

Cameron Ranch Prescribed Burn: One of the threats to the open grasslands of the alvar area is the ever encroaching thickets of shrubs. Cattle grazing helps to hold off some of this impact, but the shrubs are slowly winning; as grassland disappears the special habitat required by some rare birds also diminishes, as does the quality of forage needed by the cattle. The controlled use of fire may be a way to stop shrub growth while allowing grasses to flourish. The first prescribed burn took place in April and a second one is planned for August. Couchiching Conservancy staff members are working closely with Ontario Parks to study the effects of these experimental burns.

Carden Alvar Birding Bio-blitz. For two days over two weekends in late spring, members of the Toronto Ornithological Club and the Ontario Field Ornithologists combined forces with members of the Kawartha Field Naturalists to conduct scientific point counts in Cameron and Windmill Ranches. This annual event provides valuable information of population shifts within the bird communities in this rare habitat. Over 35 people divided into teams to listen and watch for birds at 15 stations. Highlights this year were Golden-winged Warblers on Windmill Ranch and a pair of threatened Henslow Sparrows on Cameron Ranch.

Bluebird Ranch Bio-blitz: With the enthusiastic guidance of **Dan Bone** of the Kawartha Field Naturalists, two days in late spring were set for a special visit to the Couchiching Conservancy's newest property, the Bluebird Ranch. These visits provided the first data to be collected for this unique property, and different species of birds, butterflies, dragonflies, wildflowers and sedges were listed.

Invasive Plant Species: Several alien invaders have set down roots within our properties, and staff and volunteers have dedicated countless hours and tremendous effort to combat these unwelcome species. Garlic mustard pulls have been done and dozens of bags of plant material have been removed from some key properties. This plant stresses mature maple and ash trees, so its removal is necessary to ensure long term forest health.

Dog-strangling vine can quickly cover a field or woodlot and crowd out native plant species. It also tricks monarch butterflies into laying eggs on the plant, but the emerging caterpillars cannot eat the plant and die shortly thereafter. An experimental program involving chemical application has been undertaken with our partner the Nature Conservancy of Canada... that these two organizations who are traditionally anti-chemical are now investigating such an action is an indicator of how serious the threat is.