

Keeping Arboretum pest-free is everyone's business: organization



The Aurora Community Arboretum is one of Aurora's most popular, yet somehow still unsung, green spaces ? but everybody needs to follow a few simple tips to keep the space all it can be.

So say Arboretum officials as they work to battle invasive species ? both flora and fauna ? throughout the expanse, most recently reports of goldfish having been released into the Farm Pond, a prime location for the Arboretum's resident toads and frogs.

?We're waiting to see what can be done because obviously we don't want to leave them there, but we've talked to the Conservation people and the Ministry of Natural Resources to see how they would proceed on something like this,? says Arboretum Chair Irene Clement. ?I know people dump their goldfish, but they really shouldn't in any of our bodies of water. I think that was the first time we had an animal or a non-plant invasive, other than insects [like] the Emerald Ash Borer, which is a little different.

?Certainly don't bring in things like goldfish, for example. Don't bring them into the Arboretum or any pond. They are really very bad because they are so voracious and they will eat everything. Before you know it, you've cleaned out all of the natural ecosystem there.?

While this is the first time the Arboretum has had to deal with invasive fauna that do not fall under the insect umbrella, they are all too familiar with invasive flora.

Phragmites and garlic mustard are just two examples of invasive plants that have ?bugged? volunteers who work tirelessly to keep the Aurora Community Arboretum thriving.

?There is not much the public can do about the phragmites and buckthorn because those you need to have the proper equipment and people to take those out,? Clement explains. ?We're just waiting for garlic mustard to come up in maybe the next couple of weeks. We'll be seeing it grow enough that we can actually have a public event where we invite the public to come out and join us in picking it out of areas in the Arboretum.?

While a date for such an effort has not been set yet, they hosted three sessions in the 2024 season to do just that.

?Once you identify it, you can see it in your own backyard and you can get rid of it there,? she says. ?It's not poisonous, it's not going to hurt your hands, and you can just pull it out and dispose of it properly. When people are buying plants for the spring, they should really look and make sure they're not buying something that is invasive. Take a look at what you're buying and try to buy native plants if you possibly can because they are much better for all of our insect population. Of course, insects feed all of our birds and other critters, so it's much better for the environment if you plant native plants.?

While it's important to be conscious of what you bring into the Arboretum, a space that supports a diverse range of ecosystems, it's also important to be conscious of what you leave behind ? particularly avoiding feeding bread to waterfowl like swans.

Last season, Arboretum enthusiasts were thrilled when the swans who regularly call the area's large stormwater pond home, had cygnets for the first time, but this feeling was soon dampened.

?We had four cygnets but unfortunately one of them came down with what they call angel wing syndrome, and that's usually caused by people feeding them things like bread, which is the worst thing you can feed ducks, geese and swans,? says Clement. ?Angel wing is when the outer tip of the wing is out, instead of being flat against the body, out at a right angle. One of our cygnets last year came down with this and we tried to put up signs about don't feed the waterfowl?because you're essentially giving them a death sentence by feeding them people food ? and there is plenty of natural food for them. I am sure many of us fed ducks when we were young because that's what you did back then, but we know now it is really bad for them and once they get the angel wing syndrome, that's it and they're not going to be able to fly. Lucky for us, the swan was caught and was taken to a rescue where it will be looked after, but it will never fly.?

As for the Arboretum's resident goldfish, as the Arboretum and Town await word on the best approach to eradicate them, Clement hopes, perhaps somewhat tongue-in-cheek, that the area's snapping turtles help close the circle of life on this particular story!

By Brock Weir