

## Friends of the Spit

P.O. Box 51518

2140A Queen Street East

Toronto ON M4E 3V7

info@friendsofthespit.ca

<http://www.friendsofthespit.ca>

Facebook Group

## In this newsletter...

- WHAT A YEAR!! A recap.....
- Thanks to all our members; Welcome to our new members!
- *Accidental Wilderness*: the book and the movie!
- A crystal ball: what will 2022 bring????
- Our last *mailed* newsletter: only email from now on.....

## NEWSLETTER

## December 2021

As an Editorial #1...

### WHAT A YEAR !!!!

Reflecting on the year: on the negative side, from the large production commercial filming at The Spit, from a proposal to land a ferry at the lighthouse, from raves, to dogs, to unauthorized motorized vehicles, to bonfires, to fireworks, to graffiti, to camping and many other damaging behaviours, without the presence of City and TRCA representatives to deter these behaviours.

On the positive side, the publicity from the CBC great documentary *Accidental Wilderness*, to *Accidental Wilderness* the book, to the much delayed opening of the entrance pavilion, and the parking lot completion, were all encouraging.

**Best of all was the great increase of visitors: new users and “veterans”, all enjoying the wonderful wilderness of The Spit.**

All this occurring within the context of the Pandemic that didn't abate, that surfed on through new waves... **Whew: what a year!**

As an Editorial #2...

### Many Thanks...

First, THANKS to all of you, our members, for your ongoing and continued support, by your emails and letters... so incredibly important to let the powers-that-be know that there is a **huge** constituency who love The Spit, as it is, as a public Urban Wilderness, a place different from all other City parks.

So many of you have supported Friends of The Spit, for decades. You continued support is GREATLY APPRECIATED!!!!

And, WELCOME to all our new members who joined us this year! New voices who care about the Spit for its natural beauty and solitude!

### GOOD NEWS:

#### *ACCIDENTAL WILDERNESS*

wins the Heritage Toronto Book Award !!

*To quote:* “The jury praised the book for its powerful message of community, advocacy, and action to build and protect a unique part of Toronto’s environmental heritage. With a variety of perspectives on Tommy Thompson Park, the jury also felt the book offered an engaging and beautiful read.”

The book has also been awarded the Canadian Society of Landscape Architects 2021 Research Award!

Our thanks to the writer and editor Walter Kehm, who involved us, by asking us to document our decades of advocacy for nature, and to Walter Burley whose wonderfully evocative photographs show The Spit in its glory. Friends of the Spit authored two important chapters: if you haven't read the book yet, it's available at Toronto Public Library branches or through your local bookseller.



*ACCIDENTAL WILDERNESS: The Leslie Street Spit* (the movie) is streaming on CBC Gem: go to the Nature of Things, and search for Episode 14, Season 59. A wonderful 44 minutes of Spit photography, history, and current events. High production values of a wonderful subject make this a must-see...

## As an Editorial #2...

(cont' from page 1)...

And, embracing social media, thanks to all those who have joined via our Facebook group (Friends of the Spit) - if you haven't joined yet, please do! Our membership levels are now higher than they were during the '80's ! This clearly speaks to the fact that we all see The Spit as vitally important. Consequently we worry... a worry not about zoning or boundaries or Baselands, or even admission fees .... but a worry stemming from mis-use and abuse; a worry stemming from our concern that those in power don't understand The Spit, not realizing that even small deviations contrary to the Master Plan Urban Wilderness concept will lead to negative changes.

## Quote of this Newsletter:

"You cannot go bird-watching in an art gallery. The solitude of a wooden [sic] glen cannot be replaced by potted plants at the mall. A bubbling fountain is not a babbling brook. It's long past time that the balance we seek tipped in nature's favour." *Jason Ramsay-Brown, in The Globe and Mail, 2021.*

## EDUCATION, DETERRENCE, and

**ENFORCEMENT:** With the amazing increase in Spit visitors through the pandemic, it became apparent that some visitors did not understand The Spit, or appreciate its loved qualities. From the outset, we advocated that the City and TRCA adopt a three-pronged approach, which, although it took a while to get started, and needed a disastrous rave to really push it into gear, it appears that the education portion has been reasonably successful, that the deterrence has worked, and that as, always, enforcement has been the last resort. The test will again come when the fair weather of next Spring returns! What distressed us most through this was that smaller city parks got far more attention, with our sense that The Spit was much lower priority. Toronto's iconic wild space, a destination wilderness: lower priority? Humbug!

