

## Biophilia in Bancroft

**By Nate Smelle**

Turning onto Monck Road in Cardiff while taking one of the many scenic routes to Bancroft, I rolled down my windows to take in the fresh air. Rounding the corner as I approached the first pond, I was forced to pull over to the side of the road by a bald eagle that swooped down in front of my car and then disappeared into the clear blue abyss above me. Walking along the water's edge, hoping for the massive bird to return, I soon gave up the chase when I became distracted by a pair of frisky red-winged blackbirds and a snapping turtle absorbing the late afternoon sunshine. No need to rush, I kicked off my shoes and waded into the water.

By the time I finally arrived at my destination later that evening, the darkness had prevailed and my eyelids had grown heavy. Forgetting to pay attention to my insomnia, I fell asleep to the buzzing of a woodcock beneath a sky full of stars.

I awoke the next morning before dawn, well-rested and ready for what I knew would be the best day in the last five months. Stepping out onto the deck, half asleep but eager for the day ahead, I fixed my gaze on the blossoming dogwood trees I had picked up from the Bancroft Area Stewardship Council's annual tree sale four years ago. Now more than seven feet tall, I began counting the bees already busy at work carrying pollen from one flower to the next.

Suddenly the grass between the dogwood and I erupted with a shriek and an explosive flapping of wings, jolting me out of this trance, hurling me into a dazed state of confusion. Lo and behold, it was the woodcock that had spent the night circling my cabin and singing me to sleep. No need for caffeine now. I was up. Before diving into the list of chores on my plate, I grabbed my camera and wandered into the forest to see what I could see.

Surprised by the absence of blackflies, I zigzagged my way through the maze of fallen trees that had come down in the storm the night before I arrived. Making a mental note of the firewood freshly supplied to me by Mother Nature, I continued along the temporarily stunted path, dreaming of next year's maple syrup season.

Taking a rest at the top of the hill I plopped down on what one of my neighbours told me the locals use to call Moonrise Rock. Waiting for the deer and the sun to rise from their slumber, I soaked in the pre-dawn sounds and watched the light grow out of the sky in the east. To the north I could hear a hairy woodpecker knocking on a hollow white birch. Yanking consistently in time with the pounding, a nuthatch added its voice to the symphony from the south. Landing with a quack in the pond to my west, a Mallard duck joined the spontaneous collaboration of sound.

Having spent the majority of my time in the predominantly paved environment of Niagara over the past year, I could feel the obvious difference from my surroundings. Instead of feeling separate from my environment as I do in the city, the of abundance of biodiversity ? the true wealth flourishing in my presence ? welcomed me into the fold.

Walking back to my cabin when once the sun had made itself comfortable overhead, I started thinking about an event I had recently covered at the Fallsview Casino with Dr. David Suzuki. Speaking to the crowd of 700 plus about nature deficit disorder and biophilia ? the innate love of nature which compels the human species to live in the presence of other species ? Suzuki declared that spending time in nature has a beneficial impact on human health and consciousness.

Listing one example after another to prove to the room that biophilia exists, he explained how humanity's inbuilt desire to affiliate with the natural world is evident in the way people living in cities grow food and flower gardens, and in the love for the pets they keep as companions. Even hospitals, he said have recognized how bringing animals into the Intensive Care Unit can help improve the quality of life and overall health of people in great distress.

Stretching out under the apple tree beside the cabin where I had slept, I felt as if I had just eaten my first meal after a long fast. As I imagined, the previous 24 hours had provided me with the best day I had experienced in a long while. Reflecting on the day behind me, it seemed to stand as a testament to what Suzuki had been going on about at the casino. At least from my perspective, there is no disputing the soul-crushing depression that urbanization delivers to the communities it consumes. More importantly, there is also no disputing the extraordinary healing powers of nature.