

HUGE THANKS TO BOB BOWLES for our First Ever Citizens' Plant Inventory in the Copeland Forest. Asters and Goldenrods were the subjects and stars of the study.

The Copeland Forest is without a doubt the most important ecosystem in Simcoe County and on the Oro Moraine. It has so many special features of natural and scientific interest that we all love, but we are losing some. Major changes to the water ecosystems like the decommissioned Ducks Unlimited Pond and the dam blowout; housing development preparations along the perimeter; more fragmentation within habitat areas, all are having an impact on plants and other species. We need to document the exact impact on the future environment. But we need to know what we've got first.

How fortunate for the Copeland Forest and the Copeland Forest Friends to have Bob Bowles, the renowned naturalist, author and visionary. He talked and listened to the enormous community of Copeland fans who wanted to learn more about this special yet threatened treasure.

Bob, like Joni Mitchell who sang, "You don't know what you've got til it's gone", realized that you need an accurate benchmark, an inventory listing what species the Copeland has, so we know what to protect. Since it was fall, Bob decided to begin the study with autumn-blooming asters and goldenrods.

Boy did people turn out, even in sleet and hail. Twenty-five people, over six days, from September 11 to October 8, in six ecologically different areas of the Copeland. Children, parents, general nature lovers, expert biologists, master naturalists, birders and even young people wanting the conservation field as a career.

HOW did 25 Joe citizens learn to differentiate a Blue-stemmed aster from a Zig-Zag aster? With tools like the dichotomous key, calipers, a hand lens and the instruction of the patient, step-by-step, Bob Bowles. Who knew that by sensitively feeling the upper and lower surfaces of the leaves of two goldenrod plants you could tell the Rough-stemmed goldenrod from the Rough-leaved goldenrod? When even an 8-year-old participant drew the flowers and plants with admirable accuracy, we knew we faced a challenge.

OUTCOME? Lots of learning and lots of fun for the study team. 8 species of goldenrods and 9 species of asters found this fall. Plus, 25 knowledgeable people will now be out in the Copeland covering a larger territory than one ecologist could and adding more species to the inventory.

Thank you, Bob. Please continue to involve and educate the entire community of the Copeland Forest about the value of this habitat.

