In April I was fortunate enough to visit Trinidad & Tobago for 10 days on a nature / birding trip. The lodge where we stayed in the northern hills of Trinidad is a delightful place, called the Asa Wright Nature centre. The main building was a former coffee & cacao plantation house, with a large airy verandah at the rear, which overlooked the beautiful rain-forested valley and the hundreds of acres of nature sanctuary grounds belonging to the Centre.

Hanging from the verandah were many humming bird feeders, which were continuously being visited by some of the dozen species of humming birds native to the island. Also there were wooded tables just below the verandah with fresh slices of fruit and bread, covered in chicken wire, which served as an attractive feast for the many exotic and colourful birds which were forever coming and feeding before our eyes. Thus bird-watching at Asa Wright could be quite a decadent activity – you could sit on the verandah all day if you wished, enjoying the cool breezes, and watching the goings on, while indulging in coffee, cold beer or rum punch, - whichever you preferred! In fact however, we were kept

(Nature and Birding continued on page 4)
Coordinator's Corner

If you would like to contact me, you can do it in two recommended ways.

Please call 519 824 4120 ext. 53615

or email me at bparke@uoguelph.ca

Spring has arrived… the trilliums are blooming… but the cold snap on April 23 and April 24 certainly put a bit of a damper on the gorgeous white, showy carpet in the Victoria Woods trail. Hopefully you’ve managed to see a great display on a warmer day than when I visited this trail on Wednesday April 25th.

11th Annual Pancake Breakfast was held on Tuesday April 17, 2012– please see my short article regarding this event on page 3 in this issue.

Waivers for the 2012 season are now due. Many of you filled out and returned these forms during the Pancake Breakfast… thank-you. For all other volunteers… you can download this form from the volunteer page of our website… or pick up a copy in my office. Please note that it is imperative that all volunteers fill out this form on an annual basis.

Happy Spring… hopefully in May we’ll start to see a gorgeous display in all our formal garden areas.

DOCENT DOCKET

Dragon Hunt

Ann Estill

Some people go great distances to see interesting wildlife…black rhinos, kangaroos, cobras, leopards. My choice was to take a nearby opportunity for a Dragon Hunt. With fearless leader Chris Earley I was assured there would be never a dull moment; in fact every moment would be one of those teachable moments the experts are always talking about.

The location was the Arboretum auditorium; the time was the April Guelph Field Naturalists Meeting. Our large crowd was taken into the inner sanctum of the cousins, dragonfly and the damselfly.

We learned that you can best distinguish these wetland-loving creatures from each other by the way they hold their wings: the dragonfly holds them straight out to their sides, the damsels hold theirs folded above their backs. Thus, you can pick up the first by holding its wings together gently and then release them.
National Volunteer Week was celebrated from April 15 to April 21, 2012. All in all, 53 volunteers, guests and staff attended this annual celebration on Tuesday, April 17th. We had to deviate from an annual Saturday event... as the Auditorium was booked for other paid events. A delicious treat of orange juice, pancakes and sausage were served to volunteers and their guests by Arboretum staff. The blueberry pancakes and real maple syrup were the highlight, yum, yum! Thank you volunteers for all you do in making The Arboretum the treasure it is.

The winner of the Volunteer draw was Janet Scott. The gift was a copy of the book 'Woodlot Biodiversity'. authored by Newmaster, S.G., Earley, C., Fazekas, A.J., Lacroix, C.A., McMullin, T., Lacey, B., Maloles, J., Henry, T. and Williams. Congratulations Janet! The draw was made possible due to a previous donation in memory of Bruce Monroe, one of our very faithful volunteers who was very active with the Plant Sale group... it’s a way of remembering and honoring him.

Thanks again to all Auxiliary members. Your dedication in volunteering at The Arboretum is truly appreciated!
quite busy with all the guided excursions that had been arranged for us.

Our expert local guide knew exactly where to take us to see as many interesting birds as possible! We also saw large tiger lizards, agoutis, (big harmless rodents which looked like giant guinea-pigs), beautiful butterflies, flowering trees and all the amazing variety of life that is the tropical rain-forest. We saw birds such as manikins at their lek, (courtship display dances by the males), long-tailed mot-mots, colourful trogons, dazzling honey-creepers and amazing ant-shrikes. Each more fascinating than the last to a nature-lover!

