



Preserving the Habitat in Swan Lake Park

by Fred Peters

Friends of Swan Lake Park (FOSLP) and York University researchers have started planning for the creation of the Swan Lake Citizen Science Lab. Using drone technology, the Citizen Science Lab will enhance monitoring of algae in the lake and provide ongoing information to support the management of invasive species and habitat in the park. Hopefully, the Swan Lake project will serve as a model for other areas throughout Markham and York Region.

The Markham Lions Club has expressed an interest in participating and FOSLP will be inviting other community groups and area residents to participate. Markham staff declined FOSLP's invitation to participate directly but concluded the project could proceed if it did not interfere with the use of the park by others.

The focus of the habitat monitoring is to see if anything can be done to minimize the loss of species in the park, considering the massive redevelopment plans for the Mount Joy area. Markham Council recently approved a redevelopment plan for 14,500 units to house an additional 33,300 people along Markham Road. There are already four new developments involving seven towers ranging from 21-42 storeys high that are awaiting approval by Markham Council.

Protecting the Species at Risk

Swan Lake Park is one of the most biodiverse areas in Markham. Though far from being the largest park in Markham, bird watchers have recorded the fourth highest bird species count for all areas in Markham. A total of 172 different bird species have been sighted in the park, of which the Toronto Region Conservation Authority has identified 96 species to be at risk in their territory.

In addition to the birds, FOSLP has identified 12 mammals, 3 turtles and 34 insect species that inhabit Swan Lake Park. There are 10 different species in Swan Lake Park that the Federal government has identified as at risk, and is offering funding to groups that have plans for preserving them. FOSLP has applied for funding to support two bird species (bank and barn swallows), two turtle species (snapping turtle and midland painted turtle) and one insect species (monarch butterfly) that aligns with the priorities of this year's federal program. The awarding of grants will be announced in April 2025.

In August, FOSLP volunteers undertook an inventory of the flora in the park and identified a total of 290 tree and plant species. The preliminary results flagged eight native trees and nine plants that are known to be beneficial to pollinators. We also identified eighteen invasive plants that pose serious risk to native plants and animals. Continued analysis of the habitat data will be integrated into the Citizen Science Lab project.

We are excited to partner with the researchers at York University and look forward to involving the participation of other members of the community in the development of a sustainable environmental habitat plan for Swan Lake Park. □