

**THANK YOU!**



2019 Youth Summit participants © Noah Cole

*Toronto Field Naturalists*

For supporting the 2019 Youth Summit for  
Biodiversity & Environmental Leadership



December 19, 2019

Dear Toronto Field Naturalists,

Thank you for your support of Ontario Nature's 2019 Youth Summit for Biodiversity and Environmental Leadership. By sponsoring my peers to attend, you gave students an opportunity to learn how they can create positive environmental change in their own communities and helped inspire future environmentalists across the province.

To recap, 102 youth from 70 communities across Ontario attended this year's summit – the diversity was truly incredible! Everyone was sponsored to attend by a total of 71 nature groups, conservation authorities, schools, corporate partners and individuals. This support means a great deal to us and it allows more youth to get involved each year.

We had the pleasure of participating in a wide variety of outdoor activities and educational workshops. Some of the things we learned included:

- Biodiversity and youth action
- Discovering nature
- How to harness our power to affect change, both locally and provincially
- Indigenous medicine
- Traditional environmental teachings
- Freshwater ecology
- The urgency to address climate change and how we can start
- BioBlitz competition
- How to become effective young leaders
- Environmental visual communication and effective storytelling
- Careers in conservation and where to start
- The negative impact of plastic waste on our environment

Other memorable moments included morning activities such as yoga, bird watching, swimming in Lake Couchiching, getting up close and personal with native reptiles and amphibians, and an evening campfire with stories and songs to bring everyone together. The Great Group Challenge had teams facing off in fun challenges and participants were able to connect and discuss ideas with their peers in the Networking Forum.

On behalf of the Youth Council and Ontario Nature, thank you again for your support of this great event. Because of your generous contribution, you gave me and over 100 of my friends the ability to meet, share ideas and discover our potential to become the environmental leaders of today and tomorrow. Please enjoy the photos and testimonials from the Summit on the following pages.

