

Volunteers blitz the Moraine

By Jake Courtepatte

Dozens of volunteers had the opportunity to explore the expansive Oak Ridges Moraine on Saturday, and meet some of their animal neighbours while they were at it.

The event marked the Nobleton rendition of the Canada-wide 'BioBlitz' project, aimed at gaining a better understanding of the rural land surrounding York Region.

'There is so much that needs to be said in acknowledging this land,' said Executive Director Susan Walmer of the Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust. 'For 11,000 years, the ancestors of the Huron Wendat, the Five Nations Iroquois, the Six Nations of the Grand River, the Ojibwa, the Chippewa, the Algonquin, the Metis, and the Mississaugans all established communities along this Humber path.'

BioBlitzes have been taking small communities across the country by storm in the year of Canada's 150th anniversary, with the main goal of locating, identifying, and documenting as many species as possible in a 24-hour period.

At the Nobleton area Bioblitz, groups of five or six spent hours exploring the rivers, forests, and wetlands of the 500-acre plus property owned by Hal Jackman, former businessman and Lieutenant Governor of Ontario.

'There is intense biodiversity in the Humber River Valley,' said Walmer. 'On this property, we have a mixture of mature forests, wetlands, swamps, meadows, you name it. There are numerous salamanders, frogs, birds - people that were out earlier saw deer, turkeys - we're really just trying to identify as many as we can.'

The land is protected by a federal ecological gift program, and donated by Jackman to the Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust to be put under the conservation authority.

'It's truly an honour to be involved in something like this,' said Jackman.

King-Vaughan MP Deb Schulte, a long-time champion of ecological conservation in the York Region area, stressed the importance of 'really getting to know the area and the species around you.'