

CORMORANT ADVISORY GROUP MEETING #2

Tuesday, February 19th, 2008

5:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

Mennonite New Life Centre, 1774 Queen Street East, Toronto

FINAL MEETING NOTES

Present:

Gord MacPherson, TRCA
Ralph Toninger, TRCA
Karen McDonald, TRCA
Ryan Rivet, TRCA
Adele Freeman, TRCA
Suzanne Barrett, Barrett Consulting
Wayne Reeves, City of Toronto
John Almond, Ministry of Natural Resources
Patrick Hubert, Ministry of Natural Resources
Chip Weseloh Canadian Wildlife Services
Mark Carabetta, Ontario Nature
Paul Scott, Aquatic Park Sailing Club
Colin Biggin, Park user/cyclist
Liz White, Animal Alliance of Canada*
Ainslie Willock, Canadians for Snow Geese*
Amber Ellis, Earthroots*
Catherine Grant, Earthroots*
Glenn Coady, Toronto Ornithological Club
Lynn Freeman, Toronto Ornithological Club
Gail Fraser, York University
Eric Davies, University of Toronto
Linda Rosenbaum, Toronto Islands resident

(* denotes member of Cormorant Defenders International)

These notes reflect the general nature of the meeting discussion. If there are errors or omissions, please contact R. Rivet at rrivet@trca.on.ca or 416-661-6600, ext. 5761.

Comments contained herein reflect the opinion of the individual and do not necessarily reflect the position of the organization they represent.

1. Welcome

S. Barrett welcomed the Advisory Group members and everyone introduced themselves. The evening's agenda was presented.

2. Review of meeting #1 notes

S. Barrett asked if there were any errors or omissions in the first meeting's notes. P. Scott mentioned that the members of Cormorant Defenders International should be identified.

S. Barrett reminded the group that there has been a request from the Peaceful Parks Coalition to post approved Advisory Group meeting notes on the TRCA website. J. Almond wanted to make it clear to the group that the opinions that he expressed during the meeting were his own and do not represent any positions of MNR. L. White agreed, noting that the opinions expressed were those of each individual and not their organizations. There was an overall agreement within the group on this matter.

The meeting notes from January 24th, 2008 were approved as amended.

3. Review of concerns

R. Toningner began his powerpoint presentation by showing a slide of the intrinsic values exercise from the previous meeting where each member was asked to give three values they associated with Tommy Thompson Park (TTP).

R. Toningner then addressed the following subjects:

- The DCCO population sizes by peninsula
- The DCCO metapopulation dynamics on Peninsulas A, B and C
- DCCO population growth estimate up to 2010, based on a trend line
- Forested area at TTP (by canopy cover) versus total land area, in hectares
- Amount of forest cover lost or in decline in TTP
- Tommy Thompson Park Bird Research Station migratory bird data

L. White commented that the data presented generated more questions than answers. She asked whether the data suggest that the presence of DCCO means lower foraging/body fat accumulation rates in migratory birds? R. Toningner replied that the data cannot be directly linked to the presence of DCCO, but are intended to demonstrate the significance of TTP as a foraging site for migratory birds. G. Coady stated that if TTP did not exist, migrating birds would forage elsewhere. On this point, R. Toningner predicted that there would be significant lateral migration along the waterfront. G. Coady requested a slide showing all possible stop-over locations on the Toronto Waterfront for migrating birds. He noted that TTP is not isolated in this regard. G. MacPherson stated that the importance of TTP to migratory birds should not be underestimated. He stated that the value of other migratory bird sites is related to the strength of TTP, and vice-versa.

G. Fraser asked if there were data to suggest that vegetation biodiversity is declining in TTP?

R. Toningner replied that further analysis would be required to quantify that, but biodiversity is not a critical factor in the concerns surrounding the loss of forest cover. L. White said that the picture that is being presented regarding the cormorant colonies is negative, but in reality a healthy colonial waterbird colony has very low diversity. G. MacPherson agreed and noted that it is important to understand the significance of different habitats by giving an example of a clear, cold trout stream that contains only brook trout and mottled sculpin. While this habitat is critical for these species, the community is low in diversity and the habitat cannot support other species such as Northern pike. Even though the habitat conditions may exclude or be unsuitable to other species it is still valuable despite having such a low biodiversity. He said that TRCA, as resource managers responsible for TTP, must find a balance between forest cover and colonial waterbird habitat and that the desire is to have both.