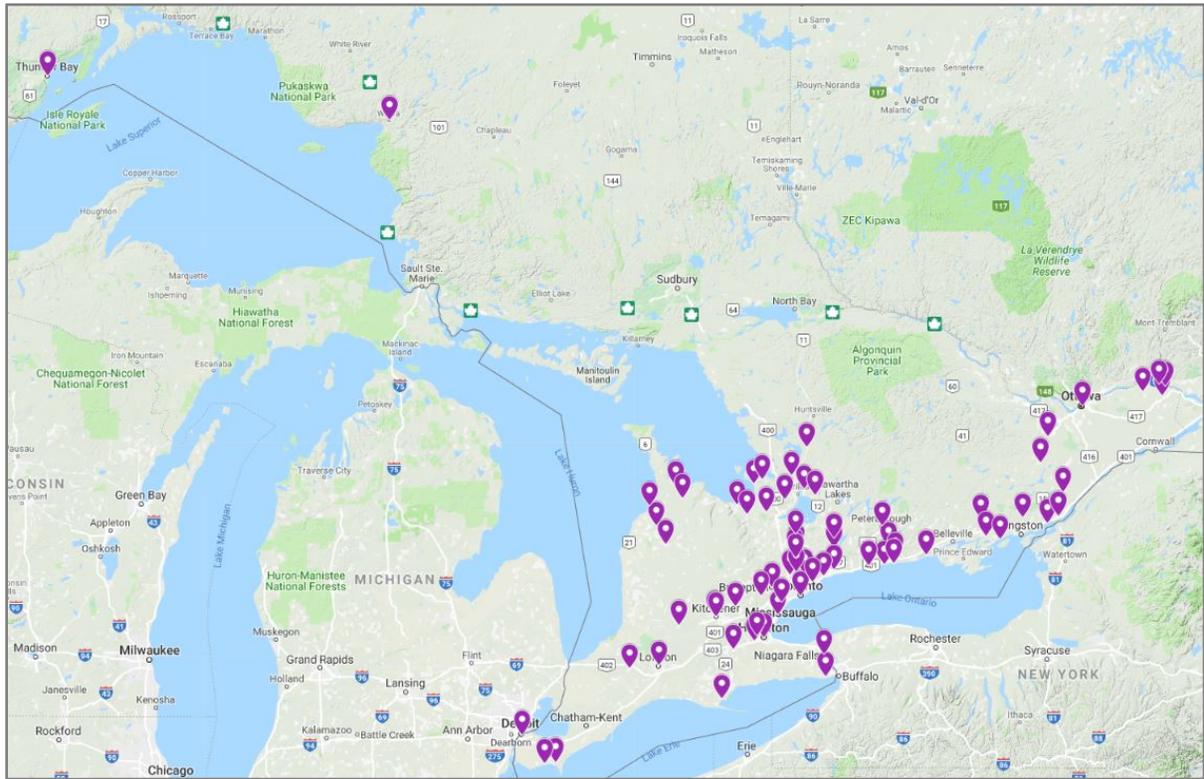
Yours sincerely,



*Sammie*

Sammie Heard, Ontario Nature Youth Council

## Celebrating the diversity of Ontario!



102 young leaders from 70 communities across the province attended the 2019 Youth Summit

- |                  |               |               |
|------------------|---------------|---------------|
| Alfred           | Keswick       | Port Hope     |
| Ancaster         | Kingsville    | Port Perry    |
| Athens           | Kitchener     | Rama          |
| Aurora           | Lansdowne     | Ramara        |
| Baltimore        | Leamington    | Richmond Hill |
| Bath             | London        | Roblin        |
| Bracebridge      | L'Orignal     | Scarborough   |
| Brampton         | Maple         | Seagrave      |
| Brantford        | Markham       | Severn        |
| Brighton         | Midland       | Southampton   |
| Carleton Place   | Minesing      | St Williams   |
| Cobourg          | Mississauga   | Stayner       |
| Collingwood      | Napanee       | Stratford     |
| Dundas           | Newmarket     | Strathroy     |
| East Gwillimbury | Newtonville   | Thunder Bay   |
| Gananoque        | Niagara Falls | Tiny          |
| Georgetown       | Oakville      | Toronto       |
| Georgian Bluffs  | Oro Medonte   | Vankleek Hill |
| Gores Landing    | Ottawa        | Walkerton     |
| Guelph           | Owen sound    | Waterloo      |
| Hamilton         | Paisley       | Wawa          |
| Hawkesbury       | Perth         | Whitby        |
| Inverary         | Peterborough  | Windsor       |
|                  | Pickering     |               |



© Sophy Wu

“The Youth Summit taught me so much about the world we live in from the incredible species that call Ontario their home to the importance of youth involvement on a global scale. It also helped me network with other youth in my community who I will be working with this year on local initiatives. But as well as learning so much, I have a ton of fun! From early morning canoeing to nighttime hikes, there was always a smile on my face.”

– Sidney, age 16, Markham

“I have so many highlights from this year’s summit, but one of my top ones has to be the Freshwater Life Workshop! Although I was unlucky to find any unique invertebrates, I was able to find some snail shells and get a glimpse into my possible future. I came prepared this year with a pair of chest waders so I could explore Lake Couchiching deeper than knee level. I made tons of friends over the last 2 years, but this year I made 3 really close friends. We all had similar interests and just clicked instantly. I look forward to seeing them next year, if not sooner!”

– Chloe, age 18, Leamington



© Chloe Jakob

“I am so honoured to have been surrounded by like-minded individuals who deeply appreciate and respect nature. Throughout the three-day summit, I participated in various, very interesting, workshops. These workshops gave me a new perspective on life and the world around me. To this day, I am reminded of conversations and stories from these workshops which have stayed with me and made an impact within my own life.”

