
Barbara Parke

It was a cold winter’s day on Monday March 4… when I joined the docents for a tour for our new director, Shelley Hunt. Chris Earley had suggested this tour for their regular monthly docent meeting… since he was going to be away. Each docent had a topic to discuss. First, a short meeting with the docents… then our tour was ready to go.

We began with introductions… including how long we’ve volunteered… and in what capacity. Then a bit about The Arboretum’s beginnings… Janet provided some history about WHAT an Arboretum is, WHY an Arboretum in Guelph, WHO was instrumental in establishing our Arboretum, WHEN The Arboretum was established, and WHERE it was established. She also highlighted HOW The Arboretum has changed over the years… and the importance of the various collections to visitors wanting to check out plantings for their own gardens.

Next I briefly mentioned that The Arboretum’s website contains all details related to our various donation programs… and highlighted my experience with the Wall-Custance Memorial Forest dedication event, which is held annually in September. It will always be a memory to my family… the tree planted in September 2012 near the memorial plaque was a ‘black walnut’. We will always recall memories of mom at her home cursing the fruit/nuts from a black walnut tree that fringed on her property. Mom was always annoyed at those pesky squirrels as she picked up the mess from them enjoying their treat on her front porch… or getting her lawn guy to collect all those nuts before he cut her lawn… the nuts were like golf balls!

Then outside we headed for our tour. It was a slippery walk over to The Promenade to check out some lichens. Franziska provided details about what a lichen is, how it is formed and talked about the various kinds of lichens. She provided samples for us to check out… and even brought her own magnifying glasses so we could check out the yellow candle flame lichen, the orange hooded sunburst lichen and three green rosette lichens on one of the trees on The

(A Tale of Arboretum History continued on page 3)
Hello Auxiliary members,

I regret to inform you that for personal reasons (not health related) I am resigning as Volunteer Coordinator effective June 8, 2013. I wish to thank you all for making my time here as Volunteer Coordinator (since January 2008) an enjoyable experience. It's been a great experience interacting with all Auxiliary members over the years. Enjoy your many volunteers hours at The Arb... whether it be volunteering in the gardens or on the grounds, on the reception desk, assisting in the seed groups or plant sale group, becoming a knowledgeable docent leading tours of the Arboretum or one of the many other volunteer tasks you happily take on. Hopefully 2013 will see another successful Arboretum Auxiliary Plant Sale. All the best to you during your volunteer time at The Arboretum.

Best regards,
Barbara

What are Docent Ken Marchant and Summer Intern Mike Kent looking at?
See Page 8

Volunteer Information Session #13
Date: Fall 2013, — date to be determined
Time: 3:30 – 4:30 pm.
Location: Board Room Arboretum Centre
Agenda will be forwarded in a separate e-mail to all Auxiliary members
Promenade. She even showed us some magic! You’ll have to attend the next Lichen workshop to learn more about them… and the magic!!!

Back we headed to the parking lot… where Ann, our ‘resident story teller’, told us a cute story about the trees in the forest… how each of the various trees spoke to the man wanting to cut them down for firewood. Oops… I can’t tell you the whole story… Ann will tell you another time… but you will always hear the whispering of the trees as you enter the forest.

As we were wandering over to the Nature Centre we were on the lookout for various animal tracks in the snow. Jena had designed a ‘Bingo’ quiz. As the group located a particular animal track she marked it off her Bingo sheet. OK… so we saw lots of ‘human’ tracks… but also found squirrel… were they red squirrel or a grey squirrel? It was often difficult to find some of the animal tracks… with the packed tracks from visitors who were cross country skiing. We saw a bunch of bird tracks which leave really neat patterns that look like art in the snow! We found the loping pattern of the deer into the trees by the pond and what looked like deer at the start of the trail. There were lots and lots of bunny tracks (and scat) as well! Towards the end of the tour we did manage a ‘Bingo’ as a few of the docents found some skunk tracks.

