



MUSKOKA
CONSERVANCY

Muskoka **Steward**

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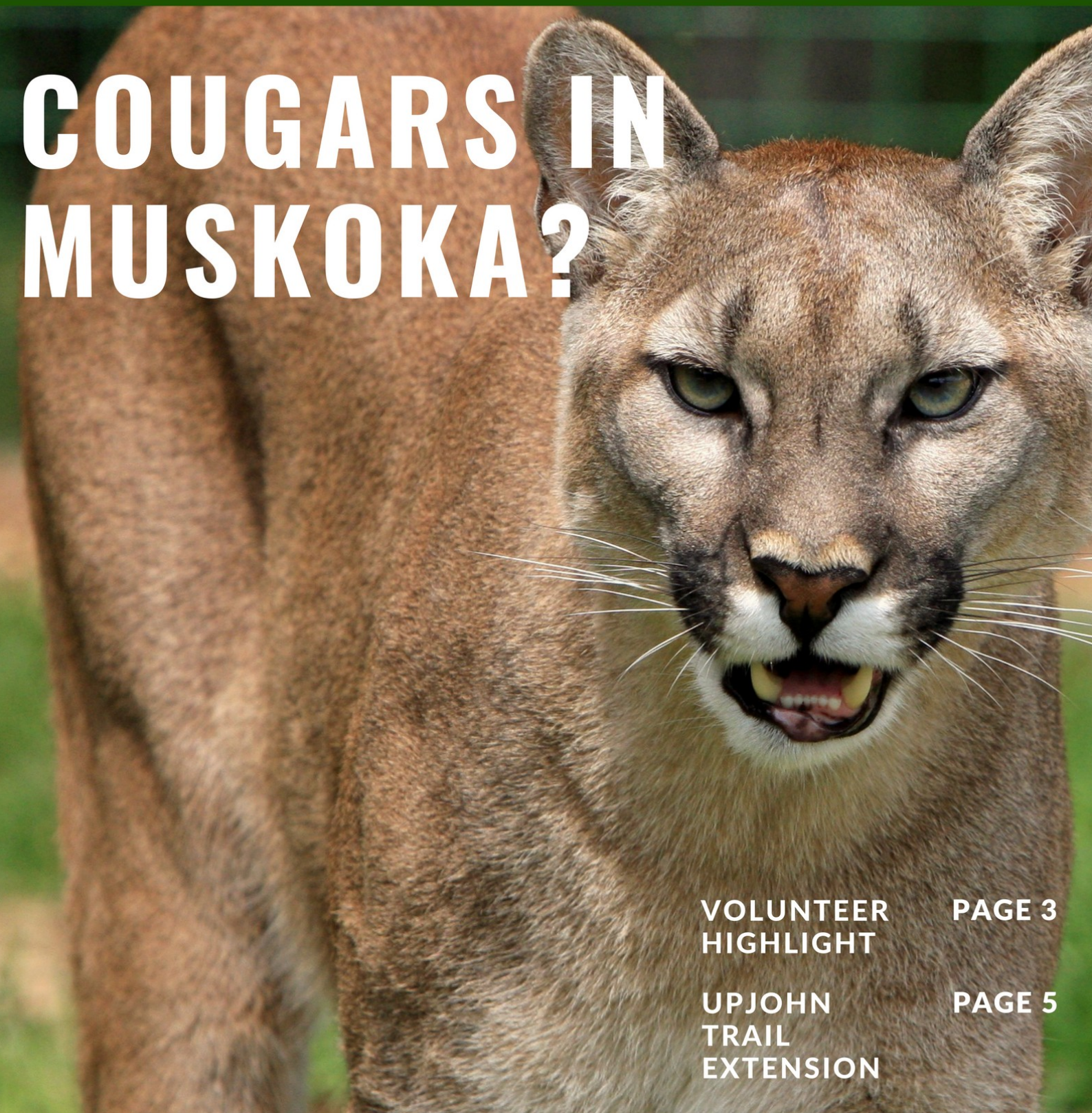
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Cougars? In Muskoka?

The office was abuzz earlier this year, when a cougar was reported on one of our nature reserves. This would be quite the sighting, as cougars are rarely seen in Eastern Ontario, let alone Muskoka. Rumours of big, wild cats have persisted in Ontario for a number of years and sightings have been increasing over the recent years. Definitive proof that a cougar (*Puma concolor*) is in the neighbourhood would be in the form of tracks, scat, clear photos, or a sighting by a professional biologist.

