

Diversity is strength



By Nate Smelle

ANYONE WHO HANGS their hat in North Hastings between the spring equinox and the summer solstice finds themselves in a uniquely rich time and place to appreciate the natural world. Providing people in this position with the opportunity to attain such a privileged perspective are a variety of conditions shaped by the local climate, ecosystem, and all its inhabitants. As one of the key contributing factors in this equation, the climate in North Hastings gives us relatively long winters followed by several waves of warm weather that breathe life into our temporarily frozen world.

Observing this seasonal pattern year after year, one unavoidably develops expectations. For instance, when the icicles begin to melt, we know that the sap beneath the bark of birch and maple trees is beginning to flow. Each year, as the last remnants of winter fade into the coming heat, resident wildlife emerge from their seasonal sanctuary, frogs begin singing, and flocks of birds return to the skies overhead. It is also reasonable to expect that by the time the May 2-4 weekend arrives each and every one of us will have donated blood to at least one hungry mosquito.

In a gesture of gratuity, the quickest and most agile mosquitoes pollinate flowering plants and trees, renewing the cycle of life. Unable to maneuver as swiftly as their less indulgent relatives, the plumpest of these nectar drinking, bloodsucking creatures wind up as nutrients in the bellies of frogs, turtles, bats, salamanders, birds, fish, and several other insect-eating species.

While humans may not consciously dine on mosquitoes very often, we do consume many of the plants and animals dependent in one way or another on their existence. In turn, we too become a beneficiary of the web of biodiversity we are a part of.

In knowing that a more biologically diverse ecosystem is healthier and more stable than an ecosystem without a wide variety of resident species, we come to understand that this diversity is the root of our strength as humans. Likewise, we also know that species with high genetic diversity and many populations which have adapted to a vast array of conditions are more equipped and likely to endure crises threatening their survival such as disease and climate change.

For those who still fail to appreciate the fact that diversity is our strength, take a walk off the beaten path in the next few weeks and quietly immerse yourself in the natural beauty of North Hastings at springtime. Spending time in nature as the leaves unfurl and life awakens from its winter snooze is always an eye opener to our place within the big picture of biodiversity. If experiencing this seasonal burst of life still isn't convincing enough that diversity makes us stronger and more resilient, go online and look into the fearful and shallow eyes of the 18-year-old domestic terrorist in Buffalo who recently murdered 10 innocent people as the picked up groceries because of the colour of their skin. There one may catch a glimpse of the true weakness and ignorance of elitism, racial

hatred and white supremacy.

This is the ugliness that inevitably arises when we elevate the value of one race, religion, or gender above another. In honour of our essential need as a species to value of diversity, American biologist, naturalist, and writer Edward O. Wilson shines a light on the irrationality of elitism.

"The more we know of other forms of life, the more we enjoy and respect ourselves ... Humanity is exalted not because we are so far above other living creatures but because knowing them well elevates the very concept of life."

Although it can seem small at times, we live in a big world, full of wonders that are beyond our comprehension as human beings. We will never know what it is like to see the world from a turtle's perspective. We will never flap our arms and be able to fly thousands of kilometres to where the climate fits our feathers. Despite these shortcomings as a species, humans have much to learn from our non-human neighbours and the role they play as stewards of our shared ecosystem. When we deny the scientific fact that our ecological health and personal health are fundamentally dependent upon biodiversity, we do so at our own peril. Similarly, when we refuse to acknowledge that we humans thrive on a multi-cultural planet, we insult our own intelligence and limit our potential for survival as a species.