A highlight was a visit to the Caroni Swamp to see the spectacular scarlet ibis, the national bird of Trinidad & Tobago. Flocks of them fill the air as they fly to their evening roosts in certain groups of trees.

Another exciting outing was to a local beach at sunset, where, as soon as night fell, we saw several huge female leatherback turtles crawl slowly out of the sea and onto the beach. Each turtle then dug a hole with its hind flippers & proceeded to lay about 100 eggs. She then filled in the hole again, patted it down, & returned to the sea, never to see any of her young emerge about 2 months later, and make their run for the sea, hopefully avoiding the many predators waiting for them on land and sea. Apparently only about 1 in a 1000, makes it to adulthood!

It was impressive to meet the “Turtle Guards”, local men who volunteer to patrol the beaches all night during the breeding season to protect the mothers and offspring as much as possible.

Another day we were taken on a walk to the hidden “Oil-Bird Cave”. This is the home of the famous oil-birds, which are the only fruit-eating, nocturnal, cave-dwelling birds in the world! These large and interesting birds were almost exterminated in former times due to their oil-rich bodies being used as lamps.

Our program also included a night birding trip, looking for owls and night-hawks; and we did see two species of tropical owls.

All in all, the trip was amazing, and I would recommend it to anyone who has an interest in nature and birds.
without any harm, after you have identified them with your Field Guide at the ready. This, it is noted, is a definite advantage over bird watching where often your find has flitted off before the book is even open.

Like real dragons, the dragonfly is a predator, never eating plants. Like all insects they have 3 body parts: the head, the thorax and the abdomen. Appendages on the abdomen are used by the male to hold the female during their complicated mating ritual. A king size pink and blue puppet illustrated the intricacies of their intimacy. I’d tell you more but am afraid you’d blush. (Chris, however, does not harbour such fears.)

Beautiful names characterize these creatures: American Emerald, Prince Baskettail, Rusty Snaketail, Eastern Amberwing.

Twelve-spotted Skimmers are evocative of their uniqueness. Taking children on a dragon-hunt would mean weapons, so we were introduced to the long-handled nets, which can be used to capture and release without harm to the insect.

I could go on but instead will refer you to the amazing booklet called Dragonflies of The Arboretum available for $8.00 which encompasses all the scientific facts in a thorough and organized style.

On March 20, the Tuesday garden group had an early start to spring clean-up in the Garden in the Park. What a perfect first day of spring with many shrubs and trees in bloom a full month early!

Norma Fear working in the Iris beds
New activities at the Roots and Shoots Peace Garden location on the Arboretum grounds, an area now maintained by the Guelph and Wellington County Master Gardeners.

The Guelph and Wellington County Master Gardeners moved their meeting site to the Arboretum Centre in the fall of 2010. At the same time, our group wanted to become more involved in the life of the Arboretum, and looked for a project to make our own.

The Arboretum staff suggested that we take over the maintenance and redevelopment of the Roots and Shoots Peace Garden, established in 2003, and the area adjacent to this spot. We set up a small committee and started research on what existed there now, what expansion we might do, and how best to accomplish these activities while respecting and meeting the principles and guidelines applied to any garden or other area on the Arboretum grounds. We reviewed the existing maps and planting charts and reviewed the lists of other possible native herbaceous species, and native trees and shrubs, that would grow and be found in any semi shaded lightly wooded area in and around Guelph.

In early spring 2011 we had a look at the existing plant life emerging in the original Roots and Shoots garden area. We weeded and tidied up, and began to remove encroaching plants and invasives, most particularly the dreaded buckthorn! After talks with Ric and Sean we elected to expand an area directly opposite the original garden to provide a future planting area. So in July we held a major mulch party, laid down a bed of cardboard and spread a mountain of mulch over this area. The rest of 2011 we continued to provide regular garden maintenance, planted a few more native perennial species, and again attacked the buckthorn.

This year, 2012, saw the reactivation of our maintenance crew starting in early May. We did a major weeding and tidy up; and plotted out suitable locations in the garden area and across the path in the mulched area and planted more native herbaceous. We have a regular maintenance schedule worked out and you will see us in this area on most Tuesdays or Wednesdays. We want to set up another mulch spread and do path maintenance. And more buckthorn attacks!

