

Canadian Chestnut Council

... on the Chestnut Trail

Rural Route # 1
Orangeville, ON., L9W 2Y8

NEWSLETTER # 19
March 1999

Editor's Comments

The Canadian Chestnut Council (CCC) Newsletter has been published twice a year - spring and fall - since the organization was formed in 1988.

Memories of the chestnut recounted by our older citizens have become a welcome feature of the newsletter. We look forward to more of them. These stories generate interest and nostalgic emotions about an era almost gone.

Newsletters try to give some highlights of what the American Chestnut Foundation is accomplishing in its noteworthy restoration program. Relevant items of international importance are also mentioned.

The CCC Annual Meeting strives to arouse interest in why we should endeavour to restore this once mighty forest monarch. The CCC directors are dedicated to moving the objectives of the organization forward. As well, the CCC counts on faithful members to share their talents and resources.

Let our motto be - alone each of us can do a little, together we can do much more. May our efforts ensure a return of this woodland bounty!

Colin D. McKeen

Charles Darwin once said, " A traveller should be a botanist, for in all views plants form the chief embellishment."

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR AND OTHER ITEMS

Robert Hambleton, RR2, Niagara-on-the-Lake, stated that his chestnut crop was a failure in 1998. His planting is on shallow sand overlaying a clay subsoil. Because of the prolonged extreme drought, the burrs were only about the size of quarters. He also reported the death of some of his trees from the blight. He mentioned that his filbert crop was a total failure.

Dr. Wilf Goodman, Shelburne, new member, reports that he bought several hundred feet of chestnut lumber from a Simcoe resident about twenty years ago. The lumber had been stored for many years previously and was milled before the blight. Dr. Goodman indulges in woodcraft as a hobby and has made good use of some of the lumber, most recently building a table for someone. (We hope Dr. Goodman will come to an annual meeting of the CCC to display some of his handiwork. The Editor).

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Board of Directors (1999)

- Mr. Douglas Campbell - Linclon Cty.
Mr. Don Fick - Elgin Cty
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- Mr. John B. Gartshore - Dundas, ON.
Dr. Les Laking - Burlington, ON.
Dr. Arthur Langford - Port Rowan, ON.

A report has recently come from Director Bruce Graham that **Don Fender** of Kelvin, ON. makes interesting objects (useful and ornamental) from his supply of old chestnut lumber. (Hopefully we shall see some of his handicraft work at one of our meetings. The Editor)

Alan Fisher, RR 2, Blenheim, ON. reported that **John Cummings** also of Blenheim area, obtained two American chestnut trees about ten years ago. One tree died, but the other survived and produced a few nuts in 1998. (We hope to hear from others about their plantings. The Editor)

In Lotus - Newsletter of Norfolk Field Naturalist Vol. 20(6) October 1998 - Darlene Degrieck tells how a previously unknown American chestnut tree was discovered. The tree was found during a walk led by Dr. Arthur N. Langford through the Charles Sauriol Forest Tract on October 3, 1998. **Ms Daisy Arthur** picked up a burr near the path and asked what it was. The leader immediately identified it as the fruit of the chestnut tree. By retracing their steps a few paces a large healthy chestnut tree was discovered. The tree was more than 16m (50 ft) high with a dbh of 40 - 45 cm (18in).

A CHESTNUT ACCOUNT FROM THE U.S., BEFORE THE BLIGHT WAS REPORTED

Extract taken from "In Getting Acquainted with Trees" by J. Horace McFarland: Outlook Company, New York. 1904.

Of the American sweet chestnut as a delightful nut-fruit I need say nothing more than that it fully holds its place against "foreign intervention" from the East; even though these European and Japanese chestnuts with their California-bred progeny give us fruit that is much larger, borne on trees of very graceful habit. No one with discrimination will for a moment hesitate, after eating a nut of both, to cheerfully choose the American native as best worth his commendation, though he may come to understand the food value, after cooking, of the chestnut used freely in parts of Europe.

