



Muskoka Steward

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WINTER WONDERLAND



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Skinks are at Risk!



Five-lined Skinks are listed as a species of Special Concern in Ontario, which means they live in the wild, but could become threatened or endangered as a result of a number of threats. The biggest threats to Skinks in Ontario are the loss and disturbance of habitat. Development and population increase in cottage country has a big impact on species at risk. The removal

The Common Five-lined Skink is listed as a Species at Risk in Ontario, and Muskoka provides habitat to this unique species. Specifically, Five-lined Skinks are found in rock barren environments at the southern edge of Muskoka – the population is known as the “Southern Shield” population.

The Common Five-lined Skink is the only lizard native to Ontario and are not often seen due to their quick nature and ability to camouflage. Juveniles and some adults can be readily identified by five cream coloured stripes that extend down the length of their green-black bodies. The species becomes more uniformly bronze with age, though hatchlings and juveniles have bright blue tails. Additionally, they can grow up to 21 cm in length.

Skinks in Muskoka are typically found in forest openings, specifically large rocky outcrops, seeking shelter under rocks or tree stumps. Females typically lay between 8-10 eggs in the early summer in a nest under cover (e.g. rotting log). They will leave their nest to bask in the sun, and then return to the nest and use their bodies to warm their eggs which hatch in the late summer. The hatchlings will be about 3 cm in length.

The really neat adaptation that Skinks have is their bright blue tail can break off if grabbed by a predator. When the tail breaks it will thrash about for a few seconds which distracts the predator for just long enough that the Skink can escape. Although a new tail will grow back with time, the Skink loses much of the fat reserves which it relies on to survive hibernation in the winter.

of cover objects has been observed specifically in the Southern Shield population as rocks are moved in high traffic natural areas and woody debris is moved for firewood. Removal of these objects during nesting season has also shown to have a negative effect on nesting success while females are brooding their eggs.

So...what can you do?

Protecting rock barren habitat for species at risk within the Southern Shield population of Five-lined Skink by helping to keep development out of these sensitive areas and limiting disturbance to rock barren habitat are key to help the species thrive. Maintaining cover objects like rocks and logs that Skinks utilize for refuge is one of the simplest things we can do. When you're spending time outdoors, remember that we need to respect the need for wildlife to have space in nature. Please don't build inukshuks along hiking trails, keep your pets on a leash, and maintain natural habitat areas around your own property. You could work to create habitat for Five-lined Skinks on your own property by using coverboards or leaving brushpiles for use and be sure not to disturb known nesting sites.

If you have interest in recording your wildlife sightings, you could set up a profile on the iNaturalist app to take photos and notes on the species you come across while out exploring – including Five-lined Skinks! The data collected using this application is used by citizen scientists and environmental professionals alike.



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Jenn LeMesurier

The poetry of dark skies, nature, and coronavirus

I'd like to begin with a haiku by Natsume Soseki:

The lamp once out

Cool stars enter

The window frame.

The Japanese poetic form seems fitting for our times. For starters, it's as short as your next Face tweet or Insta post. On top of that, traditional haiku is inspired by nature (just like Muskoka Conservancy!) and often contains a seasonal reference. Though haiku may be the perfect venue to discuss the weather, it is decidedly not a trivial form of expression. Haiku often contains deeper themes than a first reading may reveal.

Natsume's poem, for instance, seems at first nothing more than a factual statement. What do we see when we look in the window at night? But there's more to it. In the lamp light, we see ourselves, our own hot reflection. But shut the lamp and a galaxy appears. True perspective often comes only after the lights are out, or, sometimes we must turn out the lights in order to see. To me, poetry often seems inaccessible. The number of associative leaps in a haiku, however, is limited by the 17-syllable form, so the reader has a fighting chance! But that doesn't mean haikus write themselves, as I found out as I penned the following:

pink cherry ice cream
roller coaster and fireworks
a green turtle dives

I'm no Natsume but that's okay. My haiku juxtaposes pink ice cream with a green turtle. It places the excess, frivolity and amusement of human life next to the nonsense business of being a turtle. Nature doesn't need us.