## Our last MAILED Newsletter :

For the last few years, we have relied on emailing our members, and recently using our website and Facebook group as well. If you have not yet signed up for email delivery of newsletters, please do so ASAP! Emailing is very fast, reduces our environmental footprint, and saves us a lot of money. Since we started emailing, we have not had to ask for yearly renewal fees: your one-time low membership fee is all that we need right now.

## New Bird Checklist 5<sup>th</sup> Edition "in the works"

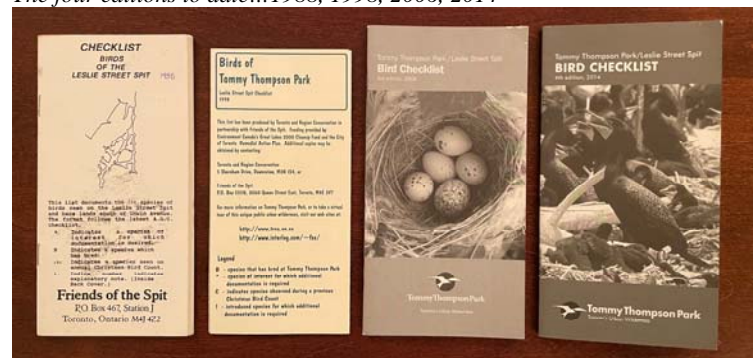
In 1988 Friends of the Spit independently published the first "CHECKLIST Birds of the Leslie Street Spit". It listed an incredible 284 species. Since then there have been three subsequent updates from the TRCA with the direct involvement of representatives from FOS, the Toronto Ornithological Club and the Toronto Field Naturalists. We have contributed financially to these publications.

Friends of The Spit are pleased to announce that a new updated Tommy Thompson Park/Leslie Street Spit Bird Checklist is now in the works and should be available in the summer of 2022. The last update, the 4<sup>th</sup> edition, was published in 2014 and listed 316 species as having occurred at the Spit.

Since that 4<sup>th</sup> edition, an additional 11 species, several of which required review and were accepted by the Ontario Bird Records Committee (OBRC), have been added. One species, Thayer's Gull, was de-listed, as it is now considered a subspecies of Iceland Gull. The new species are Ross's Goose, Willow Ptarmigan, Common Ground Dove, Common Ringed Plover, Arctic Tern, Pacific Loon, Brown Booby, Brown Pelican, Fork-tailed Flycatcher, Fish Crow, and Swainson's Warbler.

So far this year (2021) there are potentially another 7 species to be added, pending OBRC acceptance. If approved, these will bring the total number of species recorded at the Spit to 333 species. This is directly attributable to our members who with their voices and votes ensure that the Spit is kept a true Nature Sanctuary, free from commercial enterprises, pets and motorized vehicles.

*The four editions to date...1988, 1998, 2006, 2014*



## In memoriam: Ila Bossons

We were saddened to learn that Ila Bossons died November 30, 2020. Both as a City councillor, and as a TRCA Board member, she was a true friend of the Spit! We recall her penetrating questions of officials who didn't "get" The Spit, and we appreciated, big-time, her determination and her voting support. In later years, she was a strong advocate of the Allotment Gardeners on Leslie Street, and was our ally. She will be missed. Our condolences to her family, and our heartfelt thanks for all her years of advocacy.

## TTPUG (Tommy Thompson Park User Group): Gone, but not forgotten!

This portal of communication was axed by the TRCA on October 28, 2020; and, still, no replacement is in sight! This user group (comprised of various stakeholders, including Friends of the Spit) could have been very valuable through the pandemic.

Communication has been lacking, to say the least ( eg .. at the small end of the scale, those planters with begonias and canna lilies which are an inappropriate “interventions”, to those commercial films at the large end of the scale.)

We have been advocating ever since the demise of TTPUG for a new group composed of stakeholders who are committed to the Master Plan as a condition of membership (no use having someone on the User group who wants a large restaurant, as a silly example), This new group would be an active advisory resource for the City and the TRCA, not simply a place to hear what the staff think should happen next.

Mid-year, both City Council, and then the TRCA Board, passed resolutions contained within a document referred to as “Tommy Thompson Park Update”. First was to establish a TTP Joint Management Committee, comprised of institutional stakeholders, to ensure integrated management of the Park. Second was to prepare a three year work programme for operations and maintenance, develop policy approaches, and undertake stakeholder and community consultation. The third item related to long-term governance and management of the park; and finally, perhaps one of the most important issues, to develop a budget for stable and long-term funding for the maintenance and operations.