– David, age 17, Brantford



© David Pugh

“While I was at the summit, I made two new friends (a very rare feat for me), I met new and interesting people, I have created memories that will (hopefully) last a lifetime. I saw things I have never seen, like acorns and garter snakes. I was able to learn about how to reduce my everyday usage of plastics, and from that I learnt some new tips and tricks that I use daily. I learnt about how to make a change, not only in my life, but everyone I know. I learnt that our planet is in dire need of help, more so than before.”

– Ella, age 14, Thunder Bay



© Christine Ambre



© Noah Cole

“I enjoyed the beauty Geneva Park had to offer, and met many new friends that have similar interests as me. Picking a highlight of the summit is too hard. I enjoyed everything from learning about medicinal plants, learning about how I could reduce overall waste in my life, and listening to the Moe Qureshi make the keynote speech! I also enjoyed making connections with everyone I met as I ate every meal with someone new, swam the early polar bear dip, and hiked in the morning! This was honestly one of the best weekends of my life! I have met friends that will last for life and new ways to better the future! As a community we have the desire and determination to make the world a better place!”

– Ethan, age 16, Collingwood

“This summit truly connected me with like-minded peers who are passionate about saving the environment. This encouragement and enthusiasm was so contagious that I could not help but get excited about a brighter future. It was a push that I needed, as it is hard to find people who have that same interest and passion in my community. The Children in the Woods workshop taught me to get in touch with the insatiable curiosity that I had as a child. We were encouraged to run around, roll over logs to find evidence of the underground ecosystem, and to embrace everything that nature had to offer. Skid Crease, our instructor, told us a lesson that I will never forget: ‘even if you have seen it before, you’ve only just seen it today.’ This quote reminds me everyday to appreciate life and my daily surroundings for every moment it has to offer.”

– Alanna, age 17, Maple



© Skid Crease

“Although the physical experience of the summit was immaculate (for example, the breathtaking outdoors of Geneva Park, the knowledgeably guided canoe tours, and the feeling crisp air during our seven a.m. hikes), much more is to be said about the overall experience from this opportunity. The experience of the summit opened my eyes to some issues I may have been less knowledgeable about, as well as educated me on steps I can take to make change in not only my life but those in my community.”

– Isabell, age 17, Gananoque



© Noah Cole

“The people I met at the Summit are some of the greatest, most inspiring people I’ve ever met and without the summit, I wouldn’t have these friends that I am still in contact with. Even in the few days we were together, I learned so much from them. By going to the Youth Summit and learning about ways I can make an impact, my friend and I have a plan to implement these strategies in our school. We are planning a composting system and ways to reduce plastic in our school.”

– Annika, age 15, Wawa



© Noah Cole

“I love nature and wanted to learn more about how to protect it. At the summit, I was taught a lot about how to live more sustainably, how to convince family members and others to live more sustainably, leadership, teamwork and wild/freshwater life in Ontario, including snakes and turtles that we all got to hold! I made new friends and experiences that I won't forget.”

– Bryce, age 17, Paisley

“Being with people who are passionate about our environment as much as me, truly changed my life. From the moment I met up with the group on the bus, I could feel all of the good energy. I was hoping to learn a lot of information to bring back home and make a difference. I can happily say that I have reached my goal, and I achieved so much more!”

– Kyla, age 16, Kingsville



© Delenn Kershaw

“The weekend spent at Geneva Park was filled with many opportunities to network, learn new ways to have an impact on something we are passionate about, and try new things. On Friday night, Scales Nature Park gave a presentation all about turtles and snakes. And let me tell you, turtles are by far my favourite animal, so I was ecstatic. Afterwards, we had the opportunity to hold the snakes and turtles which I thought was the best thing ever!”

