Many thanks to all of our volunteers who participated in our program in 2011! We've weeded, planted, collected and cleaned seeds, provided a native plant sale, maintained the Boulevard Beds, Sculpture Garden and All-Star sites, removed garlic mustard, hedge parsley, Himalayan Balsam and Buckthorn, and learned and taught each other about the flora and fauna found in the park. We also thank the city staff in Urban Forestry and Horticulture who do this work full-time and guide us as we improve our stewardship capabilities. We know that we will have another successful year in 2012 protecting and supporting nature in High Park (and beyond) and hope you will join us again. Below is a snapshot of the activities that we had over the year. We wish you happy holidays!

**Winter Educational Sessions**

Four educational sessions were held successfully in January to March at the Howard Park Tennis Club. We explored how High Park has influenced local artists to incorporate nature in their art, and how nature is represented in First Nations’ culture through storytelling and its importance for spiritual healing.

**Greenhouse Activities**

Core volunteers helped prepare for the summer planting season by cleaning seeds and transplanting seedlings into larger pots during two sessions in February and March. This important work ensures that plants grow optimally in the warmth of the greenhouse before they are exposed to the outdoor elements. In October, seeds were collected in the nursery to continue the cycle of seeding for the coming year.

**Annual Spring Clean-up and Native Plant Sale**

In April, a large group of volunteers enthusiastically cleaned up the Boulevard Beds, but the work was cut short by the bad weather. Luckily the native plant sale a few weeks later was again attended by many volunteers and others who bought native plants to increase their garden’s biodiversity.

**Summer Outdoor Sessions**

In May, the first of a series of invasive species removal sessions kicked off with the weeding of garlic mustard. Other invasive species removed in subsequent sessions were tall sweet white clover, Himalayan Balsam, Hedge Parsley and Buckthorn. Maintenance (aka weeding) is as important as planting and equally rewarding; by removing invasive species that compete for space and nutrients, we can encourage the growth of native plants. You can almost feel the native plants applauding as they are freed from the stranglehold of invasives that try to overgrow them. At each session, it was really amazing how a group of dedicated volunteers could make such a difference in a few hours! Entire hills were uncovered of the “baddies” so that new space was created for the native plants. At the end of the season, three consecutive buckthorn removal sessions were especially fruitful.

The All-Star restoration site and Sculpture Garden site were replanted with native species during some hard-working sessions spread across the year. It was great to see that the combined effort of the burns, the weeding and the planting is paying off and that the sites are shaping up to be great natural sites where wildflowers thrive.

The Boulevard Beds near the Grenadier restaurant continued to be beautified in several sessions through planting and weeding under guidance of Henny Markus. Previously planted native species are growing well and are a great example of how gardens can be made attractive for both wildlife and humans.

---

*High Park Stewards or the Volunteer Stewardship Program (VSP) is a volunteer group that works with the City of Toronto to protect and restore the natural features of High Park by planting, collecting seeds, and removing evasive species from restoration sites. This newsletter reports highlights from the VSP’s activities in 2011.*
In July, a small group of core volunteers went to visit the Todmorden Mills Wildflower Preserve to see how conservationists there have restored essential wildflower habitat. It served as a great example of how volunteers all over the GTA have a positive impact on the biodiversity of its parks and green areas.

**Media Coverage**
SNAP Bloor West, a monthly local newspaper, has been placing short articles about our conservation activities, with pictures of VSP volunteers at work, in their publications all through the year, which is a great way to show to the public all the great work we’re doing! Our events are often listed with Inside Toronto and other print and web publications. See highparknature.org for a link to these articles.

**Potluck Lunch**
We celebrated the end of the High Park Stewards year with a potluck lunch on November 27 after the last of the Buckthorn removal sessions. Despite the rain, many of the core volunteers showed up and demonstrated their cooking skills through pastries, salads and other delicacies. As VSP chair, Sharon Lovett presented all volunteers with a token of appreciation.

**HPN & VSP Receive Award**
High Park Nature and the Volunteer Stewards Program received a Paul McGaw Memorial Conservation Award at the North American Native Plant Society annual general meeting on October 22. The award was given “in recognition of your organizations’ amazing work protecting and improving the urban forest at the community level.” See highparknature.org for the award notice, media release and news article. Thanks to all the volunteers and City staff who made this possible!

**Upcoming VSP Activities in 2012**
We are planning again a busy year full of educational and conservation activities at High Park, so stay tuned for the 2012 schedule of Sunday sessions that will be posted soon on the website. The year will start with the first winter educational session on January 8 at the Howard Park Tennis Club, 430 Parkside Drive. Program details are currently being finalized and will be sent out nearer the time. Looking further ahead, the annual native plant sale is scheduled for May 6, 2012. Fleur Careil has joined Sharon Lovett as VSP co-chair, but there are still more spaces available for taking a leadership role at the VSP, so contact us if you are interested!

**Help promote the Volunteer Stewardship Program**
At the VSP (aka High Park Stewards), we are always looking for more volunteers to participate in our sessions to enhance High Park’s biodiversity, so feel free to forward this newsletter to anyone you think may be interested to join us next year. We are also trying to increase traffic to our website, so we have added a “tell your friend about this website” link. Anyone involved with another website can also help by adding a link to our site.