The City and TRCA staff have been and continue to meet to establish the terms of reference of this TTP Joint Management committee, as mandated by Council and the TRCA Board. FOS have made representation to this group for inclusion but have not received a response back at this time! (We are pleased that both the City and the TRCA accepted that they needed to work out their respective roles, establish proper funding, and essentially get their stuff together for the Spit.) Friends of the Spit input will be valuable to them: after all, we’ve been involved in the planning processes and the feet-on-the-ground monitoring for almost 45 years now! Our input *will* make things better.

On the plus side, we have quarterly walks on The Spit with TRCA officials, and a monthly Teams’ call with Waterfront Toronto officials. Now, if we could make a similar arrangement with Parks, Forestry, & Recreation.....

We should also add our thanks that Councillor Paula Fletcher’s emailed fortnightly updates are a welcome sign of City interest and information. These began in the depths of the issues of damage to the park and lack of City deterrence measures, and signaled to us that our repeated communication regarding concerns about improper and damaging park activities were being taken seriously. It took time, but with the deterrence measures - staff, bylaw officials, occasionally police, present, physical barriers to prevent vehicles entering - finally in place, we think, deterrence has started to be effective. (Clearly, 311 was of no help for urgent matters!)

## Commercial Filming:

You’ll all recall the controversy from late last year and the first quarter of this year, when it seemed that Hollywood North was setting up camp for good on The Spit: well, perhaps, just perhaps, that has abated ?? In recent correspondence from the TRCA, we have been assured that *“As of time of writing this email [26 November 2021] we do not have any open film inquiries for Tommy Thompson Park/the Spit.”*

Ed Note: Hurrah!!!

Our position has remained the same: we oppose commercial filming on the Spit. It is an activity at odds with the Master Plan’s stated goals, it is at odds with the wildlife and the park’s urban wilderness concept. We believe that the Conservation Authority should continue their conservation and stewardship roles at TTP/The Spit, and not act as a film development agency. In that regard, the same correspondence from the TRCA also noted:

*“Following the City of Toronto Council and TRCA Board of Directors direction in June 2021, commercial filming will be an item to be addressed by the TTP Joint Management Committee. In the interim, we will continue to evaluate all proposals using the Draft Tommy Thompson Park Commercial Filming Policy.”*

Do note that this draft policy referred to is from 2011, and was only presented to and never adopted by, the TTP User Group; and certainly never became TRCA Board policy. Things sure have changed since 2011: no-one envisaged large scale productions, and the interference that they cause with park use. Any film protocol established by the City or TRCA cannot be a one-size-fits-all for all their properties: The Spit must be recognized as unique, and immune from the star-struck Hollywood North pull!

**We will continue to advocate for a ban on commercial filming at The Spit.**



Who ever thought that these two planters with begonias and canna lilies were appropriate for The Spit????



**What's going on behind those Baseland fences?: So, we asked the TRCA, and here's their reply:**  
**( Past newsletters show the schematic design of the landforms)**

Construction of the Ashbridges Bay Treatment Plant Landform Project began in early 2020. Work in 2020 included the initiation and completion of the exterior berms for Containment Cells 1 and 2 of the Landform along the northeast shore of Tommy Thompson Park, as well as the completion of the East Breakwater off of Ashbridges Bay Park. Through 2020 and 2021, the exterior berm for the Landform's Containment Cell 3 was started and completed, with cell filling activities now underway. Currently, Containment Cell 1 has been completely filled, while Containment Cell 2 filling is targeted for completion in Spring 2022. Containment Cell 3 filling works are expected to begin late this year, continuing through to Fall 2022. The Central Breakwater portion of the project has been underway since March 2021, and together with the East Breakwater, will help to divert sand moving along the shoreline away from Ashbridges Bay/Coatsworth Cut, alleviating the need for continuous dredging work in the harbour entrance.

Construction of the headlands off of the Landform is also in progress, with Headland 2 and 3 (the two middle headlands) started in late 2020 to provide protection to the outer portions of the Landform through the turbulent winter months. Headland 3 is now complete, while Headland 2 construction is expected to wrap up by the end of the year. Once complete, construction of Headlands 1 and 4 (the two outer headlands) will begin, with a likely project completion date in early to mid-2023.

