What’s Going On Under There?

The web of life in Grenadier Pond begins with the phytoplankton: lacy diatoms, bright green jewel-shaped desmids and many other types of algae. Millions of these tiny single-celled plant-like organisms offer a buffet of food options for the next level of microscopic creatures, the zooplankton. These spineless invertebrates — daphnia and bosmina are two — propel themselves through the water in search of food. They themselves become tasty targets for planktivores such as Pumpkinseed sunfish, which in turn are preyed upon by piscivores, the fish-eating fish: Northern Pike and Largemouth Bass. These are the top predators.

Shoreline vegetation plays a part in this web of life too. Decomposing cattails and other macrophytes provide a feast for larger invertebrates such as crayfish. Fish feed on the crayfish, making a link between the open water (pelagic) and near-shore (littoral) food webs. Shoreline waters also provide a sheltered spawning area for pike and other fish.

The delicate interplay in this complex web of life only stays in balance when there are enough of each species to play their role. You can help keep the pond healthy by not damaging shoreline vegetation and, if you fish, by using responsible angling practices such as catch-and-release.

To learn more about High Park’s aquatic plants and wildlife, visit www.highparknature.org
Now You See It, Now You Don’t!

Like other diving ducks, Bufflehead (Bucephala albeola) sit low in the water, then dive beneath the surface to feed on aquatic vegetation, insects and small fish. They can stay deep underwater for long periods and may resurface far from where they were last seen.

With large feet and short legs set further back on their bodies than dabbling ducks (such as Mallards), diving ducks are well-adapted for swimming underwater. However, this makes them awkward on land. When taking flight, they need a running start along the water’s surface to become airborne. Once in the air they are fast flyers, propelled by their small, rapidly beating wings.

Bufflehead, Hooded Mergansers and sometimes other diving ducks feed at Grenadier Pond during spring and fall migration, and some may stay into winter as long as there is open water. None of these diving ducks are known to breed in High Park.

To learn more about ducks and other High Park birds, visit www.highparknature.org
**Grenadier’s Aerialists**

They whirl and they soar! From May to July, Purple Martins (*Progne subis*), North America’s largest swallows, fly high above the waters of Grenadier Pond or skim its surface in search of flying insects. Males are a uniform iridescent dark purple – our only swallow with a dark underbelly – while females and juveniles are light grey below.

Purple martins pair for life and nest in colonies. Historically, they usually occupied tree cavities left by woodpeckers. In eastern North America they now depend almost exclusively on bird houses provided by humans for a place to build their nests. In early August, after the young have fledged, the martins begin their long journey to South America for the winter.

Every other swallow species that breeds in Ontario can also be found at Grenadier Pond: Tree, Cliff, Barn, Northern Rough-winged and Bank Swallows. Like other aerial insectivores, swallows’ numbers have been declining due to loss of habitat, pesticide use and other factors. Purple martins are particularly vulnerable. Please take the time to appreciate them but be careful not to disturb their nest.

To learn more about birds and other High Park wildlife, visit **www.highparknature.org**