– Clarissa, age 17, Aurora



© Lily Mae Peters



© Christine Ambre

“While I was at the summit, saving the world was secondary. I was there, in this parallel universe where kids talked to each other about birds and dressed as bees, and looked at spiderwebs instead of at our phones. Besides, you can’t save Mother Earth and forget to love her. The workshops were amazing. When you have all these kids interested in nature— and every kind too, the hippie, the bird nerd, the political activist— meeting and chatting with experts and First Nation elders, the energy bounces off the walls and it’s impossible not to learn a lot!”

– Haidi, age 17, Burlington

“With a weekend packed to the brim with inspiring workshops and engaging activities, it is very hard to choose just one thing that stuck with me the most. I equally loved the climate change presentation because it took me by surprise. All of the climate change presentations I have attended in the past have been nothing but depressing and unmotivating. However, in his presentation, Grant Linney conveyed his message with such compassion yet by still giving us the resources we need so that we can make an impactful difference. This short summit has been one of the most impactful and empowering weekends of my life.”

– Meghan, age 17, Ottawa



© Christine Ambre

“I really wanted to attend the summit because I wanted to connect with other youth that are as passionate about nature and protecting it as I am. Today, it is hard to be able to cope with the feeling of an uncertain future. The feeling is so common among our generation, that has been coined its own term. Connecting with others that have those same worries and want to do something about it, gives me immense hope. It reminds me that not all is lost and that I have the power to fight for my future.”

– Delenn, age 19, Scarborough



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## **SAVE THE DATE**

**September 25-27, 2020 at YMCA Geneva Park**

Youth Summit for Mother Earth

For more information, please visit [ontarionature.org/youthsummit](http://ontarionature.org/youthsummit) or contact Christine Ambre at [christinea@ontarionature.org](mailto:christinea@ontarionature.org)



© Natalie Rae

Hello Toronto Field Naturalists,

My name is Serena Poonawalla and I am a grade 12 student at Marc Garneau Collegiate Institute. I would like to thank you for giving me the opportunity to attend Ontario Nature's tenth annual Youth Summit for Biodiversity and Environmental Leadership which was especially special because I helped plan it as Ontario Nature's Youth Program Intern and as a Youth Council member. Being a part of such an incredible event was such an inspiring experience and has already lead to me making more sustainable decisions in my everyday life that have developed into habits. Through my involvement in the event I was able to gain a new network of like minded peers, learn from wise experts and motivate myself to create impactful change. I would once again like to express my gratitude for your sponsorship to allow me to experience such an amazing event.

Thanks,  
Serena Poonawalla

Dear Toronto Field Naturalists,

My name is Nina Nissim-Stem. I am 15 years old and go to school at Malvern Collegiate Institute in Toronto. Thank you so much for sponsoring me to go to the 2019 Ontario Nature Youth Summit.

I wanted to go to the youth summit to learn more about what I can do to help the environment. It was an incredible experience. Some of the things I enjoyed were the storytelling at the campfire and the workshops. A favorite workshop highlighted simple changes that we can make in our daily lives.

I learned about some of the actions people are taking, such as eating locally and seasonally. I also came to understand the effect of cotton on the environment which was something I hadn't considered before.

I was really inspired to do more in my daily life and at my school to raise awareness about environmental issues. One of my goals is to teach others about what they can do, since I know many people who, if made aware, would take actions to help the environment.

Thank you again for sponsoring me.