4. Potential management approach

R. Toningner outlined a potential management approach, including:

- Objectives
 1. Increase public awareness and knowledge of colonial waterbirds
 2. Limit further forest canopy loss on the peninsulas
 3. Prevent cormorant expansion to Peninsula D
 4. Continue leading research around urban wilderness
- Techniques
 - Do nothing
 - Re-vegetation and habitat restoration in impacted areas
 - Deterrents (Pre-nesting and Post Breeding)
 - Encourage ground nesting
 - Nest removal inactive and active
 - Egg oiling
 - Protection and enhancement of other species
- Matrix showing potential techniques for each peninsula

5. Discussion of objectives

R. Tonerger noted that although the erosion of the peninsulas is still a concern, it has been removed from the list of potential objectives for the management strategy. G. Coady inquired about moving dredgeate from the Toronto Harbour to replenish the eroded peninsulas. G. MacPherson stated that a project of this size, similar in scale to the 1970s dredging, is not being considered by TRCA; however smaller scale applications of clean dredgeate have been and will continue to be applied in the most ecologically appropriate areas for habitat enhancements.

G. Fraser questioned the relationship between the objectives of limiting forest canopy loss and preventing the expansion of DCCO to Peninsula D. R. Tonerger replied that natural cover and forest canopy are important, but concluded that there are other values of Peninsula D which are more important than just canopy cover. R. Tonerger showed a slide of the trail system at TTP. He stated that the majority of the public who use the park typically only visit the park from the entrance to the pedestrian bridge. He argued that sites within this area, including Peninsula D, are the most important areas in TTP in terms of providing an urban wilderness experience to the general public. Visitors are restricted from Peninsulas A, B and C during colonial waterbird nesting. G. MacPherson noted that resource management is often people management.

G. Coady suggested that the TTP Bird Research Station (TTPBRS) be moved from its current location to the tip of Peninsula D. He argued that the increased human traffic generated by this move would deter DCCO movement to this peninsula.

R. Tonerger stated that the colonial waterbirds at TTP are the main reason why it has received the Important Bird Area (IBA) distinction and that DCCO play a major role. G. Coady suggested that TRCA should promote the fact that TTP fosters very healthy colonial waterbird colonies, including DCCO, co-existing with a thriving fishery and that this is supported by data. He noted this may be significant on local, regional and possibly national levels and that TRCA has a unique opportunity to showcase these habitats and conditions.

R. Tonerger spoke to the second objective, stating that forest cover is an important feature at TTP and that forest cover should be increased. L. White asked if tree cover is the ultimate goal and how forest values can be connected to the largest colonial waterbird colony on the Great Lakes? She stated that the colonial waterbird habitat should not be considered as aesthetically offensive and that the public needs to be informed that colonial waterbird habitat is valuable despite its lack of trees. G. MacPherson reiterated the point that we must find a balance between tree canopy cover and the area devoted to colonial waterbird habitat.

R. Toningler discussed the TTPBRS and the Winged Migration education program. He said that this program promotes bird education in an urban context. He noted that the future Ecological Research Station will also study other wildlife. Findings from current research have shown that TTP is regionally important for species such as coyotes which have reproduced at TTP and have been tracked to Georgian Bay.

S. Barrett asked the group if they supported the objectives? A. Willock said it is difficult to support the objectives without knowing what methods are involved to achieve them. For example, she supports research, but not necessarily invasive research. L. Freeman asked how #1 and #4 are relevant since TRCA already undertakes them? G. MacPherson replied that the colonial waterbird colonies provide special opportunities to realize these objectives within the overall context of education and research in TTP. L. Rosenbaum suggested that objectives #1 and #4 should be used to change public sentiment regarding DCCO.

There was a general feeling that participants needed to understand these “cormorant” objectives in the broader context of TTP objectives. A. Freeman stated that TTP has an approved Master Plan and that this is the overall guiding document.

S. Barrett asked if everyone agreed on the ultimate goal of this exercise – to find a balance between colonial waterbird habitat and other TTP objectives including forest cover? There was general agreement with this goal.

J. Almond noted that TRCA is responsible for these objectives and he therefore did not want to vote on a matter that is not his responsibility. S. Barrett responded by reminding the group that the TRCA is not asking the group to make decisions, but is seeking their expert advice to gain the best possible understanding of the issues. C. Weseloh suggested that the group members might agree on the objectives depending on the methods used to achieve them.

