

# Friends of the Spit

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## NEWSLETTER

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Welcome, as we witness the ebbing of the mildest winter at The Spit! Enjoy the easy hiking and cycling, without the snow and ice formations.... Although we did miss the beauty of the snow drifts and ice formations that are a highlight of the winter for many of us.

And, of course, best wishes for 2024 and another fine year at The Spit.

### Same old, same old

#### **Who is looking after The Spit? What's the plan?**

(referencing the joint City/TRCA "Tommy Thompson Park Core Joint Management Committee", mandated by both the City and the TRCA in mid-2021.)

**We look forward to the City and the TRCA arriving at a long-term stable funding model for The Spit...**

**We say "get it together" .... and protect the place that thousands upon thousands love.**

**We are told that a series of public meetings will occur in the future, perhaps even the near future? Who knows?**

We know that the City and the TRCA have been meeting to formulate plans and we look forward to hearing more about them, including the worrisomely titled "Visitor Experience Plan" (VEP). We are told, though, that this VEP will stay within the mandate of the Master Plan: WHEW!

More importantly, we look forward to the establishment of a stakeholder committee so that those who know and love and use The Spit regularly can have their voices known and can influence the ongoing implementation of the existing Master Plan.

The ongoing TRCA webinars, the second of which occurred on February 27<sup>th</sup>, are interesting and educational, but are no substitute for community meetings, community outreach, and stakeholder involvement.

Curiously at this recent webinar, although providing tremendous information about natural habitat creation, particularly at Cell One (and kudos for it), no mention was made of the citizen advocacy efforts that prevented Cell One from becoming just a 400 car parking lot.

Also interesting was that the human usage of the park was not addressed, in terms of its impacts and relationship to the nature. This is the crux of The Spit: that it is a public urban wilderness. We look forward to the TRCA addressing these in any future webinars.

## Build it, and/but – will they come?

Will the huge new platform structure in the cormorant colony actually attract good numbers of nesting double-crested cormorants? Will it attract new birds, or just change the existing residents' nesting behaviour?

Who knows? We were not consulted or informed... and, as far as we know, the Cormorant Advisory Committee (of which we are a member) was also not notified.

Ostensibly, this huge structure will provide nesting spaces, and be predator-protected. But, will cormorants use it? A similar platform at Presqu'île PP exists, and is apparently the model for this one. Has the Presqu'île structure been successful? What numbers nested? For how long? All questions we'd like answered. In other words: what's the science behind this?

We were told that the hope is that this platform will reduce the nesting pressure on the tree canopy of the Islands and The Spit. Does this mean the platform is an attempt to mollify Islands' yacht club members and residents by hoping to lure the Islands' cormorants to The Spit?



Photo courtesy of the TRCA

We had thought that the days when Things just get whacked up at the Spit without discussion and consultation were long over. Discussions and consultations could and should have looked at the success of the Presqu'île structure, the location on the Spit, and the financial cost. Perhaps there are compelling reasons for this structure: if so, let's hear them.

Managing wildlife is very complicated at the best of times: there are many experts, and to have no discussion at all is laughable.... **The Cormorant Advisory Committee should have been consulted!**

## Nature news...

You've probably all seen and heard the footage on our Toronto media about the pair of Bald Eagle, which have taken up nesting in Toronto. A good news story all around! So this spring and summer when you see one soaring over The Spit, it's likely one of this pair. We wish them great success with their nesting.

We always appreciate receiving photographic submissions from our members, and the Eastern Red Bat photo below is one that really heartened us. Photographed by Edward O'Connell in Autumn last year, it's a terrific photo of one of our very secretive nocturnal mammals.



Eastern Red Bat photo by Edward O'Connell



Bald Eagle photo, Friends of the Spit

Look on our website in the upcoming months for a new mammal checklist.

## Outer Harbour Marina access

Recently, a number of our members have asked us if access to the Outer Harbour Marina is possible.

We have confirmed with Ports Toronto and their marina management that year-round **pedestrian access only** during daylight hours is allowed.

Please do check in at the control booth as you walk in, and be respectful of their grounds and equipment. (Access is not permitted to the private mooring areas). If there happens to be a new security guard on the booth, who might be unaware of this permitted access, please politely refer them to the marina manager. Thank you.

## **THANKS: A shout-out to the Task Force to Bring Back the Don, and Waterfront Toronto**

How exciting it is to see the new configuration of the Don River filling with water!!! Long-awaited - it now is happening! We are particularly pleased that the green connections through to The Spit, long- advocated by Friends, are starting to come to fruition with this new river configuration, and spillway. The spillway green connection extends south to the Ship Channel, and from there, the wild connection will extend across the Unwin Avenue greenspace to The Spit.

Kudos to the visionaries of the *Task Force to Bring Back the Don* for their tireless and endless work since the '90s to put forward this strong vision of what our Don River could be, and kudos to Waterfront Toronto and their associated partners for seeing that this massive project is underway. All the public meetings we've attended and participated in, over the decades, have been worth it.

Check out the Waterfront Toronto website for great drone footage! <https://portlandsto.ca/>

## **Encampment in the Wet Woods**

A very difficult situation has arisen, one of which many of you may already be aware.

A substantial encampment has been constructed in the centre of the Baselands' Wet Woods. The people residing there have been cutting trees and having open fires. The encampment has been reported a number of times to the TRCA and the City. Friends of The Spit have spoken with the TRCA, who have noted that the responsibility is the City's; and spoken with the City (who is in charge of dealing with encampments on public land) who have acknowledged that they had been to the encampment, and that, with respect to privacy, outreach remains ongoing.