As a forest tree, however, our American sweet chestnut has a place of its own. Naturally spreading in habit (see photograph) when growing there is room to expand, it easily accommodates to the more cramped conditions of light and air, making rapidly a clean and sturdy stem. What a beautiful and stately tree it is! And when, late in the spring, or indeed right on the threshold of summer, its blooming

time comes, it stands out distinctly, having few rivals in the eye of the tree-lover. The locust and the tulip are just about done with their floral offering upon the alter of the year when the long creamy catkins of the sweet chestnut spring out from the fully perfected dark green leaf clusters. Peculiarly graceful are these great bloom heads, high in the air, and standing nearly erect, instead of hanging down as do the catkins of the poplars and the birches. The odor of the chestnut flower is heavy, and is best appreciated far above in the great tree, where it may mingle with the warm air of June, already bearing a hundred sweet scents.

There stands bright in the remembering one golden June day when I came through a gateway into a wonderful American garden of purely native plants maintained near Philadelphia, the rock-bound drive guarded by two clumps of tall chestnuts, one on either side, and both in full glory of bloom. There could not have been a more beautiful, natural, or dignified entrance; and it was just as beautiful in the early fall, when the deep green of the oblong-toothed leaves had changed to clear and glowing yellow, while the flowers had left their work in the swelling and prickly green burrs which hid nuts of a brown as rich as the flesh was sweet.



The American sweet chestnut

Did you, gentle reader, ever saunter through a chestnut grove in the later fall, when the yellow had been browned by the frosts which brought to the ground alike leaves and remaining burrs? There is something especially pleasant in the warmth of color and the crackle of sound on the forest floor, as one really shuffles through leaves in the bracing November air, stopping now and then for a nut perchance remaining in the warm and velvety corner of an open burr.

1998 CCC ANNUAL MEETING *

The annual meeting for the public was held on Saturday afternoon, October 31 at the Research Station, Blue Line Road, Simcoe, Ontario. A record number of more than 80 people attended. The attendees represented a broad cross-section of people with their common interest being the love of the chestnut.

Dr. Fred V. Hebard, staff pathologist at TACF Research Farm, Meadowview, VA, gave an excellent illustrated address on the achievement of their blight resistance-breeding program. Everyone was pleased to learn of their successes and that the program is half way to completion.

Many questions were asked about the techniques used for pollination, nut harvesting, growing hybrids, inoculation and selection of resistant types. All questions were capably handled by Dr. Hebard.

To celebrate our 10th anniversary, Mr. Bill Stewart, an ardent chestnut grower and enthusiast from Orillia area, provided delectable cakes for refreshment. Others enjoyed delicious apples.

Some fine hand-crafted objects made from chestnut wood were displayed. The dozen people winning the door prizes went home with a small packet of chestnut seeds hopefully to start a small planting.

Clem Fisher was presented with some small artifacts made from chestnut, in appreciation for his many years of dedicated service as sec.-treas. Clem is stepping down as sec.-treas. but will remain as a director.

* Apologies are offered for not having an amplification system to cover the meeting. The CCC executive aims to correct the problem.

FEDERAL ENDANGERED SPECIES LEGISLATION

It is expected that the Federal Government will soon introduce legislation to protect species at risk throughout Canada. The focal point of the proposed legislation will be to ensure a cohesive Canadian approach in support of a global stewardship of biodiversity. The Canadian Council of Wildlife Ministers have produced a National Accord for the protection of species at risk. The thrust of the legislation will be to protect endangered, threatened, and vulnerable species, champion recovery and promote stewardship of these bioresources.

Canada's bioresources are precious and must be protected. Public education and awareness programs will be emphasized. All Canadians have a role to play and there is a cost to be shared.

As has been mentioned in previous Newsletters, plant life makes up 80% of the biomass of the land areas of planet Earth. Our forests make up a significant part of the total plant life and form an essential part of the total ecosystem. Some of these facts have not been clearly understood by the public and that's where educational programs have a great role to play.

NEED FOR A CHESTNUT RECOVERY STRATEGY

The Canadian Chestnut Council was formed in 1988 out of concern for the virtual complete loss of chestnut, *Castanea dentata*, in southwestern Ontario due to the deadly blight fungus. The CCC has struggled with scientific approaches that might lead to a restoration of the species. Now, a recovery plan will be developed. It is expected that a blight resistance-breeding program like the one established by the American Chestnut Foundation (TACF) in the U.S. will be an important part of the Recovery Program. Canadian Wildlife will offer financial help in support of a well conceived Recovery Plan for the chestnut. As well, other sources of funding will be sought to initiate and sustain the program.

