ontario's only venomous snake might, however, surprise you.

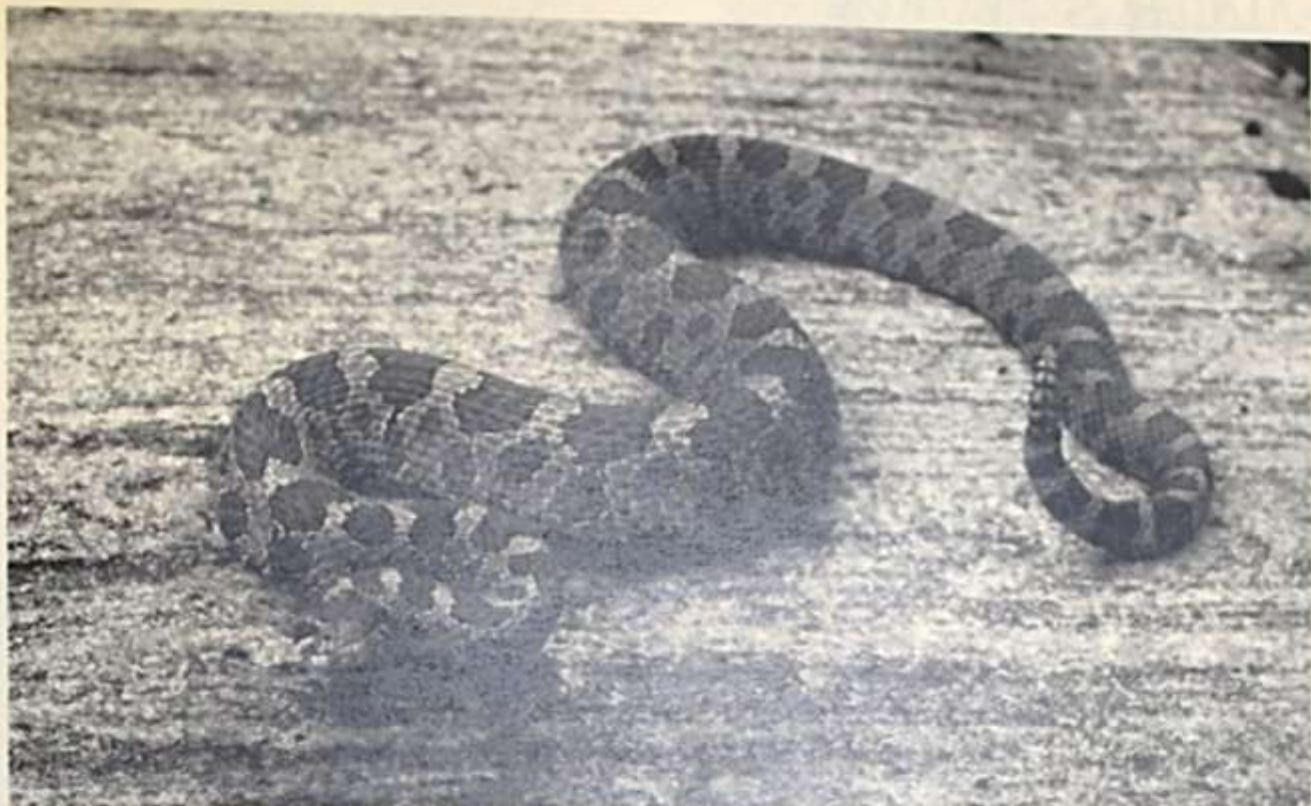
As far as Awenda is concerned, the only park sighting on the mainland was 22 years ago in 1991. Massasauga's don't appear to breed here although there may still be a small breeding population on Giant's Tomb Island. Remarkably, one individual was found west of the Park this summer; unfortunately it was a road-kill casualty. Similarly a Massasauga was discovered east of Awenda in 2001. It too, met the same fate after being implanted with a radio transmitter to better understand its movement patterns. It was killed the first day it was released. All three of these snakes were likely 'accidental' sightings- blown ashore by storms or circumstance from their main habitat in the 30,000 Islands. Their ability to survive here obviously is limited by paved roadways and development as well as the lack of ideal habitat.

As a wildlife interpreter, I take great pride in dispelling people's fears about their natural environment, so let me reassure you that playing safe in Massasauga country is easy. First, you'll need to know how to recognize one. The Massasauga is generally light grey to grey-brown, with dark spots down the back that are shaped like bowties or sleeping masks. They are thick-bodied, and have a long white stripe running above the upper jaw. They also have cat-like pupils, unlike the round pupils of other Ontario snake species. Finally, they have rattles at the ends of their tails, which they hold vertically and vibrate in a tight, insect-like buzz to warn you know if you're getting too close.