In the past, cougars, also known as mountain lions and pumas, roamed all of the Americas except the far north. They are still found in Central and South America, but their range in North America has been reduced due to hunting. Currently, they are only found on the west coast of Canada and the US. There is an endangered subspecies of the animal in Florida, referred to as the Florida panther. The Florida panther is much smaller than the Western cougar, but has a similar tawny colouring and long tail. The Eastern cougar was the subspecies that used to prowl through Ontario and the Maritimes, but has now been declared extinct.

However, even though it has been declared extinct, cougar sightings continue to persist throughout Ontario. Over the past decade, there have been provable sightings and physical evidence of cougars throughout Ontario. Some of these have turned out to be escaped cougars, that were either pets or lived on a private game reserve. However, there are other sightings that have been confirmed as wild animals. At least one cougar has been found dead in Northern Ontario and when DNA sampling was carried out, it was found to be from the Western population. Whether the Eastern subspecies is truly extinct or not is still up for debate, but at the very least, we know that cougars have been definitely spotted in Ontario.



These increases in sightings over the recent years also lends credibility to another hypothesis. This hypothesis is that cougars are migrating from the west to the east and beginning to reestablish themselves in their ancestral home. Even though this migration is potentially happening, we probably won't see a large number of cougars in the area overnight. Male cougars travel very long distances, with young males getting chased away from the birth territory once they are old enough. Females don't tend to travel as much and that is the reason for a slower migration. Though a young male may potentially move into the area, there is no guarantee that a female will follow.

If you see any evidence of a big cat in the form of prints, scat, or fur tufts, please put on your best citizen science hat and preserve it! With DNA analysis, it could provide proof of the re-emergence of the Eastern cougar or give us more information about a potential Western cougar migration. For additional information about cougars, check out www.mountainlion.org, www.cougarnet.org, or www.cougarrewilding.org.

Liz Hawke and Aaron Rusak

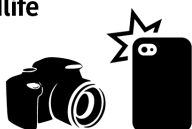
2018 INSTAGRAM PHOTO CONTEST



CATEGORIES:

1. Muskoka Nature Selfie
2. Insects
3. Land Wildlife

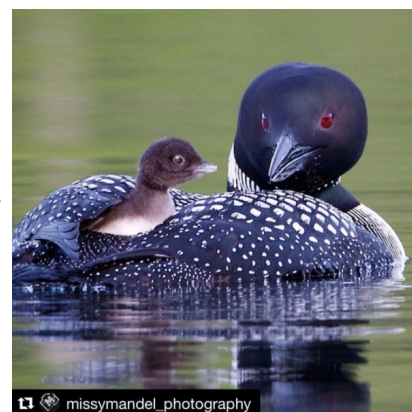
Prizes TBA



@ Message us on Instagram to submit your photo @muskokaconservancycontest

2018 Summer Photo Contest

This year's summer photo contest has begun! The contest is hosted by our volunteer, Katharine Clarkson, on the Instagram page @muskokaconservancycontest. This year's contest categories are Muskoka Nature Selfie, Insects, and Land Wildlife. To enter, tag your photo with the @muskokaconservancycontest tag. The most likes for each category wins! The contest deadline is **August 31st, 2018**. So get out there and get snapping!



One of last year's winners

A message from our Executive Director

Muskoka friends are the best of friends

The summer of 2018 has been incredibly active for Muskoka Conservancy, and we are super proud of everything we've done together with our friends. MC has an amazing collection of volunteers and supporters, and we're making a difference conserving nature in Muskoka! Here's just a sample of what we've been up to this summer, and some of the friends that made it happen.

We kicked off the summer season in June with the Little Sprouts Eco Club's maker's market of lemonade, crafts and goodies. The club is the result of energy and leadership provided by Christina Hunter. This event was held in The Corner Garden, a very pleasant educational resource featuring Muskoka native plants. The Corner Garden would not be possible without our friends Al Shaw and Bev Wicks.

Also in June, Venture Fest was a celebration hosted by one of Muskoka Conservancy's best and oldest friends, Muskoka Brewery. Amid the bbq smoke and cold beer, one of our newest friends, Mackenzie Clark spread the word about nature conservation in Muskoka.

