Friends of the Harte Trail Newsletter– February 2019

Editor – Barb Hutton Email – barbhutton@shaw.ca

Welcome to our three new members of the Executive :

Susan Bend – 204-223-2582
Patrice Wilken – 204-891-7086
Darlene Boettcher – 204-885-2927

Tree Planting on the Trail:

Over the past few years we've heard from residents, living near the Harte Trail, who would like to see more trees along the west section of the trail, from the Van Roon Garden at the south end of Cullen Drive to the Perimeter Highway. In 2018 we were awarded a grant from the City of Winnipeg to purchase trees, and held spring and fall planting events to begin the project.

All of the species of trees and shrubs selected are native to Winnipeg, planted relatively close together, and placed to grow into a natural-looking forest. The goal is to create an effect similar to the forest already found along most of the Harte Trail.

The planting event on June 6th brought beautiful weather for the first phase of planting. The first 70 trees were donated by the City of Winnipeg and Jeffries Nurseries. Volunteers and City staff planted ten species alongside the trail to the west of the Van Roon Garden: Woods Rose, Highbush Cranberry, Saskatoon, Manitoba Maple, Green Ash, Snowberry, Buffaloberry, Chokecherry and American Elm.

The snow and rain on October 13th did not stop 10 hardy volunteers from planting 70 more trees. Trembling Aspen, Manitoba Maple, American Linden, Bur Oak, Canada Plum and Hackberry were planted in a line further west along the trail towards Dale Blvd. We installed wire cages on the young trees to protect them from deer and rabbits. The cages will stay on until the trees are established in 2-3 years.

Keep watch for when we advertise upcoming planting events in 2019. All are welcome to come out to help green up our Harte Trail!

Cameron Ruml
Education Coordinator
Parks & Open Spaces, Naturalist Services, Public Works
City of Winnipeg

Bird House clean out:

Photo courtesy of Susan Bend

Each year in the fall the bird houses on the trail are visited and cleaned out in anticipation of the next year.

The bird houses that are west of the Van Roon gardens need to be moved further east. The housing development offers too much activity and the birds do not come to the houses.

Natural History:

Animals in winter –How do they survive?

As we well know our winters can be a time of shortened daylight hours, cold temperatures, snow covered ground and the occasional blizzard. We manage to get through the winter with heated cars, houses, layers of clothes and reduced exposure to the elements.

The animals in our area must survive the same conditions as we do but the question is how do they manage to do it?

The conditions that signal animals to prepare for winter are still under study but daylight length, weather and food supply seem to be factors.

There are a few ways that the animals have developed to survive the winter. They can migrate, adapt or hibernate.

Most of our song birds and water fowl, choose the migration option and fly south to where conditions are more favourable in terms of temperature, food, habitat and possibly breeding. Not all of our birds migrate and those that stay have developed some special ways to help cope. All the birds that remain here use their feathers as insulation. We have borrowed this idea in some of our winter garments. Feathers are amazingly good insulators and when the birds puff up their feathers they trap air in them. This trapped air is warmed by the bird's body and acts like a central heating system. Birds will often only stand on one foot at a time, keeping one leg tucked up into the feathers. You may see sparrows and other birds grouped together. This version of a group hug helps to retain heat. This type of activity is often used at night. Birds will also flock up in trees, particularly coniferous trees, to seek protection from the wind and the weather in general. On particularly unpleasant days birds will not leave their places of refuge at all. They will wait for better conditions before venturing out. At night the birds can slow down their body functions as an energy saving technique. Some birds have developed a special type of shivering to generate warmth. As for food supply, birds have a number of different ways of dealing with the situation. Some of the birds do over eat in the time period just before the weather takes a turn. Most of the extra food intake is turned into fat and stored on their bodies for future use. Because birds still have to be able to fly they cannot accumulate too much in the way of extra weight. Some of the over wintering birds hide seeds and other energy sources in the bark of trees or other nooks and crannies. The idea being that they will find it later when they need it. The Chickadee is an example of a bird that hides food items away for future use. The Chickadee has been shown to have the memory part of its brain increase in size in the fall of the year and then return to normal size in the spring. This increased brain capacity is thought to help the Chickadee remember where it has hidden its food supplies. The Common Redpole has a special storage place in its throat region. This permits the bird to quickly gather seeds, store them and return to a safe place. Once out of harm's way it retrieves the seeds from the special storage area and proceeds to digest them.

A number of animals use body and behavioural changes as a way of coping with the winter. The whitetail deer we see in our neighbourhood are good examples of these adaptations. The deer makes changes to their coat. The outer guard hair, which is hollow, thickens making it a good insulator. An inner coat is grown to add extra layer of insulation. The colour of the coat darkens considerably compared to the summer coat. This colour change allows them to blend better with their surroundings and makes it harder for predators to see them. The dark colour also absorbs the energy from the sun better than the lighter coat. The coat acts as a solar heater on the warmer sunny days. The deer reduce their activity

