

# Arboretum News

## Fall 2020

### Field of Gold

**Did you know...? That next year will be the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Field of Gold?**

The idea was born in 2011 and began by Nancee Webb who was in charge of our Volunteers and Members. It began as a fund raiser for the Canadian Cancer Society. Bulbs were planted to honour special friends and family who have battled cancer; the Arboretum offered the space. That first year, 1000 bulbs were planted and over 3000 dollars was raised for the Cancer Society.

Since that first year we have purchased 1000 bulbs per year. Each year in October, we call on our volunteers to help us plant. By the Spring of 2021 we will have planted 10,000 bulbs! What started out as a patch, has become a true 'Field of Gold'. Come out and enjoy.



*Volunteers preparing for this year's planting (2020)*

*If you haven't seen the spectacle, the area is located near the Woodroof Crescent entrance*



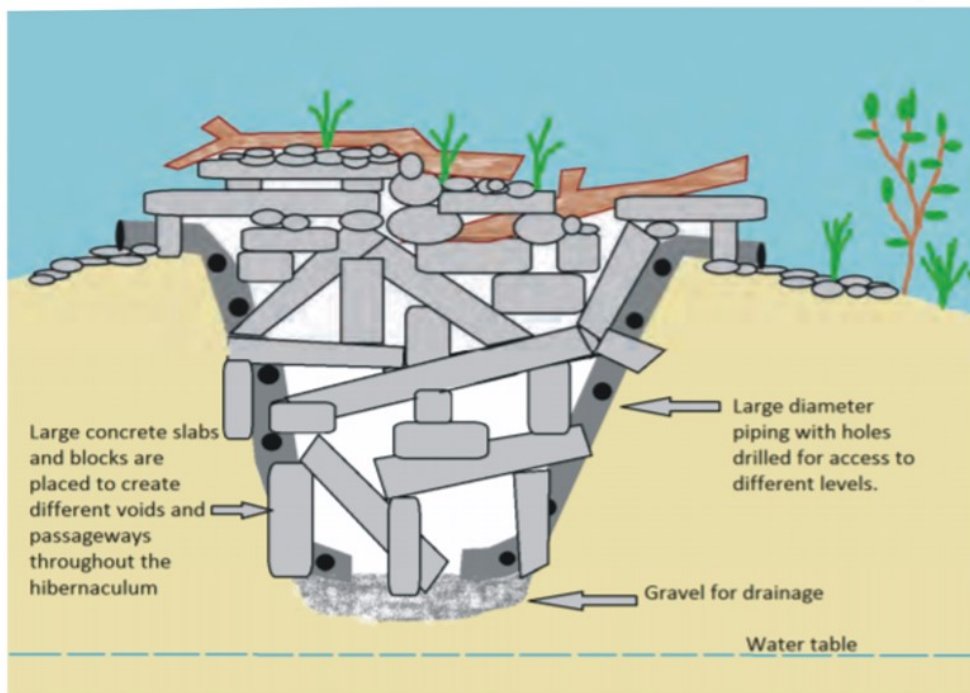
*The daffodils are usually in full bloom in late April or early May*

# We Love Snakes



Snakes help to maintain healthy eco-systems and the balance of nature. They are an important source of food and energy for larger animals and birds, and feed on mice, snails, slugs, worms and insects (great for pest control in the garden!). Habitat loss, degradation and fragmentation by roads have had a detrimental affect on snake populations. They are not only threatened by urban development but also by human misunderstanding.

Sometimes snakes find old foundations, abandoned wells or crevices in bedrock to spend the winter. Lack of places to hibernate has become a factor in their inability to survive winters. The hibernaculum is an underground series of voids below the frost line, that snakes use in the winter to protect them from the cold. In the spring they emerge to bask in the sun, to feed and eventually breed.



*Typical hibernaculum construction*

A snake hibernaculum has long been a part of the Master Plan for the Arboretum. We are now happy to report that we have finished construction on our first, but hopefully not only, hibernaculum, in the northwest quadrant of the Arboretum. The construction was overseen by Staff from Scales Nature Park (Oro-Medonte), the materials were supplied to us by the Town of Aurora, and the excavator and operator were also supplied by the Town.

We hope it will be occupied by next year's juveniles, and forever thereafter, helping us to maintain the balance of nature in the Arboretum. *Probable* occupants will be the Red-Bellied Snake, the Garter Snake and/or the Dekaye's Brown Snake. *Possible* occupants include the Eastern Ribbon Snake and the Milk Snake.



*Aurora Arboretum Hibernaculum under construction*

## Keeping the Paths Clear

If you have travelled on and enjoyed the many trails and paths of the Aurora Arboretum you will have noticed the many volunteers in their orange and yellow vests working in the area. These dedicated volunteers are members of the maintenance teams that maintain most of the smaller paths and trails on the entire 110 acres of this amazing public resource.

This year, in addition to mowing and trimming the trails with the aid of our riding mowers and gas trimmers, the teams have expanded their efforts significantly.



Tree planting, watering, tree trimming, stump removal, brush chipping and mulching have been added to the team's accomplishments. Rewarded with a sense of pride and visitor appreciation, the maintenance teams look forward to a productive expansion in our maintenance efforts.