Another new friend, Ashley Boone of Muskoka Yoga Fest, has proven her outfit has a conservation imperative. Ashley included the Conservancy in Yoga Fest since the beginning, and has made it possible for Conservancy volunteers to share information and offer paddle excursions to compliment the weekend of yoga. Our friends Barb Mason, Elspeth Wood, Liz Hawke and Andrew Blackwell helped make that happen.

Our finest moments are often when we are showing off our nature reserves. This July, in concert with a dozen friends from Muskoka Brewery, we were able to reclaim a stretch of overgrown trail at the Upjohn Nature Reserve to begin the next phase of the Wetland Access Trail. Thanks to Muskoka Brewery and their employees, we are going to be able to inspire more friends to love nature on this beautiful trail.

Looking forward to our major biennial fundraiser, Muskoka on the Edge simply would not happen without friends. Our group has been busy since last December. They've been planning, working their networks, and bringing new friends to the Conservancy. Special thanks to Ewing Morris and Partners, Don and Karen Lang, Bob and Donna Poile, Seth and Theresa Mersky, Kim and Stuart Lang, Peter Gilgan Foundation, Kathy Varley and Selby Martin, Hope Thomson, Colin Glassco, Janet Newlands, Suzanne Drinkwater, Bob Weekes, Cathy Gibson, Bev Cape, Jinny Flye, and the list goes on. This group has ensured the event of the summer will be at Muskoka Lakes Golf and Country Club on August 12, 2018.

All of these events and activities are done because our friends want to help us conserve nature in Muskoka. Together, we have protected three new properties in the last 12-months, and MC is very close to acquiring another new nature reserve in Port Sydney featuring a 60-acre wetland. The summer of 2018 has been terrific! We are super proud of what we've accomplished together, and we promise to keep working hard to ensure we remain worthy of our Muskoka friends.

Scott Young

Volunteer Highlight: Liz Hawke

Can you start by giving us a little background on yourself?

I'm recently retired and I've lived in Port Carling for 35 years. I'm also an Ontario Master Naturalist and a Florida Master Naturalist., which are two very different things. I ran my own business for a number of years, so helping out with administration work seems like a good fit.

What got you interested in volunteering for the Conservancy?

As part of my Ontario Master Naturalist training I need to volunteer in a related field. I looked around and I saw Muskoka Conservancy was doing some interesting things. What really appealed to me was both the chance to help with administration and to go out into the field. There's a variety, which I thought was good.

What are some things you want to accomplish by volunteering here?

I'm really interested in learning more about the properties that you protect and finding out what needs to be done on them. I want to help organize additional monitoring on properties to assist with Muskoka Conservancy's knowledge of the property.

If you could turn into any animal, what would it be?

Well, I think that's changed over time. I think right now, I'd like to be a bird, like an osprey.



The Science of Forest Bathing

Forest bathing, or shinrin-yoku, is a term that refers to taking in the forest atmosphere. It was developed in Japan in the 1980s and is quite important in Japanese medicine. Well it's relatively new to Canada, everyone understands that taking a walk in nature makes you feel good.

A lot of research has been conducted on the benefits of forest bathing on both the mental and physical health of a person. Simply being in wild and natural areas can have huge beneficial effects on the body. One significant benefit is that trees give off organic compounds that helps support cells in our immune system that fight off cancer. Forest bathing also helps reduce blood pressure and stress and helps you recover from an injury quicker. The practice also has a number of mental health benefits as well. It reduces stress, improves your mood, increases your ability to focus, and increases your energy level.

Shirin-yoku is not just a hike in the woods. It's about opening yourself up to nature and experiencing it in a different way. It's about noticing something that you never saw before or thinking about something in a new way. It exemplifies the saying "stop to smell the roses". Muskoka Conservancy is pleased to be working with Simcoe Muskoka Forest Therapy to provide a way to try forest bathing for your-

self. On August 26th from 10 am to 1 pm, Fran Mills will be hosting a Forest Therapy walk at our Upjohn Nature Reserve and introducing participants to the benefits of shinrin-yoku. If you're interested in participating, call 705-645-7393 to register for this event.