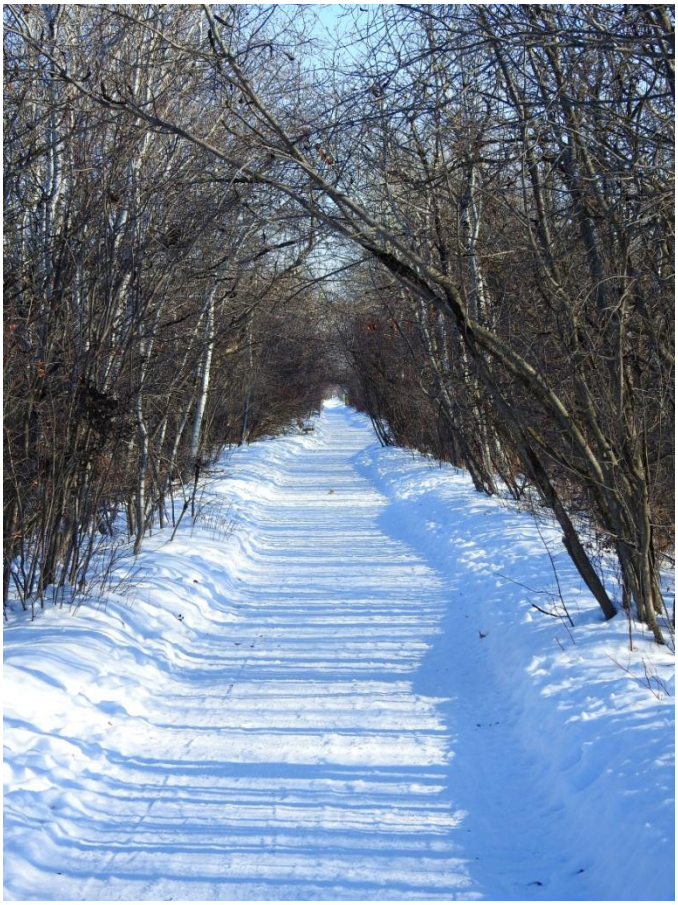
level during the cold periods as an energy conservation method. At night, in particular they will form groups, where a number of deer will come together to share mutual warmth. This gathering together is called yarding. The deer also change the type of food that they eat during the winter. Because they are browsers and not grazers a general covering of snow does not affect their food supply. Instead of leaves and shoots they will eat plant buds, twigs and the bark of trees. To help with the energy use requirements the deer can lower their body metabolism and therefore require less food intake.

Some of our trail animals use hibernation as a way of surviving the inclement months. Hibernation is not just sleeping. It is a very complex concept and is still under study. Hibernation can range from short periods of inactivity ranging in length from hours to months. True hibernation, as exhibited by our thirteen lined ground squirrel, is a lengthy period of time where all body functions slow to a bare minimum and the animal is in a very deep sleep and are extremely hard to rouse. The body temperature can drop to just a degree or two above freezing. This type of hibernating animal is using stored body fat as its energy source. Like many animals that exhibit some type of hibernation the ground squirrel will over eat in the fall of the year and build up a supply of a special type of fat, called brown fat, which has a very high energy content. The Eastern Chipmunk that is seen along the trail demonstrates a different form of hibernation. It will eat heartily in the fall but also store food away in underground borrows. It will sleep for periods of time and then rouse to have a snack and then return to sleep. Another of our familiar animals demonstrates yet another type of hibernation. The Red Squirrel can be seen running around on pleasant winter days but disappears on not so fine days. When the weather is not to its liking the squirrel will become inactive in a type of hibernation called topor. Topor is a time of reduced body functions and energy conservation but not to the same degree as the ground squirrel or chipmunk. During the fall it hides food supplies all over a designated area. When the weather is fine it will come out of its hiding place and go in search of its hidden treasures. The squirrel seems to have an excellent memory for where it hid food.

The Cottontail rabbit does not migrate, hibernate or store food for future use. Its main winter adjustment is to change its food supply. In the summer it eats a wide variety of green plants, including items from our vegetable and flower gardens. In the fall it changes from green plants to tree and shrub bark, buds, twigs and conifer needles. Once again some of these items maybe from our trees and shrubs. The rabbits have one interesting feature that helps it get the most out of what it eats. There is a special modification of the digestive system. The food taken in passes through the digestive system and the leftovers are eliminated as droppings. That sounds pretty normal, but the rabbit can produce special droppings, courtesy of a special part of the digestive system, that are different from the ones we see. These particular droppings are a different shape and colour. As soon as the rabbit expels these distinctive droppings it ingests them. There is still energy in these droppings which is extracted the second time through the digestive system. In this way the energy demands are met without having to find more food. To us the idea sounds revolting but to the rabbit it is a matter of survival.

This item has just used the animals that we see along the trail to demonstrate a few of the ways animals survive the winter. There are a wide variety of other ways animals in our province make changes in their life style to accommodate the winter months.

Along the Trail:



You can support the Friends of the Harte Trail in their important work by becoming a member. Just fill out the membership form included in this newsletter and send it, along with the membership fee ($10/individual; $15/family) to

Friends of the Harte Trail
c/o Naturalist Services Office
5006 Roblin Blvd
Winnipeg MB R3R 0G7

Cheques should be made payable to Friends of the Harte Trail.

Separate donation cheques must be made payable to Trails Manitoba with the notation “For use of the Harte Trail” in the memo section. Tax receipts will be issued for donations exceeding $20.

To place advertisements in this newsletter please call:
Lois at 204-837-3155

or

Barb at 204-896-3565

Cost is $25.00

For a graphic advertisement jpeg format is preferred.

Trail – Membership Form ($10 per person, $15 per family)

Please Print:

Name:_____

Address:_____ Postal Code:_____

Phone:_____ Fax:_____ Email (important)_____

Names of voting family members :(18 years and older)

_____

Payment:

Make cheques payable to: Friends of the Harte Trail

Payment enclosed – Membership $_____

Donations:

Separate Donation cheques must be made payable to Trails Manitoba with a notation

'For use of the Harte Trail' in the memo section of the cheque.

Mail to:

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R3R 0G7

Willing to help with:

phoning ___ trail maintenance:___ fund raising:___ newsletter:___ events:___ public relations:___