



Branching Out

Spring 2012

Branching Out is a quarterly newsletter produced by The Habitat Stewardship Group of Grand Bend, an organization committed to providing information about species-at-risk, their habitat and the role our properties play in species survival.

We live in one of the few “wild” spaces left in southern Ontario. As we enjoy our beautiful surroundings, it is important to remember that we share this space with plants and animals that are struggling to survive. The main reason so many plants and animals are becoming “at risk” is due to habitat loss. Habitat is the space the plants and animals need to eat, reproduce and hide from predators. We are lucky because our neighbourhood provides habitat nonexistent in other parts of Ontario.

Recently, the Ministry of Natural Resources sent landowners in Huron Woods and surrounding communities a letter declaring the Common Five-lined Skink to be a species-at-risk and posted draft legislation on the Environmental Registry for public comment. The Ministry, working under the Endangered Species Act, 2007, is proposing that the natural habitat in our area be protected and, where altered, renaturalized so that the skink may survive. While this proposal encourages landowners to preserve natural habitat, The Ministry of Natural Resources does not forbid human activity, but rather encourages landowners to consult with the Ministry before undertaking projects that have the potential to cause harm to the skink's environment.. Call 519-773-9241 for guidance.

Introducing The Common Five-lined Skink, seldom seen for good reason... he's hiding.



Male in mating season, minus his tail. He will grow a new one, brown, not blue.

The Common Five-lined Skink

- sometimes mistaken for a snake, the skink, Ontario's only lizard, can grow up to 8" long
- black or dark brown with five light stripes along the body
- juveniles have a bright blue tail, adult tails turn a copper colour
- males display bright orange colouring on cheeks during mating season
- females lay 8-9 eggs under large rotting logs
- the Carolinian species was recently declared endangered due to habitat loss, attacks by predators and capture as pets (sought after due to their beautiful colouring), but mainly habitat loss
- have a life span of only 5 years
- eat crickets, grasshoppers, beetles, caterpillars, spiders and earthworms
- are attacked by raccoons, red foxes, feral and domesticated cats and wild turkeys
- are active during the day, seeking warm areas on rocks and logs
- hibernate below frost level in holes created by burrowing animals like chipmunks

What Skinks Need to Survive

- biodiverse indigenous plant groundcover
- deep leaf litter that is left undisturbed by raking or removal with lots of wood debris
- fallen logs, at least 15 cm in diameter, left to decay undisturbed on woodlots and insects attracted to rotting wood and leaf litter
- females lay eggs under these moist logs and may abandon their eggs if disturbed

In order to increase knowledge about the plants and animals in our area, the species-at-risk and the habitat necessary for their survival, The Habitat Stewardship Group will organize the following activities:

- nature walks to help landowners identify species of plants and animals native to this area, and invasive plant species
- guest speaker events to educate landowners about environmental issues affecting species-at-risk
- quarterly newsletters available for pickup by the mailboxes located on Riverview Road in front of the clubhouse in Huron Woods

Coming Events

Saturday, April 21 at 1:30 Tom Hayman, Columnist, presents Bird Migration slideshow. Downstairs lounge in the Huron Woods Clubhouse

Saturday, May 12th at 1:30 Kari Jean (Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority) presents The Old Ausable Channel-the unique aquatic system in our back yard. Downstairs lounge in the Huron Woods Clubhouse

Saturday, May 19th 9:30 a.m. The Poison Ivy Walk Meet at mailboxes in front of The Huron Woods Clubhouse. Learn how to identify plants, prevent and treat rashes and blisters, naturally.

Saturday April 28 at 1:30 Melody Cairns (Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources) The Skink and the Recovery Strategy for Ontario's only lizard. Downstairs lounge in the Huron Woods Clubhouse

Light refreshments to follow each presentation

Want to get involved? Call 238-6586 or 238-8449 to offer your expertise, or just to lend a hand. Go to www.habitatstewardshipgroup.ca for copies of the MNR letter, our newsletters, native plants and trees, and the updates for coming events.