Sincerely,

Nina



Toronto Field Naturalists,

Thank you for allowing me to attend this year's summit. This was my second year, but my first time as a youth council member and it was probably the most memorable weekend of my year. I had been waiting pretty much since the end of the last summit for this to come around and it didn't disappoint. Although I had many favourite activities throughout the weekend, watching everyone arrive and getting to meet all the nervously excited first-time attendees was one of the best, we all had so much in common and hearing about what brought everyone there was so exciting. That night Scales Nature Park gave us a presentation in Copland hall. Besides being hilarious and entertaining, I learned so much about the reptiles of Ontario, that in my opinion get overlooked far too often for how interesting they are. Saturday morning I was up early to help lead the morning birding hike. We came across a big patch of Jewelweed that had water beading on the leaves and it looked beautiful in the early morning sun so we spent a fair time getting the best shots of the plants we could. We lead the group to the pond where there was some waterfowl hanging out, nothing much was going on but the scenery was amazing, the water was like glass and the mist was still rising off it so we all took it in for a while. On the walk back we spotted lots of Black-Capped Chickadees in the trees above us and we chatted amongst ourselves. I learned so much from the other nature lovers, I now have plenty of new locations to go check out! I've been birding since I was maybe four or five on the Leslie Street Spit with the birding club there but that was just about the only time I've met other birders my age so the summit is really special, all the people my age that I now spend time with, I originally met at the summit. So many other things happened Saturday, like the Bringing On Biodiversity workshop that was run by the youth council, I got to sit in and help launch the campaign to get communities protecting their native species. It was so exciting to see young people inspiring other young people, not only in the workshop but in the whole summit. It fostered a sense of capability that we have all brought back to own communities. In between workshops we had the great group challenge, just about the most entertaining event of the weekend and so much fun to be a part of, that being said I may be a little biased as I was one of the team leaders for the winning team. However, the highlight of Saturday was the nighttime activities. The campfire is always a hit, I was squished in between all my friends, which turned out well because we kept each other warm, it felt very cozy being beside the lake with a big fire and all the stars above you, I didn't want to leave. After many campfire stories we ate a hefty amount of snacks before going to the field to play games in the dark, which we all somehow made it out of unscathed, seeing as we were playing "star spinner" which essentially includes looking at a star whilst spinning as fast as you can in a circle and then trying to run. It's the most fun but comes with a little risk (as all good games do). We were all exhausted and ended up sleeping as soon as we got back to our rooms. Sunday was comfortable, we all knew each other well at that point, the ice was broken and none of us wanted to leave. It poured in the morning so birding was off, but I was up anyway so I chatted with those who wanted to go on the hike for a while in the common room. Technically a lot happened but the keynote speech was by far the most memorable. Not only was the talk inspiring, but the fact that it was a former ONYC member who had gone on to do amazing things felt like we were apart of something really special. I know I'm only in my second year, but the impact the council has had on my life has been amazing. I left feeling like I had gained 101 new friends, 101 new people who I can learn from and teach. We really are a family and a diverse one at that. While being all over the province may make visiting harder, it makes you feel so much more connected to your own home. I'm glad I found this wonderful group of people when I did, and I'm glad that there are groups like TFN who are there to make it happen. I'm already counting the days until the next summit.

Thank you for your sponsorship and generosity,  
-Cecilia La Rose



October 1, 2019

Dear Toronto Field Naturalists,

My name is Grace. I am currently 17, attend Erindale secondary school, and love to read books, play badminton, volleyball and volunteer in my free time.

My interest in joining more environmental initiatives led me to this amazing summit, because climate change is an ever increasing issue that I believe all youth should be prioritizing. Whether it is getting involved directly, or learning about new ways to engage others, I believe that we have big potential if we are all willing to put in the effort required to make a big change in our communities. But I would not have been able to do this without your generous sponsorship!

*Thank  
you!*

Thank you for sponsoring my trip at the 2019 Ontario Nature Youth Council Youth Summit - It was an absolutely life changing experience!

In the 3 days that I was there, I learned a lot, and made lifelong friends. The entire summit experience was a big highlight. I got to do a wide variety of workshops centered on climate change and environmental justice, while, learning more about myself and others in the process.

In this summit, I met a lot of like-minded youth across Ontario with the same passion, and enthusiasm to make change in their communities. It has been such a humbling experience to get to interact with each and every single one of them, while engaging in deep conversations about what the future will look like with our commitments. Workshops like "Make Your voice heard" by the amazing Grant

Linney, gave me a newer, more profound spark of motivation that I would have otherwise not had. His eye opening presentation on the statistics of climate change was a wake up call, because the lack of support for climate justice in my own community was a bit discouraging.