You could read my poem to a child and they might be delighted, but the more you think about it the darker it gets. I suppose it comes naturally, what with recent news coverage of the coronavirus outbreak. One article I read on the BBC News website quotes a Professor Tim Benton who offers this perspective:

"Environmental and climate change are removing and altering animals' habitat, changing how they live, where they live and who eats whom. Often, wildlife species are more successful in cities than in the wild because of the plentiful food supply, making urban spaces a melting pot for evolving diseases...The more we change the environment, the more likely we are to disrupt ecosystems and provide opportunities for disease to emerge."

Human health depends on nature being healthy. If that isn't a strong motive for nature conservation, I'm not sure what will move us. Yet, I look around and see nature under threat all around me.

I'll leave you with this one by the master, Kobayashi Issa:

Don't weep, insects –
Lovers, stars themselves,
Must part.

Scott Young

RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP OR JOIN US TODAY!

An annual membership is an easy way to show your support for nature conservation in Muskoka. Donors of \$95 or more will be added to our membership list.

Online

Visit muskokaconservancy.org
and click donate in the top right:

DONATE

Mail

Send cheque or credit card
information to:

Box 482
47 Quebec Street
Bracebridge, ON
P1L 1T8



Phone

Call 705-645-7393 ext. 200 to
make a donation over the phone



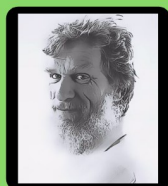
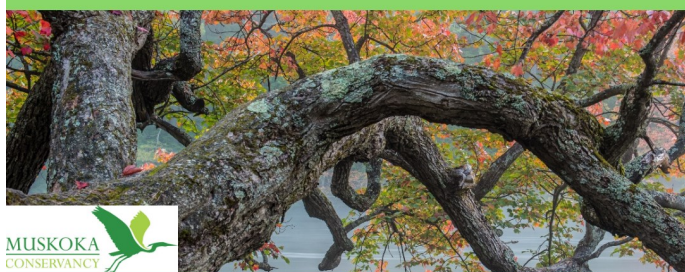
**In person donations are always
welcome!**

Photo Contest

Muskoka Conservancy's annual photo contest has begun! This year's theme is 'Any Aspect of Trees'. In 2020, we want to celebrate the beauty of trees and encourage everyone to submit photos of a significant tree. Whether it is a tree significant to your life, or just a really cool looking maple, we want them all. Submission will be accepted until April 1st. Submit your photo to us via Instagram, using @Muskoka_conservancy and tagging it #mccontest.

MICHAEL FOSTER PHOTO CONTEST 2020

Theme: Any Aspect of Trees



The Michael Foster Photography Award is presented annually to the photographer whose image best represents the beauty of Muskoka. The image that receives the most "likes" on Instagram will be the winner and the photographer will receive a mounted enlargement of their photo and will be celebrated at our Annual Meeting.

Submit your photos via Instagram to:
@muskoka_conservancy
and tag #mccontest



DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSIONS: APRIL 1, 2020

Muskoka Earth Festival

Muskoka Earth Festival is coming this May and Muskoka Conservancy is pleased to be a part of the event! The event will be held on May 30th, 2020 from 10 am until 5 pm at the Bracebridge Fairgrounds. This is the first Muskoka Earth Festival and it will have a bit of everything! Fantastic speakers, engaging workshops, children's activities, and even a green marketplace. Check out muskokaearthfestival.com for more information. Muskoka Conservancy will also be running a booth and a workshop there, so stay tuned for more details.