CASTANEA DENTATA IN NOVA SCOTIA

Recently Dr. Greg Boland received a report from Les Corkum, Falmouth, N.S., on the history and current status of the American chestnut in the province. Nova Scotia is recognized as an area of Canada, free from the blight.

Mr. Corkum believes that the two large trees growing at different sites between Halifax and Windsor may be about one hundred and seventy years old. The large tree in the Mount Uniacke Museum Estate growing in a wooded area is a fine timber specimen. The chestnut near Ashdale grows in the open and has developed a large spreading crown. It has a trunk of about 327 cm (131") making it the largest chestnut tree in Canada and perhaps the sixth largest specimen in eastern North America. There is also another old large tree growing near the south shore at Chester Basin.

Between 1982 and 86 the Bowater Mersey Company undertook trial plantings of *C. dentata* at several sites in the province. Some of these trees have grown well and are now producing crops of nuts.

NEW ZEALAND PLANS TO ENTER THE WORLD EXPORT MARKET OF SWEET CHESTNUTS

Dr. Harvey C. Smith, a plant pathologist from Lincoln University, N.Z., recently had several discussions with Dr. McKeen about a plan to get his country into a world market for chestnuts.

Dr. Smith maintains that New Zealand is a blight-free country.

Their best nut-bearing types come from crosses between the European chestnut, *Castanea sativa*, and the Japanese chestnut, *C. crenata*. Japanese types seem better adapted than the Chinese types. He reported that the American chestnut is ill-adapted for the New Zealand climate.

Discussions confirmed the necessity of stringent germplasm evaluation in programs aimed to establish or re-establish *Castanea* crops for timber or nut production.

REQUIREMENTS FOR THE SUCCESSFUL GROWTH OF YOUNG CHESTNUT TREES

In recent years the Newsletter has devoted a lot of attention to this subject. Why?, because of numerous failures observed in outplantings of deciduous trees and chestnuts in particular. Often more than 50 to 75% of the annual growth potential has been lost in many observed sites.

Weeds and grasses give young deciduous trees their greatest competition. Perennial grasses such as couch (twitch, quack) are the worst offenders. Grasses commence their spring growth often six weeks before bud break on trees such as chestnut, beech, and oak, etc. The earlier growth gives the invasive root system of grasses a tremendous advantage. Unless frequent heavy rains occur, or irrigation is provided, soil moisture is often depleted around the roots of a chestnut tree even before it leafs out. Then after the first weak flush of spring growth the tree is forced into a summer dormancy. Often no further growth occurs for the remainder of the season.

Until a chestnut tree reaches a height of two or more meters (6+ ft), it cannot compete with a grass or weed cover growing near its trunk. For this reason no competitive plant should be permitted to grow within 0.6 m (2 ft) of its trunk.

" LOGGERS FOR WILDLIFE

Fifty-nine of the species identified on Canada's 1997 list of wildlife at risk depend on forests for their survival. That's why Canadian Wildlife Federation (WCF) has teamed up with the Canadian Forestry Association (CFA) to develop a workshop aimed at forest workers and woodlot owners who have an impact on endangered species. ' These are the people who use the chainsaws, skidders, and dozers -- and who we believe need to be educated about endangered species conservation,' says CWF Executive Vice-President Colin Maxwell.

Loggers for Wildlife workshops will help forestry companies and woodlot owners meet the criteria of sustainable resource use. ' The object of the program is to complete the federal government's legislation on endangered species,' says CFA Executive Director Glen Blouin."

Extract taken from Canadian Wildlife Federation Bulletin Vol 2, February 1998.

The Canadian Chestnut Council

Membership Regular \$10.00 _____ , Contributing \$25.00 _____ .

Make cheque payable to; Canadian Chestnut Council, c/o R. Pamentor, RR# 1, Orangeville, ON., L9W 2Y8.

Name _____

Address _____

Telephone _____

Do you know of any unrecorded chestnut trees? ____
If yes, please give location, size and condition. ____

Other comments and suggestions re: aiding and promoting the Council's objectives. _____