The Landform will add approximately 3ha of landbase to Tommy Thompson Park for restoration and public use considerations. TRCA will be working with the City of Toronto, with input from public stakeholders, on conceptual design for this area in late 2022/early 2023.

*Photo Credits: November 29, 2021; City of Toronto and Toronto and Region Conservation Authority: with our thanks for sharing;*



*Looking east to Ashbridges Bay Park*



*Looking south to The Spit*

Friends of the Spit (and all stakeholders) look forward to participating in the public consultations to shape the public use of this new landform. We'll keep you all posted as to meeting dates ... look for a late 2022 memo!

**Difficulty of public participation in covid times.** Sadly, Zoom public meetings have inhibited true consultation. We realized a webinar is as good as anyone could expect in covid times, but a webinar is truly no substitute for public engagement, or stakeholder engagement. We all look forward to the time when those in-person discussions and debates, which can be so fruitful and beneficial, can be reinstated.

**TTC service to The Spit:**

One of our members emailed us earlier in the year, wondering why the TTC 83 Jones bus service ended at Leslie and Commissioners': Why couldn't it be extended to Leslie and Unwin? We contacted the TTC, and after a back-and-forth of emails, were told on August 12th: "Unfortunately, the time has passed regarding the 2022 Annual Service Plan; therefore, as mentioned, TTC will consider extending the 83 Jones bus service as part of our 2023 Annual Service Plan."

Ed. Note: these things don't move quickly, do they?

So, if you know someone in the power alley of the TTC, please lobby them so the service can be extended south soon: where there's a will, there's a better way!

**HISTORY:** We've come a long way



*The Globe and Mail: June 13, 1972.*

## What lies ahead? 2022 and beyond....

Stakeholder communication and participation: In the discussions leading to the establishment of the Joint Management Committee between the City and the TRCA if we are given the opportunity; with additional ongoing participation via our membership in any Stakeholder Advisory Group once established; with stakeholder participation for the publicly-accessible elements of the new Ashbridge's Bay landform.

Vigilance: that The Spit doesn't lose its urban wilderness character due to small changes here and there: Concrete planters and begonias and canna lilies, changes in parking lot designs, asphalt paving paths meant to be gravel, new plantings in neat rows (not higgledy-piggledy as Nature does it, etc., etc.) are perhaps minor in some eyes, but they indicate an attitude out-of-sync with The Spit values and Master Plan. We continually repeat: **Don't apply the same thinking and planning of other Toronto parks to this land: The Spit is different!!**

And of course, ensuring that education, deterrence, and where necessary, enforcement, still occur.

And even more so, a watching brief so that the Master Plan prohibition against private motorized vehicle access ultimately wins!

**The Spit is a major attraction and asset of Toronto, and the Region: show it the love and care it deserves!!**

## Quiet on The Spit:

No Island airport overflights meant for some quiet months of enjoyment on The Spit: Hope you experienced the solitude!

Leslie Street Lookout: now in the process of public consultations, this pocket park at the east end of the Ship Channel, opposite the Allotment Gardens, will bring some urban park flavour onto Leslie Street, will add native plantings along the street itself, and of course will have fabulous west views. The developer is CreateTO, and from the sketches presented, it will be much different in character than The Spit: nonetheless, it'll be a park where there was none before, with green "corridor" space along Leslie Street.



*Purple Gallinule. A new Spit visitor.*

## SEASON'S GREETINGS !!

And our very best wishes for 2022! (our 45<sup>th</sup> year of Advocacy.)

Enjoy the Spit this Winter, and dress warmly!!

**Thanks for all your advocacy in 2021!!**

## New Bridge:

Despite the lack of notice by Ports Toronto regarding the pedestrian (red) bridge removal and repair, it is back, looking totally new! Should be good for another 25 years !

## Dragonflies and Damselflies (Odonates):

Continuing the long line of Friends' stewardship initiatives (bird, butterfly, and plant checklist), we are delighted that a knowledgeable member is creating the first Spit Odonates checklist. Look for it on our website in 2022, and, if you have sightings you'd like to share, email us, please!

The presence of these odonates is an important biological indicator of a healthy ecosystem.



*Spot-winged Glider  
near Pipit Point  
7 September 2019*



*Skimming Bluet, female  
Cell One  
5 August 2021*



*Halloween Pennant, male  
Baselands  
21 July 2021*

*All photos courtesy of E. O'Connor*