



Book review

BARBARA MCKEAN, Head of Education

Birds of Hamilton and Surrounding Areas
By **Robert Curry**,
Hamilton Naturalists' Club,
2006. 650 pp.

IN RECENT MONTHS, Royal Botanical Gardens' members have heard us blow our horn about being a biodiversity hotspot, with an astounding number of species of plants (over 1,100) totaling close to 1/5 of Canada's wild flora. Well, it's time for us to take a deep breath and blow again, only this time, about the significance of our lands from an avian point of view. Our unique geography is part of what makes Hamilton and area such a birding mecca; as the newly released book *Birds of Hamilton* notes, Cootes Paradise is, "...undoubtedly the best overall birding location in the [Hamilton Study Area]."

The Hamilton Study Area (a 40 km-radius circle centred on Dundurn Castle) forms the boundary covered by this landmark volume recently published by Bob Curry and members of the Hamilton Naturalists' Club. No stranger to The Gardens, Bob is a member of our Science, Horticulture and Education Advisory Committee and carried out much of the book's early research in our library. As noted in the Foreword by Fred Bodsworth, *Birds of Hamilton*, in a sense, completes a circle started in 1866 when Hamilton businessman and politician Thomas McIlwraith

compiled the first bird list in Ontario. He later went on to write the first book about Ontario birds. Since then, Hamilton has continued to be a hotbed of things ornithological, with many of the Province's top birders cutting their teeth here.

Beautifully bound, with cover art by Robert Bateman, striking pen illustrations, and breathtaking photos (along with a slew of crack birders, Hamilton can lay claim to a cadre of exceptionally talented bird photographers), the book includes well-written chapters contributed by other local birders and HNC members. The meat of the book is Curry's contribution — meticulous species accounts compiled for all 386 species that have been seen in the Hamilton Study Area (the total was 385 species until an additional bird — the Manx Shearwater — was added on August 30 of this year). Incredibly detailed, these one-page descriptions include information on rarity, breeding status, and population trends, and provide a rich source of information that has not been readily available in past. Less-experienced birders will appreciate the 'birding year' calendar that lists highlights to expect on a month-by-month basis.

Birds of Hamilton should find its way onto the bookshelf of any area bird lover as "the" encyclopedia of birdwatching in Hamilton. All proceeds from the book support the conservation work of the Hamilton Naturalists' Club; purchase a gift book at the Gardens' gift shop and support the environmental work of two great local organizations. Signed copies are available. ❁

Emerald ash borer one step closer to The Gardens

Despite a large quarantine area in the Windsor-Essex region, emerald ash borer was found on a private lot in London on October 24. Worse, Canadian Food Inspection Agency officials believe that these invasive insects may have been in the Forest City for at least two years.

This metallic green beetle was introduced into the US from Asia in wooden packing material. First found in 2002, it has destroyed over 20 million ash trees in Michigan, Ohio and Indiana, all of which have large quarantine areas.

Containing its spread is proving to be all but impossible, however, you can help to slow it by using only local firewood, and not moving firewood anywhere. Monitoring ash trees is also helpful. Ash borer larvae feed under the bark, destroying the tree's water and food transport system. After pupation, the half-inch long adults leave a distinctive D-shaped hole in the bark when they emerge in spring.

All ash species are affected, and so planting of ash may not be in anyone's best interest according to Harry Jongerden, Interim Director of Horticulture, who feels that, "It is not so much a question of whether these insects will arrive in our area, as when, and so homeowners may want to consider underplanting mature ash with other tree species, in preparation."

Field Botanist Natalie Iwanycki has great concern about this insect's potential impact when it arrives in our area. According to her, "Ash trees account for approximately one out of every ten tree species here, however, ash is one of the most successful — and often the only — native tree species regenerating in our natural areas, so this poses a huge ecological threat."

Ash trees produce seed that serve as an important food source for local wildlife including grosbeaks, wood ducks, deer and numerous small mammals. Royal Botanical Gardens' staff will be following new ash borer containment plans with great interest.