We have been told that the City's hands are tied until they can find an alternate location to house these people. If you witness issues, call 311, as 311 tracks all homelessness issues pertaining to parks and greenspaces. As with other 311 issues, the more contact 311 receives, the more this issue will receive attention. If you see an open fire, you are asked to call 911.

We have been advocating for this site to rise in priority, as the tree cuttings and fires are both dangerous and destructive to the habitat. While this matter is being addressed, we ask that you avoid confrontation with the inhabitants, and that you let the municipal process play out.

Clearly this is symptomatic of much greater problems in society, and we must be conscious of that and understanding.

## **Monetizing The Spit...**

Does the TRCA really need \$22 plus HST per person to lead a stargazing expedition out on The Spit? Where does this money go? And how does it help The Spit?

We realize that Tommy Thompson Park has the best dark skies in Toronto but surely those dark skies are available to all those who cannot pony up \$99.44 for a group of four.... Save yourself the \$\$, head down to the parking lot, and face south, away from the City lights...

## Showing some love .... at last!!.....

On a recent visit in the mild weather to The Spit, many were relieved to see that the graffiti had been removed from the Cor-ten siding of the visitor centre on the Spine Road. The architects had always assured us that the Cor-ten meant graffiti could be easily washed off. It was disheartening to see graffiti accumulating on the structure, on the maps, on the photographs - on every surface.

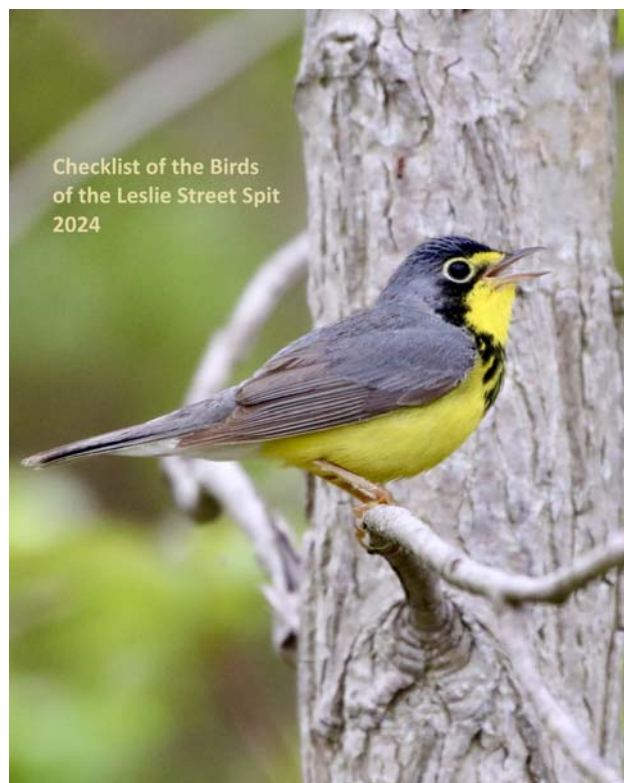
You'll recall that, in our last newsletter, we decried the state of the buildings and expressed concern about their neglect. We are pleased to see that the graffiti has been cleaned off, and let's hope that the buildings will remain relatively graffiti-free for a while.

Many thanks to the City powers-that-be that finally had the graffiti removal crew out onto The Spit.

## New bird checklist

The *Checklist of the Birds of the Leslie Street Spit, 2024*, is now on our website for you to view or print. This checklist, issued as an interim publication, documents the 333 species of birds observed to date at The Spit and the adjoining waters.

This checklist updates the 4th Edition, 2014, Bird Checklist, Tommy Thompson Park/Leslie Street Spit prepared by a volunteer committee and published by the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) with financial donations from Friends of The Spit and several private donors. A 5th Edition checklist has been prepared by a volunteer committee, including TRCA staff, and is awaiting publication by the TRCA. The first Checklist Birds of the Leslie Street Spit was created and published by Friends of the Spit in May 1989. At that time, the list total was 284 species.



## Citifying The Spit.....

And finally, since when did an urban wilderness wrap trees? This isn't Rosedale or Forest Hill! Doesn't anyone see the incongruity of this wrapping in an urban wilderness? As well as cringe at the waste of money?

We thought the whole idea of an urban wilderness was that vegetation grew and the elements shaped it. If rabbits gnawed away at its saplings, and beavers at the trees, that was part of its life. If the storms from the lake bent this tree or that shrub, that is the story The Spit is telling.

The Spit becomes citified and sanitized by small little cuts, and eventually, if these things aren't halted, our beloved place becomes just like any other city park.

**STOP citifying the Spit!**



## The meaning of a name....

### **The Spit/Tommy Thompson Park: time to change the Name !**

Talking about the citification of The Spit, a frequent visitor and long-time friend has made a recommendation to the TRCA and the City to rename The Spit/Tommy Thompson Park the

**“Leslie Spit Nature Reserve”**

FOS recognizes the great value of making this change, as it clearly recognizes the uniqueness of The Spit and reflects the distinctive qualities that set The Spit apart from all the other city parks with their non-native plantings, manicured habitat, and artificial structures. Seeing “Nature Reserve” (not “Park”) in the name also will manage a first-time visitor's expectations as to the amenities available.

This name change recommendation appears to be gaining traction: we are hopeful ....