



# The Ottawa River Institute

*"Fostering sustainable communities in the Ottawa River watershed"*

[www.ottawariverinstitute.ca](http://www.ottawariverinstitute.ca)

## **Ottawa River Institute Annual Report for 2012**

During much of our 11-year history we have placed a strong emphasis on promoting energy conservation, renewable energy, local foods, and other aspects of sustainable communities. In 2012 we were busy with two collaborative (partnership) projects funded by the Ontario Trillium Foundation that expanded our work in the area of ecological integrity, while continuing our efforts to build sustainable communities. These projects enhanced knowledge of natural habitats and wild species in Renfrew County and encouraged community participation in nature-based recreational activities and conservation.

### **Nature in Your Neighbourhood**

Our Nature in Your Neighbourhood (NYN) project, launched in June 2011, culminated in 2012 with publication and distribution of the *Nature in Your Neighbourhood Guide to the Bonnechere River Watershed*. In addition to our project partner - the Bonnechere River Watershed Project - and the Ontario Trillium Foundation, four local libraries were major contributors to this project hosting talks, launches and video showings. The four participating libraries, all in the Bonnechere River watershed, were the Bonnechere Union Public Library, Eganville; Killaloe Public Library, Renfrew Public Library and Admaston/Bromley Public Library, Douglas.

*NYN Guide* presentations to municipal councils took place in July (Horton Township, Town of Renfrew, and Killaloe, Hagarty & Richards), August (Bonnechere Valley), October (Admaston/Bromley), and November (Algonquins of Golden Lake - Pikwakanagan). The presentation at Pikwakanagan included a showing of one of the four NYN video episodes.

So many enthusiastic participants attended the fall 2011 NYN library speakers' series that we organized a second round of presentations in spring 2012:

- April 26, at the Bonnechere Union Public Library, Eganville, famed Ottawa Valley naturalist Michael Runtz spoke to an overflow crowd, coinciding with the launch of his recent book, *Natural History*;
- April 29, Killaloe Public Library, expert botanist and gardener Grant Dobson, owner of Connaught Nursery and founder of the Ottawa Valley Native Plant Botanical Garden, shared his 25 years' knowledge of native plants, including garden planning and design;
- May 9, Renfrew Public Library, the three "Wild Women" - Ottawa Valley artists Joyce Burkholder, Kathy Haycock and Linda Sorensen – spoke about their art and philosophy of painting in nature, which shines through in their work. We are very grateful to them for allowing us to feature their art in the on-line version of the *NYN Guide*.

### **Nature in Your Neighbourhood Excursions**

ORI staff, members and friends helped organize the following outdoor events in June and July:

- The 'Celebrate Our River' Bonnechere River paddle (Wilber Lake to Eganville) which included a drumming welcome led by ORI Drum Circle coordinator Jean Brereton.
- A "Paint Out" in Renfrew involving 17 painters; held in partnership with the Ontario Plein Air Society, the AY Jackson Trail and the Renfrew Artists' Guild.
- A Frog Watch led by Rachele Clayton in Hoch Park, Killaloe involving students and parents from the Madawaska Home School Association July 21, 24 people learned about the medicinal and culinary herbs growing wild at Hoch Park on an Herb Walk led by Diana MacAuley.

## **Community Drum Circles**

2012 was a great year for the Community Drum Circle project, coordinated by Jean Brereton, as part of the collaborative project with the Pembroke Area Field Naturalists funded by the Ontario Trillium Foundation. Over the course of the year Jean organized and facilitated nearly 50 Community Drum Circles in schools, seniors' homes, community centres, and outdoor venues. The demand for these sessions and response to them by participants confirmed the great value of this program in our community. Residents of varying ages, cultures, and levels of musical ability learned in-the-moment improvisation and the benefits of listening and co-creating. Jean describes how one drum circle transformed residents of a long-care facility (some of whom did not know each other) into a smiling, engaged, and fully participating rhythmic community where new relationships were formed. The project also included 14 sessions for training new drum circle leaders. These events should be part of the community fabric of Renfrew County for many years to come!

## **Renfrew County Biotabase**

In collaboration with the Pembroke Area Field Naturalists, and with support from Bird Studies Canada, ORI has created the Renfrew County Biotabase: an on-line citizen science repository of observations of local flora and fauna. With this ambitious and comprehensive tool, which includes checklists for over 35 different species groups, local naturalists have a permanent, universally-accessible means of monitoring changes in biodiversity through time. As of December 2012, more than 50 biodiversity observers had registered as Biotabase participants and over 9000 forms (many with multiple species records) were on line, including records of birds, butterflies and dragonflies seen on local field trips dating back several decades. These records have attracted the attention of professional scientists interested in acquiring greater knowledge of species distribution in our area. The overall database concept has sparked preliminary discussions about expansion of the Biotabase to a broader (perhaps provincial) scope. The project, supported by the Ontario Trillium Foundation, also included community talks about the importance of biodiversity, Watershed Ways articles, and promotion of field trips.

## **Seedy Sunday**

ORI was very pleased to continue its sponsorship of "Seedy Sunday" in 2012. This well-attended event took place on Sunday March 4 at Fellowes High School Auditorium in Pembroke from 10 am to 3 pm. It featured seed swaps, seed and local food vendors, information booths, music by local artists, a local food lunch, and a series of presentations about gardening and local biota. Robin Cunningham, a long-time member of the Pembroke Area Field Naturalists and coordinator of the Renfrew County Biotabase, made a presentation about some of the many interesting species found in the Ottawa Valley, and ways to make your own property more attractive to them. We extend our congratulations and thanks to the organizers of this awesome event, Claire Lepine and Pat Tamosetis.

## **ORI on the Web**

ORI coordinator Cheryl Keetch continued to keep our website, Facebook page, and You Tube presence up-to-date. In 2012 the main ORI website got a major redesign; it features beautiful photos of natural scenes and contains many more details on events described in this report along with, videos and an archive of our Watershed Ways. We also launched a Facebook Page in 2012, the Renfrew County Nature Notebook for people to share photos, videos, sound clips and information about nature sightings and events. Work also began on the companion website, the Renfrew County Nature Notebook, which we are launching today. The Nature Notebook Facebook Page and website are intended to complement and support the Renfrew County Biotabase. Be sure to check out Cheryl's series of videos featuring local naturalists talking about Renfrew County species!

## **Conclusion**

The Ottawa River Institute has had a very successful eleventh year of operation, thanks to the contributions of many people. We are very grateful to the Trillium Foundation, ORI members and volunteers, our coordinators Cheryl and Jean, and our collaborating organizations -- the Bonnechere River Watershed Project and the Pembroke Area Field Naturalists. We look forward to continued progress in the future toward sustainable communities and ecological integrity in the Ottawa River watershed!

*Ole Hendrickson, President  
for the ORI Board of Directors*