Aaron Rusak



Little Sprouts Update

The Little Sprouts Eco-Club has been busy heading into Summer with their very first makers market sale at the Conservancy Office in June. Kids of all ages sold their wares and learned all about supporting local, becoming an entrepreneur and the work it takes to create and sell your items. In July, the kids had the opportunity to learn how to fish from our local BassMasters Fishing club. As Little Sprouts events would have it, it rained but that didn't stop our budding fishers as they learned all about local fish and the importance of catch-and-release. 20 children also received a fishing rod to take home thanks to Craig Hunter Electric for donating the rods and Gravenhurst Canadian Tire for the discount and free fishing supplies.

In August the Little Sprouts are learning about solar energy and will be making their own solar powered Mason jar garden lamps at the Gravenhurst Dockside Festival. We will also be partnering with Riverstone Environmental on August 21st for a fun family evening of bug hotel building. We continue to grow our online group which is now over 430 local families following along and many of attend each monthly outing.

Christina Hunter



Citizen Science Results

The field season of our citizen science projects has concluded and we have some fantastic news to share. To recap, two of our properties were selected for both amphibian and bird surveys to monitor the species present there. We were looking for focal bird species, such as the Virginia rail or American coot and for the presence of breeding groups of amphibian.



Both properties had considerable success in the programs. On one of our properties, five species of frogs were discovered, as well as one of the focal bird species, the Pied-billed grebe. Additionally, through these surveys, we were able to increase the knowledge of our species at risk on the property. Before the surveys the property had one species at risk; now we know it to have five.

The other property had similar success. A Virginia Rail was heard calling from the property and at least two frog species were heard calling on the property, but many were heard on the adjacent property. All in all, it was a fantastic field season. Muskoka Conservancy is looking to expand the project in the future, so let us know if you're interested in joining. This project was supported by the James L. Baillie Memorial Fund of Bird Studies Canada with funds raised through the Great Canadian Birdathon.

Wetland Access Trail Extension at Upjohn Nature Reserve

The Upjohn Nature Reserve really has everything when it comes to wild spaces. It's a forested nature reserve, with a vast wetland complex as well as vernal pool habitats and a number of species at risk. The other important thing it offers is education and outreach, through its Wetland Access Trail. For the last three years, the Muskoka Brewery has been integral in establishing the trail and has provided hours of volunteer work as well as funding to make the trail a reality.

This year's project was re-establishing an overgrown trail on the property. We were joined by a team of volunteers who assisted in blazing this trail and clearing the brush.



While the trail has not been completely cleared yet, significant progress has been made. The trail extension runs along the wetland, offering some breathtaking views of the wetland. Additionally, the Muskoka Brewery volunteers helped with the creation of new parking spaces, so that visitors to the nature reserve can park off the road.

It was a gorgeous day and great fun was had by everyone who participated. A huge thank you goes out to Muskoka Brewery, for all the assistance they gave us this year and in past years in making one of our nature reserves a truly special place.

Aaron Rusak

Sunday August 12, 2018

You are invited.

**MUSKOKA
ON THE
EDGE**

Muskoka on the Edge
Sunday August 12 from 5:30pm to 8:30pm
Muskoka Lakes Golf & Country Club
Music - Auction - Tapas style food and drink

All proceeds in support of Muskoka Conservancy.

Tickets \$200. Purchase now. This event will sell out.

Call (705)645-7393

Event sponsorships available.
Visa and Mastercard accepted. Tax receipts issued.

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**MUSKOKA
CONSERVANCY**

www.muskokaconservancy.org

Conserving nature in Muskoka.

Muskoka Conservancy has an online shop!

With our website update, we've added ecommerce functionality to our online shop. This means that you can get your favourite Muskoka Conservancy gear and gifts without having to leave your home!

Check out our online shop at **muskokaconservancy.org/shop**

If you want to buy your items the good old fashioned way (or just want to see one of our faces), you're welcome to come into our office at **47 Quebec Street** and see the items in person. Or, for those of you in Toronto, contact **Elizabeth Mason** at **(416) 924-4868** for all your MC needs.

A big thank you!

Muskoka Conservancy would like to thank Windermere Garden Too, Rosseau General Store, and Indian River Trading Company for stocking our products this summer! You can go there to get frisbees, tea towels, and other merchandise!

Thank you to our official partners!



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