

## Nature Day on the Wood Property

On June 8th the grade 6 class of Saltcoats School participated in a nature day organized by the Yellowhead Flyway Birding Trail Association. The day took place on the property of Ken and Nancy Wood. We did many things and learned many things from the moment we got there to the moment we left. We learned about many different animals like moose and gophers. We also learned about some plants like the Hoary Puccoon flower. Mr. Wood was very enthusiastic to teach us about beavers, which are very interesting. It was a hot and humid day with lots of mosquitoes and wood ticks, but most of us persevered.

None of the grade sixes were prepared for the onslaught of information we would receive once off the bus. A large part of this information was about mammals, birds, and a dab of amphibians. The first thing we would learn about was the Purple Martin. Related to a swallow, these birds nest in big communities. To feed they will fly around with their wide beaks open to catch flying bugs like mosquitoes and dragonflies. Martins are also closely related to swallows. Another small bird was the cliff swallow. They will build nests on numerous buildings and cliffs. With mud they build a small bubble on the side of a steep incline. Another swallow is the bank swallow. The bank swallows will dig holes in sandy outcrops. Then they nest in these holes. This would offer so much protection. A chickadee is very easy to identify, they will make a "chika dee dee" sound, but sometimes they will say "cheeseburger". Many bird watchers bait birds with bird feeders. These feeders can include a handful of foods. They may have oranges, sunflower seeds, nuts, canola fat, and more. The food is on a platform of wood attached to the ground by a pole. The food and birds are in danger of squirrels, raccoons, and cats. To fix this, this tin is fixed to the pole slanted downwards. This makes it impossible to climb up and protects the feed. During our tractor ride we ventured into the long grass to find a duck nest. The mother duck exploded as we neared the nest. The nest was hidden in long grass and we would never have known about it if Mr. Wood had not shown us. In total there were eleven small spotted eggs. There was no protection for the eggs other than its placement in the long grass. As we moved on the tractor ride we saw moose droppings and trees without bark. Moose will scrape the bark to shed their antlers. On the final stretch, we moved to a creek bank. There we spotted and held a boreal tree frog. It was small and brownish green. The last animal we would see would haunt the class till we got home. It is a small brown insect called the wood tick. They followed us around the whole time. The class average had to be at least 5. For the 11 people in the class that would make 55 wood ticks.

Plants were a big part of the trip too. We saw many things like the pussy toes. They are very soft and fuzzy. They were gray and small. My favorite plant was the hoary puccoon. It was a small yellow flower. If you picked the flower and sucked on it you would be greeted by a faint sweet taste. On the hay ride we stopped by some Saskatoon trees. We learned that the tips would be eaten off by the deer family. White poplar is a very common tree in Saskatchewan. The white substance on the bark can be used as sunscreen and keeps the tree cool. But a danger to trees was dog poop fungus. It covers the branches and looks like dog poop. We passed a tree graveyard. It was flooded from beavers and all the trees drowned. But this gave them a new life. They are now a home to bugs and birds, giving food and nesting capabilities. The purple vetch is a small purple flower. Stinging nettles will sting and hurt a whole lot. They can be eaten by picking the leaves. Apparently they are actually very good. The hawthorn plant has thorns as big as a toothpick!

Beavers were a big part of the tour and Mr. Wood's favorite. The beavers are the king of the ecosystem and builders. They move so many trees, sticks, and dirt it is actually crazy. Beavers will chop down trees in about an hour and a half and transport them through their trenches. These are trenches they dig and fill with water to cart logs and branches back to their main water source. With them they will either use them to build the dam or lodge along with mud or store branches with leaves at the bottom to eat in the winter. The lodges have an entrance at the bottom so they swim down and swim back up to enter it. Beavers for the most part decimate nearby poplar populations but they leave maple alone because they do not like the maple's bark.

The day was very fun and we all took something away from it. If you are interested in nature there are "plenty" of books and apps to identify plants and animals, like the Merlin Bird app. Thank you to Mr. Wagner for setting up the day with Mr. Gillis. Thanks to the YFBTA for planning the day. Thank you to Mr. and Mrs. Wood for opening up their property. Thanks to Mr. and Mrs. Maier for sharing their knowledge. Thank you also to Mrs. Knudsen and Mrs. Wagner for being chaperones. Thanks to Mr. Phillips for being there for safety. We learned many things fitting in the categories of animals, plants, and beavers. Thanks for the day and knowledge.

By: Zaiden Evans