

2023-24

# Report to Donors



# Mission, Vision and Goals

Ontario Nature is a charitable organization that protects wild species and wild spaces through conservation, education and public engagement. We represent more than 30,000 members and supporters, and 150 member groups from across Ontario.

Our vision is an Ontario where nature inspires and sustains us for generations to come. Together, we are the voice for nature in Ontario.



**Protect** and restore nature

**Educate** people about the importance of nature

**Advocate** on behalf of nature

**Connect** people with nature

## Values

### Reconciliation

We seek to work with Indigenous Peoples in the spirit and practice of reconciliation, honouring Indigenous interests, responsibilities, rights, Treaties, protocols and Knowledge Systems.

### Integrity

We aim to be transparent, accessible and accountable, using best available knowledge and advice.

### Leadership

We strive to achieve the best outcomes for nature through innovation, perseverance, and ethical decision-making.

### Inclusion

We embrace diverse perspectives and engage with and learn from people of all cultures, abilities and backgrounds.

### Responsibility

We work to achieve a nature-centred sustainable and equitable future for generations to come.

### Collaboration

We protect nature through sharing knowledge and working with partners and communities.

### Respect

We welcome diverse opinions and worldviews and will operate with kindness and compassion.

# A Movement to Be Reckoned With



**Kurt Kroesen,**  
President



**Caroline Schultz,**  
Executive Director

Ontario Nature's members and supporters have tasked us to be relentless protectors of wild species and wild spaces. We take that seriously and will not stand down when faced with short-term thinking that damages the life system upon which we all rely. Caring for nature is not an elite enterprise or a luxury. In fact, climate change disproportionately impacts low-income Canadians, people of colour and Indigenous communities. Diversifying the conservation movement presents a huge opportunity to get more perspectives, volunteers, donors and ambassadors.

Nature-based solutions are a powerful force mitigating climate change. The more forests, wetlands and grasslands we conserve, the greater the limits on emissions of greenhouse gases and the stronger the buffer against a changing climate. In Ontario we're seeing an extreme increase in pressures such as policy decisions that enable unchecked development of woodlands, wetlands and farmlands. While some developers make a windfall, the harm to ecosystems is profound and impossible to undo.

To meet these challenges, we helped ensure much more land is protected permanently over the past year. The Ontario Nature team assessed the conservation qualities of over 12,000 hectares of land owned by municipalities and conservation authorities to get them to count towards the national target of protecting 30 percent of lands and waters by 2030. And thanks to our generous donors, we expanded our Lost Bay Nature Reserve.

Good information drives effective conservation. This year saw the culmination of over 10 years of data collection and analyses with the publication of the Ontario Reptile and Amphibian Atlas, the authority on the distribution of herpetofauna in the province. The Atlas project has spawned many further initiatives such as our Long-term Snake Monitoring Protocol.

Ontario Nature's Nature Guardians Youth Program continued its impressive legacy of contributing to lasting change through conservation action. From the first Youth Summit in 2010 to today, Youth Council members and alumni are leading conservation actions. We are thrilled to have two of the founding Youth Council members as members of our Board of Directors.

You, our members and partners, are with us every step of the way. We do what we do thanks to your steadfast support. You are there when nature needs you most. Thank you.

(COVER) SCOTT GILLINGWATER; (OPPOSITE PAGE) ADOBE STOCK

# Protect



Lost Bay Nature Reserve



Bobolink

## Newly Expanded Lost Bay Nature Reserve

Ontario Nature's members and supporters rallied to expand our Lost Bay Nature Reserve, protecting an important connecting corridor within the Frontenac Arch, which is one of the most biologically diverse areas in Canada.

This 50-acre addition permanently safeguards a critical linkage for terrestrial and aquatic species to move within the Frontenac Arch and will help to ensure that at least 24 species at risk and 16 provincially rare species that have been observed on or near the nature reserve will have a safe refuge.

We are very grateful for your contributions to conserve this important nature corridor!

## Protected Areas Contribute to National Biodiversity Target

Over 12,000 hectares of protected areas in southern Ontario—about the size of Bruce Peninsula National Park—have been officially accepted into the Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas Database. Through partnerships with three municipalities and one conservation authority, the inclusion of these lands marks an important step towards achieving Canada's commitment to protect and conserve at least 30 percent of lands and waters by 2030, otherwise known as the 30x30 target. This brings the total lands assessed by our team to almost 23,000 hectares, managed by eight different conservation authorities and eight different municipalities.