We enjoy being active on the grounds and educate ourselves and others on the various species that find this area a natural home. The path through this area is a popular walking spot as it cuts through from the road by the end of the Italian Garden to the road just above the Arboretum Centre. Most of the folks walking through stop and talk to us about what we are doing and what is growing there, and often ask about other features to be found on the Arboretum site. Or even ask us questions relating to their own gardens. So this gives us the opportunity to provide another aspect of Master Gardener services, educating the public and offering free gardening information and advice.

(Roots and Shoots Peace Garden on page 7)
What a winning combination for Guelph and Wellington County Master Gardener members and the Arboretum, for now and well into the future. Thank you for the opportunity to garden and grow in yet another location in the Guelph area.

Queen of the Night
Marg Gillies

The garden book *The Untamed Garden* is a collection of humorous commentaries about plants both familiar and perhaps not so well known. For example, author Sonia Day describes the performance and charms of the night blooming cactus cereus (*Epiphyllum oxypetalum*) as leaving “middle age men feverish with excitement” once a year. As I read Day’s description of a plant that she states “sits utterly charmless and apparently sulking:” for months on end, it brought back my own memories of a magical evening with cereus, commonly referred to as Queen of the Night. This event occurred more than fifty years ago in my father’s greenhouse. As I recalled that event, it would seem my father too was happily smitten.

Taken by surprise my father discovered one morning that his cactus had produced two blossoms in the dark of night the previous evening. After looking closer at their limp remains, instinct informed him that a bigger show was to occur that evening. “You must go out to the greenhouse later tonight. The Queen of the Night will be in bloom and this will be the only night that you can see it. It only blooms for a few hours one night of the year. There will be nothing to see by tomorrow morning” so my father informed me. This nondescript cactus that had spent a few years anchored in the earth in the corner of a greenhouse suddenly had become my father’s pride and joy. Long after the summer sun disappeared, what a glorious show there was for a few short hours! By sunrise, on the following day, all that remained were spent, drooping blossoms attached to a collection of weary looking branches.
For some reason known only to nature, the Queen of the Night would continue to languish in its corner for the next few years.

Who could have imagined anything so exquisite from a scraggly, neglected looking plant that once had been little more than a stick stuck in the earth by my father? I do not know the details regarding the exact origin of that cactus but I suspect an elderly acquaintance and customer, who spent the winter months in Arizona had given it to my father. Beyond his normal greenhouse work, my father delighted in growing experimental plants from seeds, cuttings and grafts. Unlike his other speciality plants that blossomed faithfully each year, this ungainly and unsightly cactus that grew ever taller on a support system had been a test of patience. However the year that cereus produced its first queenly blossoms, it no longer was viewed as an ugly duckling not deserving of its own space.

Although I remember the delicate beauty of its large, creamy white blossoms, the memory of an exotic vanilla-like scent during its few hours of existence has long faded. In its natural habitat among other desert plants mainly in New Mexico, Arizona and Mexico, this cactus can reach a height or length of four to eight feet quite quickly. With its scraggly stick-like creeping branches that are not easily recognizable among other cactus species, very few people are able to view this cactus as it blooms in the dark of night in its natural environment. In the desert, this amazing event can occur on any one night over a period of a week in late June or early July.

Once the cactus has flowered, it can return to its unsightly appearance for another four or five years. When it does bloom, one or two buds initially may appear. But nature often acts in such a way that these buds may wait to open with several others during the same night. In order to produce seed, it is necessary for several cereus blossoms to open at the same time for pollination to occur. Shops in botanical gardens in Arizona do sell seeds but in its own natural environment this Cinderella of cacti has been become a protected plant in some areas of the south west.

Back in the late nineteen fifties, my sister’s simple Kodak box camera with its flash recorded a photo with several large saucer-sized blossoms clustered together along with a dinner plate size blossom that truly was the queen of all queens. The perfectly formed starred-shaped petals that surrounded a cup of petals filled with a thick cluster of long yellow stamens that surrounded a sizeable pistil were show stoppers never to be forgotten. According to the literature I had experienced a rare event in the world of plant life. These days if people are patient and have a week to spare, they may be fortunate to view this magical sight in the darkness of an Arizona botanical garden. I feel fortunate to have witnessed the blooming of the ‘Queen of the Night’ within my father’s greenhouse all those years ago. As Sonia Day suggests in her book men have been known to fall in love with Queen of the Night blossoms. I can’t help but wonder if this isn’t true for women too.