To continue this expanded work, we are going to need some additional help for these teams and we would welcome your participation. Retired, professional, amateur, student, all are welcome. No experience necessary, you don't need to be a tree or gardening expert. Please contact Marcia Wilson, our volunteer coordinator for further information at

[auroraarboretum.volunteer@gmail.com](mailto:auroraarboretum.volunteer@gmail.com)

## Turtle Protection in the Arboretum

This summer we protected 4 snapping turtle nesting sites in the Arboretum. They were covered by wooden and wire frames, and in some cases by A-frame barricades supplied by the Town. Aurora had an abundance of turtle nests reported this year, and we were lucky to have found these 4 within the park. Every year, female turtles lay their eggs in various places in the Arboretum. This year when the females were caught in the act, we were able to get the nests covered and protected.

Snapping turtle mamas lay their eggs in early summer, and the eggs hatch up to 90 days later. So, in September, the nests were checked daily to watch for activity. There are commonly 40 eggs per clutch, especially for mature female turtles. Visitors to the Arboretum were very curious about the progress of the nests and babies.

Our first nest hatched on September 1<sup>st</sup>. The babies climbed out of the hole - one at a time, the frame was lifted, and they were transported to the nearby stream, in this case 75m away! As you can imagine, there are many hazards awaiting the baby turtles between their nest and the East Holland River. Our goal was to at least give them a start, then they're on their own.



Four hatchlings being transported to the East Holland River for release

Unfortunately, 2 of our nests didn't produce baby turtles. The Turtle Tia group, Aurora's wonderful volunteer turtle guardians, feel that would be due to poor site selection by the mother turtles.

Snapping turtles don't reach maturity until they are 15 yrs old, so that's 15 yrs of avoiding hazards before they can reproduce. Of course they're especially vulnerable when they are hatchlings.

*"It takes 59 years and about 1,500 eggs for one adult female to be replaced in the population so every one of these mamas is critical to their survival." - Wendy Kenyon, "Turtle Tia", The Auro-ran*

Next year we'll be on the lookout again. If you see what looks to be a mature turtle digging a nest and/or laying eggs (late May to mid June), please go to our website and fill out a 'Contact Us' form, or get in touch with 'Turtle Tias' on Facebook.



First time Snapping Turtle Mama laying her clutch at the Aurora Arboretum next to parking lot

A second nest hatched on September 18<sup>th</sup>, this time closer to one of our stormwater ponds.



Two babies, covered in mud after emerging from their nest, making their way to the Stormwater Pond.

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## Freeman Maple Autumn Blaze

*Acer freemanii*

The genus was developed by the US National Arboretum in 1930 by Oliver Freeman. It is a class between '*Acer rubrum*' (red maple) and '*Acer saccharinum*' (silver maple). This tree has won an 'Award of Merit' from the Royal Horticultural Society in Britain for its outstanding quality.

This beautiful tree grows to about fifteen or eighteen meters tall with a branch spread of about twelve meters.

In the Aurora Arboretum there is a Freeman Maple which is an example of the multi stem or clump type. It is a fast-growing deciduous tree with small, green, maple shaped leaves in the summer which turn to brilliant red in the fall, holding this beautiful display for several weeks. It has grey bark which furrows slightly as it matures.

It grows well in full sun or part shade with rich, well drained moist soil. It is not a street tree – it is great for a garden or park.

In the Aurora Arboretum it is located off Woodroof Cresc north trail by the 'field of gold' east of the bridge. It is dedicated and plaqued to Anne and Frank Collins.



## Girl Guide Hike in the Arboretum

On Saturday, October 17, Sara Bowman and Mike Bender led a guided hike in the Arboretum with the 1<sup>st</sup> Aurora Brownies and Guides. There were a total of 6 Girl Guides, one parent and their leader Shauna "Nana Owl". It was a beautiful sunny day and really nice to be outside. All participants wore their mask and practised social distancing, which was easy to do outside in the spacious Arboretum. It was even more glorious thanks to the outstanding fall leaf colours on the trees. The hike lasted 90 minutes leaving from the gazebo, going around the large Storm Water pond, through the Field of Gold (Daffodil Area) and back to the start. The girls had lots of questions and were sharing all the amazing things they knew about wildlife and the environment. Part way through the walk the girls were even quizzing Sara and Mike about the names of certain trees. A great time was had by all!

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## First Virtual AGM

This year's Annual General Meeting had to be held virtually due to the Covid-19 situation. It ran very smoothly with a number of members in attendance. We are pleased to announce our elected Board of Directors:

Irene Clement, Chair  
Mike Bender, Co-Chair  
Karen Bender, Secretary  
Tina Sarta, Treasurer  
John Clement  
Marcia Wison  
Karen Fullbrook  
Brad Watson  
Chris Gynan  
Lee Eickmann  
Gord Barnes  
Carol Dowell

This newsletter is published by the Aurora Community Arboretum Inc.

For more information on Arboretum activities or events, or how to become a member, telephone (905) 727-3492 or email: [auroraarboretum.info@gmail.com](mailto:auroraarboretum.info@gmail.com) or [auroraarboretum.volunteer@gmail.com](mailto:auroraarboretum.volunteer@gmail.com)

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