(TOP) NOAH COLE; (BOTTOM) ADOBE STOCK



Azure Bluet



## Sydenham River Nature Reserve Habitat Restoration

This was the fifth year of habitat restoration at Sydenham River Nature Reserve, where we converted disused agricultural fields into Carolinian forest through natural succession. To track long-term success, Ontario Nature staff monitored vernal pools and subplots in restored fields. Staff and stewards conducted butterfly and breeding bird surveys and snake and salamander monitoring. We established a bat monitoring station in collaboration with Ontario Land Trust Alliance.

Ontario Nature members and volunteers from Lambton Wildlife Inc. and the Sydenham Field Naturalists planted 850 native trees and shrubs during a two-day planting event in the fall. We planted 1,260 trees and 821 wildflower plugs this year across two former agricultural fields that we are restoring to tallgrass prairie. We are extremely grateful for your support in making this multi-year restoration project possible!



(TOP) JAMES KAMSTRA; (INSET) PATRICK RIVERS; (BOTTOM) RIVER JORDAN

## Safeguarding Forests

In 2023, we continued building a strong case for the permanent protection of nearly 1 million hectares of Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) designated conservation lands in Ontario.

We completed an economic analysis outlining the net benefit of permanent protection, highlighting that we can protect biodiversity and mitigate climate change while supporting local jobs and the economy. The long-term economic benefits of protecting FSC candidate protected areas outweigh the potential costs, with the ecosystem benefits provided by these lands estimated to be in the millions of dollars annually, meaning protecting these areas would be a win for nature, climate change and the economy.

# Educate

## Nature Guardians Youth Program

Ontario Nature's Nature Guardians Youth Program continued its impressive legacy of contributing to lasting, positive change through conservation action.

- Ontario Nature's Birding Backpack program continued to thrive across Ontario. We hosted three events in the Greater Toronto Area and four in Thunder Bay with Lakehead Region Conservation Authority.
- In collaboration with Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority and Knowledge Holders from Chippewas of Rama First Nation and Alderville First Nation, the Youth Council visited Holland Marsh and Scanlon Creek Conservation Area to learn about wetlands through hands-on workshops on nature-based climate solutions, freshwater monitoring and Indigenous ways of knowing.



Youth Summit

- At the 2023 Youth Summit for Mother Earth, we welcomed 64 youth from across the province for a weekend of cross-cultural learning and outdoor fun at Camp Wahanowin. The Youth Council and Youth Circle for Mother Earth Coordinating Circle hosted the event with project partners: the Indigenous Environmental Institute at Trent University, Plenty Canada and Walpole Island Land Trust.
- 19 Youth Circle for Mother Earth Coordinating Circle members and project partners gathered for a winter retreat at the Camp Kawartha Outdoor Education Centre to participate in land-based learning, discussion circles led by Elders and Knowledge Holders, reflect on past accomplishments and plan for the coming year.

## Wetlands Campaign

Protecting Ontario's wetlands is vital to increasing our province's climate resilience and conserving our biodiversity. Over the past year, the Youth Council has supported Ontario Nature's wetland initiative to raise awareness and advocate for the conservation of these critical habitats.

Through outreach events, creating communications materials and participating in and leading workshops, the Youth Council continues to take action for Ontario's wetlands.



(BOTTOM) TOM KALD; (TOP) GILLIAN JOHNSON; (INSET) JENNA QUINN



## Ontario Reptile and Amphibian Atlas

In November 2023, we launched the *Ontario Reptile and Amphibian Atlas*, a publication over ten years in the making! Informed by community science data collected between 2009 and 2019 by over 12,000 volunteers and contributors, the atlas is the most comprehensive source on reptile and amphibian distribution in the province.

The atlas project engaged an unprecedented number of Ontarians in community science, and increased public awareness about and appreciation for the plight of reptiles and amphibians. The publication is informing conservation work and contributing to reports, recovery plans, local land use planning and habitat stewardship programs.

We are grateful to the many atlas contributors and community scientists.

You can read the publication for free online at [ontarionature.org/atlas](https://ontarionature.org/atlas).