Now that you know what to look for, here's why you don't need to run away screaming when you see one! The first reason is that you'd be lucky to even see one in the first place, partly because they're an uncommon species, and partly because of their shy nature. If you've ever wandered around a marsh in the Georgian Bay area, chances are that you've walked past a handful of rattlers without even realizing it. Massasaugas are quite small by rattlesnake standards being less than 100 cm. They are active at night which rarely brings them into contact with humans. Although they lack outer ears, vibrations are passed along the jaw bone to the inner ear. If they can they will high-tail it away from you when they sense your footsteps rather than risk coming into contact with a potential predator.

If a Massasauga is startled it will shake its rattle as a warning. If the snake decides that there is no escape, it may bite in self-defence. Thankfully, 25 to 50% of Massasauga bites are dry, meaning that there is no injection of venom. After all, it needs that precious venom to take down and digest its prey- mice and other small mammals (another great reason to have these snakes around the cottage!). Venom is actually a complex cocktail of chemicals affecting nerve and blood cells which is designed to subdue prey without the risk of physical injury. It is also an aid to digestion in breaking down tissue to usable protein. The quicker it digests the more it can feed and build its fat reserves. Why waste something so costly to produce and necessary to survive on a non-prey item? One interesting statistic to remember is that most of the rattlesnake bite cases in Ontario are males between the ages of 16 and 25 who have been bitten on the hands and arms. Not coincidentally most individuals have been found to have consumed alcohol. This brings us to an important conclusion: Don't try to pick up or harass a Massasauga, even if you think it might impress your friends!

Finally, if you are unfortunate (or unwise, as above) enough to suffer a Massasauga bite, there is still no need to panic. In all the years of human activity in



Massasauga territory (with an average of 6 treated bites per year in more recent recorded history) the total number of confirmed deaths caused by Massasauga bites in Ontario comes to a grand total of two, both of which happened over 40 years ago. In both cases the individuals would have likely survived if they had sought or received proper medical attention. In any case, although painful, you would have several hours to get to the hospital before serious risk.

The most important thing to remember about the Massasauga is that it is a designated Threatened species under the Ontario Endangered Species Act. Not only that, but there are a number of similar-looking Ontario species of snake that are also protected by law, all of which are non-venomous. Therefore, it's important to put this new information into perspective. If we adopt an attitude of respect and protection for the Massasauga Rattlesnake, then we may in fact see a reduction in the number of bites per year. Killing a protected species is subject to large fines and potential imprisonment under the Act.

If you expect to be in Massasauga country in the future take precautions, wear rubber boots while hiking in shoreline areas where the species finds its habitat, bring a flashlight when you walk at night, and don't put your feet or hands where you can't see them.

As for camping in Awenda, our park is home to a near record 32 species of reptiles and amphibians, and the Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake is an important and exceptionally rare species within the greater park ecosystem. If you are a lucky enough to see a species of snake that looks similar, we encourage you to take a photo and send it our way. Remember, the only thing cold-blooded about the Massasauga is its metabolism! What the Massasauga really needs is to be left alone.....and a better press agent!

*Carly has a Bachelors of Science from Trent University and was hired directly by the Friends of Awenda for a 16 week contract to work as a Naturalist/Interpreter within the Natural Heritage Education Department.*

## Wildlife Sightings

Red-headed Woodpecker numbers continued to see an upward trend both within the Park and in the local area. Sighting locations suggest two to three pairs in Awenda this year. The highlight was seeing a pair of adults and two full-sized juveniles around the Campground Office and Trailer Dumping Station in mid-August.



Although no sightings of the threatened Whip-poor-will were located within park borders several birds were heard by park staff on the nearby Penetanguishene Peninsula. Reports were documented on Concession 13, 14, 15 and 18 in areas proximal to the Nipissing bluff. One individual was feeding on a calm night at Kettle's Beach and was likely directly within Awenda airspace. Hopefully we may yet find this threatened species within the Park in similar habitat.

On June 27th a group of Algonquin naturalists spent the day naturalizing with Awenda NHE staff. Sixteen species of warbler were seen including the first mainland record for Prairie Warbler, which up to that point had only been recorded on Giant's Tomb during the breeding season.

Awenda's Cerulean Warbler population appears to be remaining stable. Males were heard calling in five distinct locations, all of which suggest birds are returning to similar territories (4 of 5 calling locations were active in the Canadian Wildlife Service survey of 2012). Elsewhere in southern Ontario CWS surveys in 2013 found little evidence of this perilously endangered species. Dr. Lyle Friesen would like to return to Awenda in 2014 to investigate the isolated Awenda population.

Two forest interior bird species found their way on to the national SAR list: Wood Thrush and Eastern Wood Pee-wee. An internal survey conducted by NHE staff on June 20th turned up twelve (12) Wood Thrush and 27 Eastern Wood Pee-wee territories along park roadways. It appears these forest specialists are currently thriving in Awenda's mature forest conditions.

