

***Chairperson's 2018-2019 Report on behalf of
the Board of Cooper Marsh Conservators Inc.***

This last year has seen the Conservators involved in many activities that continue to benefit Cooper Marsh and its wetlands, wildlife and infrastructure. These activities have been conducted in partnership with the owners of Cooper Marsh, the Raisin Region Conservation Authority (RRCA), the River Institute, the Cornwall & Area Birding Club and the South Lancaster Fish & Game Club.

To create additional cattail-resistant areas of open water in the Main Marsh that enhances the survival and breeding of fish, amphibian and reptile populations and the wetland birds that feed upon them, the Conservators have recently raised over \$83,000 in funding from federal and provincial governments, along with contributions from the South Glengarry Township and the Conservators. In the latter case money was raised by the Conservators with contributions from the general public, mainly through our social fundraising events. This funding has permitted extensive additional habitat restoration this winter with the creation of 3 large ponds which are located immediately south of the visitors centre, in front of the blind by the centre and west boardwalk and south-west of this boardwalk. This also enhances the opportunities for visitors to view wetland birds on and beside these areas of open water and enriches educational programs and day camps run by the River Institute and RRCA.

A visit by Bird Studies Canada confirmed that the wetland bird populations at Cooper Marsh have returned following our long-term habitat restoration work with RRCA and Ducks Unlimited that started in 2011. Since then the Conservators have raised \$250,000 in funding construction of these ponds and channels. Our total fundraising for Cooper marsh since 2012 has now reached a total of well over \$600,000. This includes payment for the construction of the boardwalk, four phases of habitat restoration, 3 new blinds, 2 new viewing platforms, the new sign at the main entrance a new Notice Board built this past year by the main gate: we have also added new displays in the visitors centre.

The resultant improvement in vegetation conducive to wetland fish and bird breeding has resulted in Black terns returning after many years to nest in 2018. Sandhill Cranes nested for the third year in a row. These are all clear indications of the success of the habitat restoration program.

In order to enable us to establish accurate records of attendance by adults and children at Cooper Marsh, we have installed a motion-activated monitoring system at the main gate. This permits us to obtain detailed attendance information of importance in obtaining funding for our activities and assessing their impact on attendance. We thank Dundas Power Line for the donation and installation of the pole that supports the camera.

The wildlife displays in the visitors centre are much appreciated by visitors and play an important role in introducing them to the wildlife at Cooper Marsh. They also play a key role in the many educational classes and day camps that use the centre. The displays have been showing clear signs of ageing with bleaching of colours. Our “albino beaver” was one example. A committee is working on the creation of new glass display cabinets and the installation of new windows that will transmit almost no UV light that causes bleaching of our displays. Already new birds and mammals have been donated by the general public and prepared for display by local taxidermist Gary Bray. These include a Snowy Owl from MNR, a Fisher as well as a Ruffed Grouse and an Otter. We thank Lorna McKendry, Enbridge and Ontario Power Generation for recent funding of our new displays.

We will be installing an improved projection screen for talks as well as access to the internet. This will be linked to a new zoom camera system that will enable close-up views of wetland birds outside the visitors centre. A second osprey nesting platform that has just been installed immediately south of the centre and close up views of the young chicks will be available on the screen once the ospreys start nesting.

The Conservators continue to provide much of the funding of the college student that acts as an interpreter at the centre each summer. These funds are raised mainly as a result of fundraising by our Social Committee. This year the *Spring Fling and Silent Auction* will be held on May 26th, 2019. The *Wine & Cheese* will be held on October 6th, both to be held on a Sunday from 2.00-4.00pm.

We would again like to thank the Cornwall and Area Birding Club for acting as interpreters in the Spring and Fall before the summer student interpreter is available, as well as on two days each week when the student is off duty. This enables us to keep the visitors centre open for much of the year for all to enjoy.

Another new initiative this year is the plan to offer the opportunity for people to purchase memorial benches and have them installed at Cooper Main Marsh. With support for their installation by RRCA, work is now in progress to identify a design and supplier.

The Wildflower Group led by Dr. Philip Fry and Chris Critoph has been very busy growing wildflowers from seeds, collected mainly from plants now established at Cooper Marsh. Donations for these seeds have been used to raise funds to support the group’s activities. The many varieties of plants grown from seed have been planted in the meadows adjacent to County Road 2. Last summer, Chelsea Hope, a local bee keeper, kindly installed two bee hives by the wildflower meadows. This is promoting pollination of the wildflowers as well as providing a source of local honey.

Recognizing that Cooper Marsh lacked a documented history or description of its wildlife, the Conservators, in partnership with RRCA, have created a detailed

account entitled *A Legacy of Cooper Marsh*. This will soon be available in the visitors centre and online on our website at rrca.on.ca

At the beginning of the summer of 2018, with the Main Marsh full of water, a severe wind storm badly damaged that part of the eastern section of the boardwalk at right angles to the wind and waves. Work is in progress by RRCA to assess the damage and determine how best to repair the damage.

Active turnover in both professional and volunteer organizations is, I believe, a part of the lifeblood of such organizations. New members are actively joining the Conservators and are interested in contributing to our many activities. But it is sad to note, however, that Jacques Legault, one of our longest serving members since the creation of the Conservators and Cooper Marsh, has decided to step down from the many roles in which he has contributed as member, treasurer and chairperson. We thank you Jacques for your many contributions. We will always remember all that you have done for this organization.

After my term of 3 years, I have also decided to step down from my role as Chair to let others take over the reigns. I will continue to offer my services as a member of the Board and help in any way I can with the day to day activities. And they are indeed all that and more nowadays! But it is so satisfying to see all that the Conservators, working with their partners, have achieved in recent years and the great commitment that I now see to making this wetland one of the finest in Ontario.

I have been honoured to serve with an outstanding Board who are all very active, taking the lead with their own special projects and committees. For me it has been a special experience in my life as it has brought me even closer to nature and wetlands and the environment where so many of my interests now lay. I wish the newly elected chair every success in their work. Thank you for the privilege of allowing me to serve you as your Chairperson.

Finally I would like to acknowledge the support, assistance and partnership given to the Conservators by the staff of RRCA and its Board. I would particularly like to thank Brendan Jacobs, Pete Sabourin and Lissa Deslandes, for their assistance in achieving our goals throughout the past year. Also our thanks to our partners the River Institute and RRCA for their commitment to education at Cooper Marsh and to the support of Ducks Unlimited Canada for their restoration work on the West Marsh this winter: also our thanks to the South Lancaster Fish & Game Club and Cornwall and Area Birding Club, all enabling us to achieve together our joint goals of ongoing conservation, restoration and enrichment of Cooper Marsh for the benefit of its wildlife, future generations and for us all to appreciate and enjoy.

Dr. Robin Poole

Board Chair, on behalf of the Directors, Cooper Marsh Conservators Inc.