S. Barrett asked for a show of hands on each objective. There was consensus among the group on objectives 1 and 4. Three members of the group supported objective #2 without qualification and six were in favour providing that modifications were made to the proposed methods. Ten members of the group were in favour of objective #3.

6. Discussion of management approach

S.Barrett asked for the group’s comments on the Proposed Management Approach:

Management Option	Peninsula D	Peninsula A	Peninsula B	Peninsula C
Pre-nesting Deterrents	*			*
Post-Breeding Deterrents	*	*	*	*
Enhanced Ground Nesting		*	*	

Egg Oiling		*	*	*
Restoration	*	*	*	*

L. White asked if raccoons selectively prey on Black-crowned Night-Herons (BCNH). G. Fraser replied that in the study she conducted they appear to, but there are many other factors that need to be studied. G. Coady replied that this phenomenon may be attributed to the fact that BCNH nests are located lower on trees and at the edges of the colony, which may make them easier targets for raccoons.

Regarding nest removal, G. Coady stated that DCCO readily rebuild nests and that removing old nests might encourage further deforestation by DCCO because they would strip trees they may have left alone had their nests not been removed.

G. Coady noted that the minimum distance between the outer limits of the DCCO colonies in relation to the roadway has always remained constant. R. Toningier added that habitat suitability is also a factor in DCCO distribution.

G. Coady stated that harassing DCCO will cause them to move elsewhere. He asked what the pre-nesting deterrent techniques are and when they would be used. G. MacPherson answered that people traffic would be the first option, as well as noise deterrents. L. White asked if noise deterrents would affect other bird species. G. MacPherson and R. Toningier replied that adverse impacts on non-target species are not intended and that in this regard noise deterrents would be stopped at the onset of the passerine breeding bird season or if negative impacts are observed in other wildlife species.

L. White asked what TRCA's response would be if BCNH began nesting on Peninsula D? G. MacPherson felt that BCNH would not move onto the peninsula because of human presence. R. Toningier replied that TRCA has not considered how nesting BCNHs on Peninsula D would be handled, but generally public access is restricted in areas where sensitive species are discovered, just as access is prohibited during the colonial bird nesting season on the other peninsulas.

C. Biggin asked if the deforestation caused by DCCO is due to the nesting or tree stripping and if there is a way to encourage them to nest on the ground? C. Weseloh replied that DCCO deforestation is due to both their guano and tree limb stripping which reduces nutrient uptake and limits rates of photosynthesis. G. Coady said that most of the Georgian Bay DCCO colonies are ground nesters despite having suitable trees available. C. Biggin asked if the DCCO populations on Peninsulas A and B are decreasing? R. Toningier replied that they are leveling off. G. Coady said that food availability is not the limiting resource for DCCO population growth, but rather the availability of nesting habitat.

L. Rosenbaum inquired about the possibility of displaced DCCO moving to the Toronto Islands. G. Coady and C. Weseloh both agreed that DCCO are not likely to move to the Toronto Islands in large numbers because there is more intense human activity on the Islands.

G. Fraser recommended that disturbance to ground nesting DCCO be minimized and that human access to Peninsula B should be by water. C. Weseloh stated that DCCO will return to nests that have been successful in the past and because of this, TRCA should not oil ground nests if the goal is to promote ground nesting.

G. Coady asked what post-breeding deterrents are proposed for Peninsulas A and B? R. Toningier answered that a range of techniques would be considered, but that there is no intent to stop DCCO nesting in these areas. He noted that research suggests that post-breeding loafing may adversely affect the survival of already stressed trees and that post-breeding deterrence would only occur after hatch year birds were feeding independently. G. Fraser suggested that the DCCO should be allowed to loaf on Peninsula A since there are no trees left for them to injure. G. Coady suggested the Endikement tip would be a good area to encourage post-breeding DCCO loafing. C. Weseloh commented on the success of post-breeding harassment on Lake Oneida and in Florida. He said wildlife managers for Lake Oneida constantly harassed migrating DCCO and reduced their stop-over time, thereby reducing their effects. L. White noted that harassing DCCO will only cause them to move elsewhere. Her suggestion was to enhance ground nesting and restore forest habitat, but not to use deterrents on Peninsulas A and B. G. Coady asked that if TRCA deters DCCO off the peninsulas, where is it acceptable for them to loaf? C. Weseloh suggested that TRCA move DCCO off the peninsulas in August (post-breeding) and monitor where they move to.