An Eastern Fox Snake was located on the mainland east of Awenda- which is the closest confirmed location to the Park in recent history.

Unfortunately the Monarch Butterfly has not fared so well as a species. Drought conditions in 2012 and winter habitat loss in combination with heavy pesticide use in the United States have reduced this once ubiquitous beauty to a shadow of its former population (herbicide laden corn seed is killing the Monarch's host plant Milkweed). Two individuals were sighted over the course of the breeding season while an additional three monarch were seen during migration in September.

On the subject of migratory insects, three of six migratory species of dragonfly were documented on Giant's Tomb on September 23rd by Tim Tully and Mike Lavin: Spot-winged Glider, Green Darner and Black Saddlebags

Unicorn update: Awenda's favourite deer is well at last report on September 29th. She was seen at Kettle's Beach eating apples alongside her fawn from last year and a healthy pair of twins from 2013!



Tim Tully had a bonus day of birdwatching on Awenda's 4th Beach on October 8th. The late day sunshine saw a Bald Eagle cruise overhead with a juvenile Sanderling fearlessly scurrying along the shore. Meanwhile a Barred Owl called noisily in the interior forest behind the Beach.

A sand dune is born! Low water conditions have produced the unexpected benefit of a budding sand dune on the once flat 4th Beach. As water levels have dropped sand has been deposited to create an infant dune which is continually trapping more sand as vegetation establishes itself. American Beach Grass and many other native dune specialists are now colonizing the area. On September 11th Bottle Gentian (*Gentiana andrewsii*) was found in the foredune, a new plant species for the mainland having only been found on Giant's Tomb in 1995.



It is appropriate to finish the year's sightings by going way back in time- 470 million years before present to the Paleozoic Era. During the Ordovician Period shallow salt water seas flooded the area. In it various creatures lived including squid-like organisms called cephalopods. It would have had a conical calcareous shell divided into chambers which are the visible elements of the fossil. Some cephalopod shells were coiled like their modern nautilus relatives while most including the genus *Actinoceras* maintained a cone-like appearance. The fossil was found at Kettle's Beach a number of years ago by Gord Sedgewick's daughter. Gord recently donated the fossil to the Park for educational purposes.



## Friends' Beach Barbeque a Big Hit with Campers!

The Awenda Beach barbecues brought in over \$600.00 for the Friends of Awenda Park and raised the group's profile dramatically. A Big "THANK YOU" to all those volunteers who helped out! The Friends would also like to thank Park Naturalist, Tim Tully and his staff, for all their assistance with set up and take down each Saturday throughout July and August. Also, thanks to Superintendent Mike Armstrong and Assistant Superintendent, Andrea Dupuis for their support of this endeavour. If you have an exciting fundraising idea for the Friends we would love to hear from you! E-mail us at [awenda@csolve.net](mailto:awenda@csolve.net) with your ideas, questions or if you would like to offer your volunteer support.

Board Member/Volunteer Joanne Scott



Back Row-Denis LaHaie, Jack Scott, Sheila Webber-Kettle, Colleen Johnstone, Rick Kettle, Randy Hargrave, Claude DesRochers  
Middle Row-Helen LaHaie, Nancy Hargrave, Gail Ivary  
Front Row-Brenda McGillivray, Joanne Scott, Marisse DesRochers  
Missing from the photo-Jennifer Sheremeta, Mary Lyn Beauvais, Susan Peterson

# Membership & Donations

## WHO ARE THE FRIENDS OF AWENDA?

The Friends of Awenda is a not-for-profit charitable organization working in cooperation with Ontario Parks and Awenda Provincial Park. The Friends is dedicated to the preservation, understanding, and interpretation of Awenda's biological, geological, and cultural treasures. To see recent and past projects, and activities, visit us online at [www.awendapark.ca](http://www.awendapark.ca).

## WHY JOIN THE FRIENDS?

As a member you can assist with fundraising activities, get involved in planning and organizing events, or just come out and enjoy the programs and special events.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: (     ) \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Payment Information:

Cheque

Credit Card # \_\_\_\_\_

Expiry Date \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_

Cardholder Signature: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Membership Type:

- Family \$25.00/yr
- Family \$60.00/3yrs
- Individual \$20.00/yr
- Individual \$50.00/3yrs
- Non-Profit Group \$50.00/yr
- Non-Profit Group \$140/3yrs
- Corporate: Please Contact Us

How you would like to be involved:

- Board Member
- Helping at Special Events
- Newsletter Contributor
- Fundraising
- General Member
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_



Mail membership to:  
Friends of Awenda Park  
P.O. Box 5004  
Penetanguishene ON  
Canada L9M 2G2

