

Markham's Reesor Pond

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Reesor Pond was named by birding enthusiasts to honour the farm family on Reesor Road. Its 20 or so acres of open land and water occupy what's left of a farmer's field on the eastern edge of Markham. The result of a bylaw requirement that developers set aside a certain acreage of greenspace or parkland within their housing projects, the stormwater pond and surrounding land, now rehabilitated after excavation, fulfill the agreement.

During 2005 the topsoil was bulldozed aside and thousands of tons of underlying glacial till removed. By fall, the initial work was done and naturalization begun. Planting hundreds of native plants including hardwoods, conifers, shrubs and many water plants continued into 2006. Completed by early summer, its barren acres were forever changed through the careful planning of people skilled in the science of environmental engineering. The result is parkland in its earliest moment of creation, full of promise, with new habitats beginning to emerge.

Six boulder weirs impede the flow in the steep channel of the feeder creek and provide a series of pools, ideal spawning grounds for native fish and frogs. A variety of sandpipers, ducks and herons, regularly frequented the ponds and muddy shoreline during the first year. Its banks were secured with pegs to prevent erosion while shrubs, trees and water plants were planted, providing habitat for a diversity of living things.

Though frowned upon by some conservationists, I welcome this introduced habitat to a region where cultivation has overwhelmed the countryside, even to the exclusion of ponds. Beaver dams and their habitats were probably common in this area before settlement so it will be interesting to note over the years to what extent this pond, which is the near equivalent of a beaver dam, will have on the local wildlife.

In the spring of 2006, sparrows, robins and grackles nested in newly planted conifers. Red-winged Blackbirds wove nests in the imported cattails and Mallards nested in new cover. Horned Larks nested in the grasses. Several pairs of Spotted Sandpipers and Killdeers nervously gave alarm calls alerting their broods to intruders. Muskrats, deer and coyotes are attracted to the pond and frogs call during the mating season.

As the year progressed, native species of water plants such as Pickerelweed, Water-plantain, Arrowhead and Bur-marigolds bloomed in succession. Most oak, ash, beech, basswood, conifer saplings survived transplanting and in spring four species of swallows used them as perches filling the air with their twittering. I saw a flock of Red-winged Blackbirds land on a slender 20 foot beech and bow to the ground. Upon departing, it sprang straight up again. Fifty years from now that same tree may have



Reesor Pond on 29 May 2007. Photo by Jean Iron

nesting Red-tailed Hawks.

I delight in witnessing the inception of a new landscape for it is easy to imagine how it will be long years into the future. Before the oak, beech and willow trees reach maturity, many species will take advantage of the emerging habitats. It will occur slowly with successional changes of as the habitats mature. Water plants will gradually encroach and enrich the open pond, drawing waterbirds not found there today. The American Bittern's *chugalong* and various calls of Virginia Rail, Sora and perhaps Common Moorhen will be heard in season and new generations of birders will keep records of their seasonal comings and goings.

At the outlet of the creek, a decent mudflat may develop, which will attract shorebirds migrating to and from the Arctic. In the Fall of 2005 after initial excavation a mud floor was fully exposed and numerous shorebirds stopped over on their way south. Among them were Short-billed Dowitcher, Stilt Sandpiper and Baird's Sandpiper. These species are not usually seen in Markham for lack of shorebird habitat. As the pond develops, I hope these and other birds rarely seen here today will become a common sight during migration.

The record for the year of its inception, 2006, includes over 100 bird species, among them Le Conte's Sparrow, Chestnut-collared Longspur, Common Tern, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Ruddy Turnstone, Whimbrel, Red Knot, Red-shouldered Hawk and Bald Eagle—an enviable list for a place so new. Reesor Pond's future seems assured having already registered in the annals of the birding community and will be a boon to generations of nature lovers. The town of Markham has created a wonderful natural area.

Reesor Pond is on the west side of Reesor Road close to Toronto just north of Highway 407 in Markham.