E. Davies introduced the idea of "Ideal Free Distribution", coined by Bill Sutherland, which describes the way in which animals distribute themselves among patches of resources. It explains that in order to control the distribution of wildlife, it is necessary to create a positive stimulus where they are desired and a negative stimulus where they are not.

L. Freeman asked what restoration means on Peninsula D? R. Toningier replied that restoration there would involve the removal of non-native and/or invasive species and the planting of native, site appropriate species.

G. Fraser suggested the planting of shrubs as nesting habitat for BCNH on Peninsulas B and C. C. Weseloh supported this idea, saying that BCNH will nest in many shrub species like red-osier dogwood. He added that a mesh barrier around these shrubs might allow BCNH access but restrict DCCO. G. Coady noted that BCNH are unaffected by DCCO at TTP, so this measure would likely be unnecessary. R. Toningier said that while the BCNH population appears stable, their productivity is unknown, therefore the long-term success of the colony is a potential concern.

G. Coady stated that it is difficult to discuss management on such a fine scale because DCCO may decide to leave the site any time, and management should be considered on a regional scale. He added that if DCCO cannot be allowed to thrive at TTP, an IBA, then where can they thrive?

L. White suggested that TRCA should not conduct any management on Peninsulas A or B, apart from some restoration plantings; conduct a minimal amount of management on Peninsula C so that it may act as a buffer; and prevent DCCO movement onto Peninsula D. All the group members agreed that keeping DCCO from nesting on Peninsula D is a worthy objective.

Some group members had a problem with the use of the word "management". L. White questioned the meaning of the term in this context. She said that "management" means something different to everyone and that if this is a functioning ecosystem, why interfere with it?

L. Rosenbaum and L. Freeman suggested that the group uses the term “stewardship” instead of “management”. Some members of the group supported the use of this term. L. White added that it is important to manage values, not wildlife and we should recognize that the DCCO colonies and Peninsula D represent different sets of values.

L. Freeman asked what long-term management methods would be viable on Peninsula C? C. Weseloh reminded the group about the minimum distance from the outer edges of the colonies on the peninsulas in relation to the roadway. He wondered whether the buffer on Peninsula C would stay consistent with that on the other peninsulas, or if the Peninsula C sub-colony would move closer to the roadway. C. Weseloh predicted that the outer part of Peninsula C will eventually resemble Peninsulas A and B, but that TRCA may be able to save the forest cover in the inner section of Peninsula C with management.

Following the discussion the Proposed Management Approach Chart was amended to show that there was not full support for post-breeding deterrents and egg-oiling on Peninsulas A and B (indicated by the question marks).

Management Option	Peninsula D	Peninsula A	Peninsula B	Peninsula C
Pre-nesting Deterrents	*			*
Post-Breeding Deterrents	*	?	?	*
Enhanced Ground Nesting		*	*	
Egg Oiling		?	?	*
Restoration	*	*	*	*

S.Barrett asked if the group could support the Management Approach as amended? There was general consensus that this approach is reasonable.

6. Public meeting

A.Freeman asked if the group felt a public meeting is actually required. G. MacPherson replied that a public meeting is necessary because it presents an opportunity to inform and educate the public about colonial waterbirds. G. Coady supported this, adding that transparency of this process is very important. G. Fraser said that she supports public awareness and education about DCCO and that the public needs to understand that humans are also malodorous and are often also the cause of deforestation. L. White stated that most people don’t know much about DCCO history, life stages, or nesting habitat, etc. and a public meeting is a good opportunity to raise awareness. She suggested that the CWS DCCO factsheet be provided at this meeting. A. Freeman recommended that web links and reading material will be provided on a forthcoming web page on TRCA’s website. S. Barrett also noted that a public meeting would be a good

opportunity to promote the TTP Spring Bird Festival, including tours of the colonial waterbird colonies.

The date of the public meeting was set for Thursday, April 3rd, 2008. K. McDonald will confirm the venue; options include the Mennonite New Life Centre and Metro Hall. TRCA will circulate an outline of the public meeting to the advisory group for review.

The date of the next Advisory Group meeting was set for Wednesday April 23rd, 2008. This date will allow the public enough time to provide further input following the April 3rd meeting.

The next Cormorant Advisory Group Meeting will be held
Wednesday, April 23, 2008 from 5:30 p.m. to 9:00p.m.
at the Mennonite New Life Centre, 1774 Queen Street East, Toronto