



Ensuring wildlife thrives at rare and protected natural spaces

Most people using public trails at parks and natural spaces obey basic trail etiquette like “stay on the trail” and “take only photographs and leave only footprints”. But did you know rare and protected natural spaces like Oshawa Second Marsh (OSM) and McLaughlin Bay Wildlife Reserve (MBWR) have special codes of conduct to protect habitats and wildlife?

Let’s set the scene. Think of how human development has replaced much of the natural areas in Southern Ontario. Now imagine you are a migrating bird, setting out on a long trip that you have no choice but to take. You are heading toward a place where you can finally stop beating your wings, get a snack, socialize with your friends, maybe find a mate, and even stay awhile to raise young. That place you are hoping to land is like an island of refuge in a swath of human development next to an inland sea.

An island of refuge is what OSM and MBWR have become to migratory species like the wood duck, the yellow warbler and the monarch butterfly, in addition to year-round wildlife residents like frogs, deer and small mammals. These critical habitats and biodiverse ecosystems are not only a matter of comfort, but a matter of survival.

Both OSM and MBWR, are open to the public for day-use hiking and located on the north shore of Lake Ontario, south of Highway 401. When the rules for public access were created, wildlife was top of mind. Standard etiquette like “stay on the trail” had greater emphasis. Additional posted rules like “no dogs allowed, no motorized vehicles, no swimming, no boating, no fishing” were based on conservation.

More recent research, like the Portland Oregon urban park authority’s report on the impact of dogs on wildlife and water quality, found that key to wildlife vitality is minimizing disturbance and stress. People on trails have some impact to wildlife, but people with on-leash dogs disturb wildlife over twice the level of humans alone. Off-leashed dog behaviour is worse. This is due to a wild animal’s instinct to fear predators. Dogs and their scent are perceived by wild animals as a predator threat. And it is not the impact of just one disturbance, it is the accumulated impact of many

disturbances that causes harm. Hence, MBWR does not allow dogs and has other rules in place to minimize stress on wildlife and habitats.

When visiting your favorite nature trail these simple acts will help wildlife at natural spaces like OSM and MBWR not only survive but thrive.

1. Know and obey the posted rules.
2. Seek out on- and off-leash dog parks in your area where you can enjoy nature with your dog.

To learn more, see links below.

Friends of Second Marsh <http://www.secondmarsh.ca/recreation-and-trails/code-of-conduct/>

Oshawa Parks <https://www.oshawa.ca/en/parks-recreation-and-culture/parks-trails-and-open-spaces.aspx>

ProtectNatureTO <https://www.protectnatureto.org/>

Leave No Trace Canada <https://leavenotrace.ca/>

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Susan Ellis is a lifetime member of and long-time volunteer for Friends of Second Marsh (FSM). She has been a member of the Board of Directors since 2019. Recently retired from General Motors Company of Canada, Susan looks forward to spending more of her time in and for nature.

Subject Photo: Bob Bell – Mallards.jpg

Photo Caption: A Mallard Pair – Peacefully nest keeping at Oshawa Second Marsh, photo by: Bob Bell