(TOP) DAVID COULSON; (BOTTOM) JOE CROWLEY



Five-lined Skink

# Advocate

## Nature Network

Our Nature Network is comprised of member groups that support wild species and spaces across the province. Together, they form an alliance that engage their local communities in advocacy, conservation, education and community science. This year, we were thrilled to welcome nine new groups to the Nature Network!

These dedicated groups help us bring local issues across Ontario to the attention of the province. The Nature Network is our eyes and ears on the ground. Together, we are a powerful collective voice for conservation. Many of our conservation initiatives would not be possible without the help of the Nature Network.



Halton/North Peel Naturalist Club



## Searching for Ontario's Snakes

In Ontario, population trend data does not exist for many snake species, causing difficulties when assessing their conservation status, particularly for cryptic and lesser-studied species. Thus, there is a need for widespread, standardized, long-term monitoring to gather baseline information about Ontario's snake populations. Our Long-term Monitoring Protocol uses cover board transects to collect data on snake species present in an area. Data collected will be used to assess the relative abundance of species over time.

In 2023, people used the protocols at 35 sites across Ontario, including six sites in the Long Point Walsingham Forest Priority Place surveyed by Ontario Nature staff. We formed partnerships with seven new organizations, that will begin surveys in 2024. Participants observed 2,001 snakes across all sites, including 174 species at risk.

Through this work we are developing methodology and acquiring data to support habitat protection, species at risk management plans, and educational programming to protect snake diversity.

(TOP) MELISSA THOMAS; (BOTTOM) KATIE BRISTOW  
(OPPOSITE PAGE) ABBEY LEWIS

## Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas

We collected data for year three of the third Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas (Atlas-3). This community science project will put Ontario at the leading edge of knowledge about the status, distribution and abundance of breeding birds found in the province. It provides an invaluable resource for conservationists and researchers.

Atlas-3 is a partnership between Ontario Nature, Birds Canada; Canadian Wildlife Service (Environment and Climate Change Canada); Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry—Government of Ontario and Ontario Field Ornithologists. Over 5 years, hundreds of volunteers search for evidence of breeding birds within 10 x 10 kilometre squares.

Our team surveyed across central Ontario, including Restoule, Grundy Lake and Marten River, searching for evidence of breeding birds. Ontario Nature staff submitted 507 checklists in four regions and completed 903 point counts in 42 squares in central Ontario.

To date, 1,540 participants have made 1.5 million observations of 284 species over 94,687 survey hours. Data collected will guide environmental policies and conservation strategies well into the future and is a tremendous example of what we can accomplish when we work together.



White-throated sparrow



Holland Marsh

## Nature's Watchdog

We were there when nature needed us most. Thanks to our dedicated network of members, nature groups and supporters, we mobilized a vocal opposition and brought local environmental issues to the attention of decision-makers.

Ontario Nature—alongside other organizations and community members across Ontario—fought back against the Greenbelt land grab. We joined our members in celebrating when Housing Minister Paul Calendra announced that the Greenbelt protections would be restored and legislated.

We celebrated another big win, along with our partners, in our work to protect Ontario's wild species and wild spaces in a court case related to the Bradford Bypass, a controversial proposed highway in Ontario. The Federal Court found that the federal Minister of Environment and Climate Change Steven Guilbeault's decision to deny a requested federal impact assessment for the project pursuant to the Impact Assessment Act was unreasonable. The Court found that, despite the importance of public participation under the Act, the Minister did not explain how, or whether, he had considered key arguments and information included in the request.

**“In an era of unprecedented and accelerating biodiversity loss, the government must carefully assess the potential negative impacts of large projects, like highways, before granting permissions to proceed. In the case of the Bradford Bypass, we’re talking about a freeway that would bisect the provincially significant Holland Marsh, cross several watercourses, and damage or destroy the habitat of many species at risk. We need full information on the risks. Thankfully, the court’s decision supports such evidence-based decision-making.”**

—Caroline Shultz, Executive Director, Ontario Nature

Thanks to your support, we continue to effectively serve as nature's watchdog in the face of environmental deregulation.

# Thank You

To our members, donors and supporters! We are grateful for your generosity.

These listings include donors who contributed between March 1, 2023 and February 29, 2024.