On the pathway to the Nature Centre we stopped so Ken could talk about an invasive species… his example… the common buckthorn, introduced to North America from Europe about 200 years ago. Despite being an attractive plant, buckthorn has had a major impact on forest ecology and succession in eastern North America. Because it is well adapted to this part of the world and few animals can feed on it (it is poisonous) it has been very successful and has managed to displace other more desirable woodland species making it one of the worst invasive pests in Canada.

We did stop on our way over to the Nature Centre at a ‘threatened’ Hop tree. Dylan, one of our newest docents, presented a very informative discussion about the various ways in which species can become threatened or endangered, and the ways in which they are protected in Ontario. He highlighted examples of species that have become at risk (or endangered) because of invasive species competition like the Deepwater Cisco; infectious pathogens like the Butternut; habitat loss like the Bobolink and Fowler’s Toad; and even direct persecution by people such as the Timber Rattlesnake. Protecting this threatened wildlife over time will be a complex challenge that requires public awareness of the issues first and foremost.

Once we arrived at the Nature Centre… several birds were spotted… but the group headed over to the Gosling Wildlife Gardens…. where Susan provided a short biography about Philip Gosling… and how the Gosling Gardens came about. She also highlighted how the Gosling Foundation provided $250,000 for our new greenhouse… and had it named as the Henry Kock Propagation Centre… in memory of a long time Arboretum staff member. We continued to walk through the five gardens, where Susan pointed out various qualities/features of each garden… for example the little ‘window’ in a couple of the gardens where you can check out the birds/animals in another garden without disturbing them. She also highlighted some of the birds who are attracted to the plantings in these gardens. Many were interested to know we might see a brilliant blue indigo bunting this summer. Susan told us how she had several sightings of the indigo bunting last July and August. Also humming birds frequent these gardens in the summer.

We also stopped to look at the Pawpaw tree in Garden 5… another endangered’ tree. Although somewhat difficult to spot during the winter… you will have to check out this tree later in the spring/summer.

From the Gosling Gardens we headed into Victoria Woods… and followed a packed trail until Joy located some ribbons she had tied on a tree. We turned off the trail towards a tall dead tree… please be careful not to lean on it… we really didn't want it falling on any of the volunteers! Joy's assigned topic was shelf (or bracket) fungi. On this dead tree were several excellent examples of tinder polypore, a very interesting shelf fungus, shaped like a horse's hoof.
The tinder polypore has been used for many medicinal purposes since ancient times. Hippocrates recommended its use to staunch wounds and we now know that the fungus contains iodine and other natural chemicals beneficial to humans. Most amazingly, this fungus along with flint were found in a carefully sewn pouch carried about the waist of Ötzi the five thousand year old mummified "Iceman" whose body was exposed in 1993 from a glacier on the border on Austria and Italy! The tinder polypore *Fomes fomentarius* growing today in Victoria Woods has been used as tinder for at least five thousand years.

As we headed back along the compacted trail from the Nature Centre we ventured over to the frozen pond area in Victoria woods. There Jocelyn discussed aquatic habitats of The Arboretum. One really interesting creature is the fairy shrimp… which lives in vernal pools. They can produce two types of eggs… either ‘summer’ eggs or ‘winter’ eggs. The winter eggs overwinter and will hatch in the spring when the pool fills. The type of egg the female lays depends on the number of male fairy shrimp in the community. Very interesting indeed! What a great tour for our new Arboretum director. It was informative and interesting… we all learned a little more about history, science, nature and magic… along with enjoying some fresh air on this brisk winter’s day!

A special thanks to all the participating docents… both for the knowledge they imparted on all of us… along with reviewing/updating my notes for this article.

Thanks docents!

