



Hamilton-Halton
Watershed Stewardship Program

A Program of:



STEWARDSHIP by Barbara Kerr

Five years ago, in 2006, my partner, Urmas Soomet, and I moved into our present home. After well over a year of searching for the perfect place, close to town but with the 'feel' of country, we found our hearts' delight in Flamborough between Waterdown and Carlisle: a brand new house on forty acres, six of which were cleared, the rest bush. Formerly a farmer's field, the cleared area showed the furrows from years of plowing, and now had standing water over most of it, the drainage ditches long since abandoned. The house, built on grade and then back-filled around it, was surrounded by bare earth, freshly seeded. Truly an empty canvas.



Not long after we settled in, the Hamilton Spectator published an article describing how a local resident had partnered with Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) in restoring his property to a wetland habitat. The project included a wildlife pond, something that had been high on our 'wish list' in our home search. We contacted DUC, and so the adventure began.

Mike Williams from DUC came to visit us and pointed out some of the unique features of our property that we were unaware of: prairie meadows of native wildflowers on the uplands, and at least one ephemeral swamp in the woods. He devoted much time to explaining the programs and funding available through DUC, and helped us to file the appropriate permit applications, necessary as our property had been designated as a protected wetland. To assist us further Mike made the connection for us with Colleen Lavender of the Hamilton-Halton Watershed Stewardship Program of Conservation Halton and Hamilton Conservation Authority.



Colleen has been our guiding light, ever so patiently advising us of the educational and financial support available to us as landowners, directing us to individuals with specific expertise, providing invaluable

Landowners Sharing their Stories

This story is one in a series of stories told by local landowners who have a passion for protecting the natural features on the land they steward and for protecting the water that flows through that land. Many of these landowners are recipients of the Watershed Stewardship Award. The award is a sign that landowners proudly display on their property acknowledging their commitment to be good stewards of land and water.

The Hamilton-Halton Watershed Stewardship Program is shared by both the Hamilton Conservation Authority and Conservation Halton.

The Stewardship Program has been working with property owners since 1994, providing advice on environmentally friendly ways of managing properties with natural features, such as woodlots, wetlands, meadows, floodplains and creeks.



resource material, and standing in our corner every step of the way. In one of our early meetings with her, Colleen suggested that perhaps we might wish to meet with other 'stewards' for their input.

Until that time, my only association with stewards was through my church. From my childhood, I recalled 'Stewardship Sunday' as a monthly event when sombre-faced gentlemen in suits and ties passed a special collection plate and spoke of things like 'Building Funds'. I must admit that I really didn't know what a steward was, and was a bit intimidated at the prospect of becoming one. But after a meeting or two, my concerns dissolved. These were all like-minded people, dedicated to the conservation and restoration of the natural wetlands so necessary for species habitat. Thanks to all associated with our endeavour, I now have a much better understanding of the concept.

The next step in our project was to actually dig our pond. In September of 2009, we contracted Fleet Brothers Excavating in Dundas. If stewardship is defined as the careful and responsible management of something entrusted to your care, then Fleet is exemplary. The young man who came to actually do the digging was a strong and gentle chap named Kyle who operated the huge excavator with nothing short of grace. We watched from the window one afternoon as he artfully moved huge buckets full of earth. Just as he was about to lower the scoop once again, a bullfrog hopped directly to where the blade would bite into the ground. Instead of carelessly disregarding the frog, Kyle used the edge of the monstrous machine to gently nudge the little fellow out of harm's way.

The excavation of our pond continued through the fall of '09. We were very fortunate in that the pond is spring fed and it filled as fast as they could dig. Through the winter, we observed tracks in the snow of the wildlife visitors – coyote, deer, raccoon, and rabbits primarily. By spring, we had our pond.



Our very first feathered visitor was a handsome male Wood Duck followed by a wide variety of other birds. We were amazed at the number and volume of the spring peepers and frogs, and by the schools of tiny fish and the lovely aquatic plants that 'magically' appeared as the ice melted.



We continued (and continue still) to attend workshops such as the 'Species at Risk' and 'Creatures of the Night' seminars provided by the Hamilton and Halton Conservation Authorities and the Watershed Stewardship program, along with others provided by various other organizations like Burlington Green and Pollination Guelph. Cherish Elwell, Watershed Stewardship Technician, is amazing at keeping us apprised of events as they come up, and at answering my never-ending questions.

In the fall of 2010, we received one such notice from Cherish regarding a 'Wood Duck Nesting Box Workshop'. In that I have a special affinity for this lovely creature (remember, he was our first guest in the pond!), of course I had to attend. I came away with not only my own nesting box, predator guard AND pole to install them both on, but best of all with my very own guru, 'Wood Duck Alfie' Stanevicius, a quirky and passionate conservationist of boundless knowledge, enthusiasm and generosity. Thanks to Alfie, we had a successful hatch this spring, and now have 'the virus', as he calls it: we have since installed a second duck box and two Bluebird boxes!



Cherish also very kindly put us in contact with Jennifer Roberts, Forestry Technician with Conservation Halton, who guided us in selecting some 160 native trees and shrubs that she and her assistants came and planted, helping us to restore habitat for the local wildlife.

As you can likely tell by now, Urmas and I are most enthusiastic and passionate about our wetland project. There are so many other people to thank - too many to mention here. As the pond and the wetland continue to mature, we often just stop and wonder. And we are so grateful.

One final mention, and that is our neighbours, Vern and Jane Battenham, the previous owners of our property. Jane is a vast source of information, both historical and botanical, and a great friend: Vern is a farmer who works another piece of property down the road from us - his old family homestead. One day recently while I was out weeding in the garden, Vern's tractor pulled into our driveway. As I approached, I could see he was cupping something in his rough farmer's hands. He smiled. "Are you the conservation lady?" As I nodded, smiling back, he opened his



hands to present me with the tiniest turtle I had ever seen. He had found it in the middle of the field he was working, and carefully moved it out of the way of the tractor. When he was finished, he picked it up and drove it gently all the way down the road so I could release it near our pond where it would be safe.

Stewardship.



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Interested in learning more about natural features on your property? Call to arrange a free on-site consultation!

Hamilton-Halton Watershed Stewardship Program
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