Little Sprouts Update

The Little Sprouts have an exciting spring coming up. In February, they have two opportunities to get outside and enjoy nature. On Family Day weekend, the Little Sprouts will be hosting a scavenger hunt at the Winter Carnival in Gravenhurst at Gull Lake Park. All are welcome to attend. At the end of the month, the Sprouts have partnered with Wandering - Nature Therapy Walks for a mindful forest hike at Morrison Meadows. This will be a great opportunity for the children to get to know the nature surrounding us and how it improves our mood and outlook when exploring the forest. Later in the spring, we are partnering with Great Beginnings to offer an Earth Family Day at the Gravenhurst EarlyON centre. We will be painting rain barrels, making seed bombs, and enjoying an environmentally focused concert by local musician Bet Smith. The eco-club will also be participating in a community clean up day sponsored by a local business, so stay tuned for details on that as the snow melts.

Christina Hunter



Project Protect Training

After the success of our first year of Project Protect, we're happy to announce we're ramping up to begin surveying again in April. Our first training session had about 13 volunteers engaged and preparing for spring surveying. We have another upcoming training session on February 19th from 1 pm to 3 pm, where any interested individuals can come out and learn a bit more about the program.

Project Protect is our citizen science initiative aimed at gaining us a better understanding of the species diversity present on our properties. Volunteers conduct either bird or amphibian surveys and submit the data. The data allows us to look at population changes on our nature reserves and also feeds into a larger data set that makes up the entire Great Lakes region. If you're interested, email Aaron at arusak@muskokaconservancy.org.



Project Protectors returning from a bird survey at Muskoka Delta Nature Reserve

Books, Birds, and Beer

Books, Birds, and Beer ... and great company—what more could you ask for!

Support the Muskoka Conservancy on May 5th, 2020 at Muskoka Brewery and enjoy a reading by Steve Burrows from his latest book in the award-winning Birder Murder Mystery Series, "A Dance of Cranes". Tickets \$40—includes a book, a tasting flight of beer, and an evening with the extremely engaging and entertaining Steve Burrows. To purchase a ticket call the Muskoka Conservancy office at 705-645-7393 ext 200 or email info@muskokaconservancy.org. Tickets are limited, so call now to be sure to reserve your spot.



Upcoming Nature Quests

This February, Muskoka Conservancy is offering two Nature Quests to interested participants. The first will be held on February 20th at Upjohn Nature Reserve. This will be a snowshoe Nature Quest where we will examine some Wood duck nest boxes and prepare them for next year.

The second will be a mammal tracking Nature Quest held on February 23rd, also at the Upjohn Nature Reserve. We will be looking at the various mammals on the property and identifying their tracks and habits.

If you want to take part in either of these exciting opportunities, call the office at 705-645-7393 or email Aaron at arusak@muskokaconservancy.org.

Aaron Rusak

JOIN US!

Thursday, February 20, 2020

Snowshoe Nature Quest

Upjohn Nature Reserve, Bracebridge

Bring your snowshoes for a trek to check out the Wood Duck boxes!

9 am to 12 pm (Meet at MC office)

Weather and conditions permitting

Suggested \$10 donation per person

To register: 705-645-7393 ext. 200

UPCOMING EVENTS

Feb 19

PROJECT PROTECT TRAINING
Bracebridge United Church, 1 pm to 3 pm

Feb 20

SNOWSHOE NATURE QUEST
Upjohn Nature Reserve, Bracebridge, 9 am to noon

Feb 23

MAMMAL TRACKING NATURE QUEST
Upjohn Nature Reserve, 9 am to 11 am

Mar TBA

PROJECT PROTECT BIRD TRAINING
Location and time TBA

Apr TBA

POND EXPLORERS NATURE QUEST
Location and time TBA

SAVE THE DATE

MOTE 2020, AUGUST 9TH



STAY IN TOUCH FOR MORE DETAILS AND TO REGISTER!

"Look deep into nature, and then you will understand everything better" - Albert Einstein

Our Nature Quest program runs year-round, so be sure to check our website and social media for updates on upcoming events!

Muskoka Conservancy's Shop Items Available All the Time Online
(muskokaconservancy.org/shop) or at the Muskoka Conservancy Office, 47 Quebec Street, Bracebridge or in Toronto from Elizabeth Mason at (416) 924-4868!

Our items include coffee mugs, toques, books on butterflies and reptiles, note cards, and "Made in Canada" tea towels.

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