## \$10,000+

Canadore College  
Colleges and Institutes Canada  
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## Bequests

### The following individuals made gifts through their Wills

Estate of Timothy Wayne Archer  
Estate of Scott Walter Beemer  
Estate of Jean Heather Margaret Cane  
Estate of Lois Elizabeth (Betty) Cooper  
Estate of David Earl Craig  
Estate of Wilfrid Crozier  
Estate of Alice Kathleen "Kay" Jones  
Estate of Sheila Kinross  
Estate of Stanley Daniel Rosenbaum  
Estate Of Karoline Seniw  
Estate of Douglas Graham Sloan  
Estate of Inger Sofie Stene  
Estate of Katherine Louise Turner



# Champions for Nature

With gratitude, we are pleased to recognise our **CHAMPIONS FOR NATURE**. This committed group of members renew their support annually with contributions of \$1,000 or more to Ontario Nature's general fund. Their leadership support means that we can undertake long-term programs and respond to threats to nature as soon as they emerge.

## \$10,000+

Ann H. Atkinson  
Ed Bezeau  
Suzanne Carlson  
Margaret Catto  
Marilyn E. Cook  
Deborah Diemand  
Jack & Mary Gingrich  
Teresa Heffernan  
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Walter Zimmerman  
And 1 Anonymous Donor

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Kerry Wilkins  
Ken Young  
Bob & Karen Yukich  
And 3 Anonymous Donors

(TOP) KRISTIN DAHL

# A Legacy for Nature

This year, Ontario Nature received several bequests from generous donors. We spoke with the family of some of these donors to learn more about their lives and celebrate their love of nature.

## Doug's Story



*"Of all the paths you take in life, make sure a few of them are dirt." — John Muir*

The Bruce Trail meant everything to Douglas Sloan. He certainly spent enough time on the trail to appreciate its' magic—completing his 50th End-to-End from Niagara to Tobermory at the age of 74! He became well-acquainted with our Malcolm Bluff Shores Nature Reserve while volunteering as a 'trail captain' of the Peninsula section of the Bruce Trail.

Education and teaching youth were his other passions, teaching high school math and taking a break from his career to study environmental science.

Doug's love of spending time in nature on the Bruce Trail inspired his gift to Ontario Nature. His bequest will be invested in our Education and Nature Reserves programs, helping to protect vulnerable habitat and supporting the next generation of conservation leaders.

## Celebrating the Beemers' Love of Nature



Scott and his mother Sue were avid naturalists, and well known in the conservation community. They both cherished the opportunity to meet other nature-lovers and were a fixture at Ontario Nature's Annual Gathering. Both gentle and kind souls, the Beemers became endeared to many staff and board members, and we will miss seeing their friendly faces at our events.

Many other conservation organizations benefitted from their stalwart support, and they were active members of Nature Guelph—who have created an award in Scott's honour.

For Scott, cottage life on Oxtongue Lake was a highlight of the year, and he nurtured a lifelong love of learning about the natural world. Scott passed away shortly after his mother, and included a generous bequest to Ontario Nature. Their gift will be invested in our Community Science program, helping to connect nature enthusiasts over their shared love of wildlife.

## Generations of Loons



Sheila Kinross let us know several years ago that she planned to remember Ontario Nature in her Will. She shared with us an inspiring moment in nature:

*"Recently, at a family lakeside cottage...while sitting by the dock, enjoying the peace and stillness—a LOON appeared! He stayed around for about 15 minutes—diving, and gliding so gracefully back and forth across the water. An unexpected and precious surprise!"*

We shared this note with her son after Sheila passed, and he let us know that the same loon and its partner have a baby chick and are thriving.

Sheila's bequest will be invested in our advocacy program, helping Ontario Nature act as a strong voice for nature.

# For Nature Forever Circle

Our **FOR NATURE FOREVER CIRCLE** is a special community of supporters who have committed to leave a legacy for nature by including Ontario Nature in their Will or estate plans. By looking to the future, this dedicated group will keep our voice for nature strong for years to come. If you have left a gift in your Will to Ontario Nature, please consider letting us know. We would love to acknowledge your generosity and discuss what you wish to accomplish with your gift