Photo by Barbara Parke
National Volunteer week was celebrated from April 21 to April 27, 2013. In our ongoing tradition at The Arboretum, staff treated volunteers to a delicious pancake and sausage breakfast on Wednesday April 24th. All in all, 53 volunteers, guests, staff and summer students attended the breakfast. The winner of the Volunteer draw was Matt Park. The book he received was "Last Child in the Woods" by Richard Louv. Thanks again to all Auxiliary members. Your dedication in volunteering at The Arboretum is amazing!
Cruising from Dar-es-Salam toward Mombassa Kenya that evening of January 17, 2013, our minds were filled with anticipation for the following day’s safari game excursion to view the big five. Then suddenly as we prepared for another night’s sleep, the ship’s captain began speaking on the intercom system to all 680 passengers. “I must inform you, that we have been advised to cancel our Mombasa stop - therefore the ship is now sailing toward The Seychelles Islands”. Although earlier that day we had watched the news broadcast about the terrorist attack that had taken place the previous day in Algeria, we blithely did not anticipate that our cruise itinerary would be altered by a crisis related to the other side of Africa.

Two days later we arrived in the port of Victoria situated on the mountainous little island of Mahé. Located in the middle of the Indian Ocean, hundreds of kilometres east of the African continent, Mahé is the main commercial centre for a string of African islands known as The Seychelles. With a population of less than 80,000 people the islands have a thriving economy based on the tuna fishing industry and tourism. Having achieved independence from Britain in 1976 along with a well established infrastructure, the islands have an unemployment rate of 4%. Enjoying magnificent views of its crystal clear turquoise waters that surround the island along with its abundant natural beauty brought to mind the word ‘paradise’.

To replace the Mombasa stop, the tiny Seychelles island of Praslin was added to the itinerary. For this stop we opted to visit Vallée de Mai, a national park and UNESCO world heritage site since 1983. Passing by glassy white beaches (Disappointment continued on page 7)
and quaint French colonial homesteads we made our way along a steep mountainous road, edged by secluded glades of tropical vegetation including creeping vanilla and cinnamon bushes. As blue skies turned to ever deeper shades of grey, the threatening rain became a torrential downpour by the time we were ready to embark on a 2 kilometre walk.

The purpose of the walk was to view one of the two remaining natural habitats for the coco-de-mer palms, which are endemic to the Seychelles. (The other is on the island of Curieuse). Protecting ourselves with over-sized umbrellas from waves of torrential rain that spilled from the heavens, we were determined not to miss an opportunity of a lifetime as we proceeded along the trail in ankle deep streams of rushing water. Craning our necks high, we stopped to view dozens of nuts clustered together in various stages of growth. Before a gigantic nut drops to the ground, it will have taken as much as seven years to mature. The nut may take another 6 months to disintegrate enough to release 2 to 4 seeds that in turn will take up to two years to germinate.

Because of its unusual shape the enormous nut of the coco-de-mer (a.k.a. double coconut, love nut, sea coconut) is considered by some as the most erotic of all plants. (Using one's imagination, this thought is easy to reason when one views it!) According to information provided by the Botanic Gardens International, coco-de-mer (Lodoicea Maldivica) is a palm with the longest leaves and heaviest seeds of any plant in the world. The palm tree itself can reach the height of 30 - 34 meters with leaves that range in lengths of 10 meters and widths up to 4 meters. The male and female flowers are borne on separate trees with the male catkins reaching the longest in the world at one metre. With a possible life span of 300 years, the coco-de-mer trees take 25-30 years to reach maturity. The mature nuts can weigh from 15 to 30 kilograms. As highly prized nuts, the coco-de-mer seed trade is tightly controlled by the government. (We discovered that in one gift shop in Victoria, that a large government-stamped coco-de-mer nut could be purchased for
Due to a poaching history, natural regeneration of the seeds has virtually stopped. The remaining populations of trees remain threatened due to fire and the encroachment of invasive plants.

Although we did see cultivated coco de mer trees on the island of Mahé, the viewing of the exotic coco-de-mer trees in one of the two remaining natural rainforest habitats became an unexpected bonus on our month long sea journey from Cape Town to Singapore. With the monsoon-like rains that we experienced on Praslin, photographing these trees became very difficult but the memory of that walk will always remain.

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Ken Marchant and Mike Kent are looking at a gray tree frog on a redbud.

Photo by Franziska Boerlin

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Disappointment continued from page 7

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Liz Hauser Rhododendrom