## For Nature Forever Circle Members

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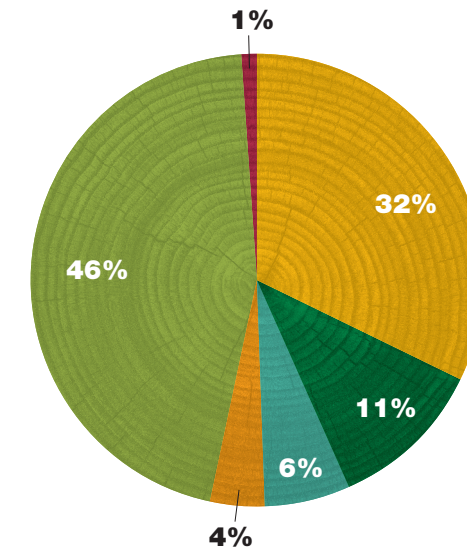
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KIRSTEN DAHL

# Financial Highlights

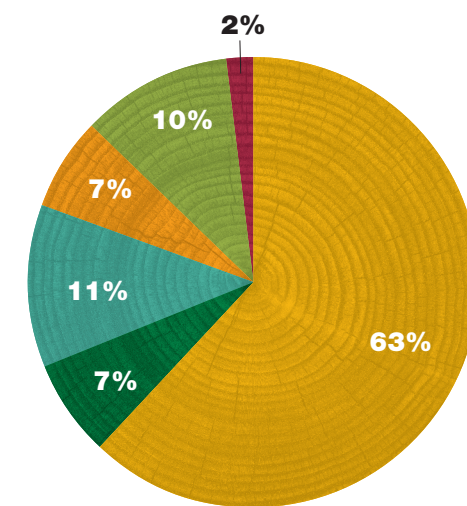
Year end February 29, 2024



## Statement of Revenue

	2024	2023
Donations and memberships	1,270,532	1,467,100
Bequests	454,981	469,269
Publication ( <i>ON Nature</i> )	249,572	206,696
Investment income	171,215	70,640
Program grants	1,831,346	1,665,072
Other income	50,014	71,857
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,027,660</b>	<b>3,950,634</b>

- DONATIONS AND MEMBERSHIPS (32%)
- BEQUESTS (11%)
- PUBLICATION (*ON NATURE*) (6%)
- INVESTMENT INCOME (4%)
- PROGRAM GRANTS (46%)
- OTHER INCOME (1%)



## Statement of Expenses

	2024	2023
Conservation and education programs	2,581,646	2,398,984
Publication ( <i>ON Nature</i> )	275,898	272,718
Fundraising	471,956	452,452
Public relations and outreach	276,330	254,418
Administration	438,049	281,803
Rental Properties and other	67,884	63,171
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,111,763</b>	<b>3,723,546</b>
Excess (deficiency) of revenue over expenses	(84,103)	227,088
Gain (loss) on change in fair market value of investments	216,752	(121,152)
<b>Total</b>	<b>132,649</b>	<b>105,936</b>

- CONSERVATION AND EDUCATION PROGRAMS (63%)
- PUBLICATION (*ON NATURE*) (7%)
- FUNDRAISING (11%)
- PUBLIC RELATIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS (7%)
- ADMINISTRATION COSTS (10%)
- RENTAL PROPERTIES AND OTHER (2%)

## Financial Position as at February 29, 2024

	2024	2023
Capital Assets – Nature Reserves	6,307,478	6,162,933
Capital Assets – Easements	943,000	943,000
Capital Assets – Other	59,546	95,115
Investments	3,132,349	2,839,537
Other Assets	3,801,789	3,530,992
Total Liabilities	(2,866,068)	(2,326,132)
<b>Total Net Assets</b>	<b>11,378,094</b>	<b>11,245,445</b>

## Notes

- 55% of the total net assets is nature reserve and 8% of the total net assets is conservation easement lands.
- 15% of the total net assets is restricted to generate income for long-term nature reserve stewardship.

# Our Impact in 2023

**7** research projects on our nature reserves

**9** nature reserve outreach events with **189** attendees

**22** volunteer nature reserve steward groups

**26** nature reserves

**30+** staff members

**59** Youth Council members

**71+** Nature Network groups involved in community science

**132** species at risk identified and protected on our nature reserves

**150** Nature Network member groups, including **9** new groups

**210** community science volunteer hours spent monitoring snakes

**787** attendees at **9** community science events

**1,355** youth engaged in our Nature Guardians Youth Program, including at **22** events

**1,540** volunteers participating in the third Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas

**7,807** acres protected through nature reserves system

**27,000** readers of our award-winning *ON Nature* magazine

**30,000** members and supporters

More than **145,000** people connecting with us through our digital community

**300+ million** media impressions for our conservation work



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