In addition, the Team challenge taught me more about what teamwork really is, and the importance of communication and listening on both ends. I met friends that I still keep in touch with, and people that have genuinely inspired me to work harder at achieving what I want in life, because they have shown me that there is no limit!

Mo, one of the first founding members of the youth council was our blue team leader, and I was so humbled by his positive attitude, and his kind character. His success at implementing natural legislation in politics and working at the renowned Stanford University for research in that area. I am so motivated by his keynote speech, which talks about how youth are NOT lazy, but instead the leaders of tomorrow. This was a much needed talk, because in class, I have been shown and TOLD by teachers that youth are “lazy, stubborn and whiny”. His speech has stuck with me, and will continue to motivate me to ignore any one/people who attempt to stop me from achieving what I aim to achieve. Whether it is in climate justice, presentations, or general small accomplishments, his speech has empowered me to become more resilient as a thinker, and activist.

It has shown how youth need to work even harder this generation, not only to prove themselves wrong, but also to work against these labels that have been put against them. Even in society, when being a climate activist is not the most popular in our school, his speech talks about working hard towards goals regardless of barriers. Because as he said, at the end of the day, your successes will overcome all failures you have ever had.

After returning from the summit, (the same week) I gathered the courage to share the local climate strike on all social media for my youth alliance, as well as promoting it with all friends. (And making my first social media post ever- with a picture of me at the climate strike!) I even gathered the courage to speak at the strike to all participants about the importance of joining our efforts at the peel environmental youth alliance. Without the motivation and constant positivity that all participants and educators had given me, I am not sure if I would have had the courage to actively speak out about climate justice in my community without the summit.

And this has had such profound impacts already. Because after the strike, I met over 20 youth in my city, who are meeting with the mayor of mississauga, and I will be joining the discussion!

I am so thankful for all that you do to continue supporting the conservation of nature and the preservation of what the earth has to offer. I am forever committed to sharing my gratitude to this organization, and the Ontario Nature Youth Council for the amazing opportunities it presents for youth to get inspired and take the lead on actions in their communities.

I had the pleasure of meeting some amazing people! Thanks to the Toronto Field Naturalists group for being my sponsor!

#### Youth Summit Pictures Blue Team Discussion





Youth Summit (I'm in the middle, new friends!)

Climate Strike at celebration square pictures (after the summit)





FRIDAYS  
FOR  
FUTURE



SYSTEM  
CHANGE  
~~NOT~~  
CLIMATE  
CHANGE

Dear Toronto Field Naturalists,

My name is Deleenn, I'm 19 years old and I'm from Scarborough, Ontario. I go to ASE 1 and I'm very passionate about fighting climate change. Some of the things I enjoy doing are swimming, drawing, photography and reading. I also love to educate others about animals and nature. I'm currently volunteering with a grade 2 class, teaching them how to connect with nature, first hand. This includes mini tree plantings, hands on animal activities, as well as nature-themed art. I also worked at a zoo camp over the summer, teaching campers about global conservation issues.

I really wanted to attend the summit because I wanted to connect with other youth that are as passionate about nature and protecting it as I am. In this day and age, It is hard to be able to cope with the feeling of an uncertain future. The feeling is so common among our generation, that has been coined its own term. "Eco anxiety" refers to the anxiety and fear that climate change brings. I definitely feel this on a daily basis. Connecting with others that have those same worries and want to do something about it, gives me immense hope. It reminds me that not all is lost and that I have the power to fight for my future. As a result, I was inspired to take action in my region of Toronto. Scarborough does not have a lot of people fighting for climate justice currently. I was able to start "Climate Strike Scarborough" and "Fridays for Future Scarborough", where we draw awareness and demand climate action. I was also inspired to take on grassroots projects in my area, that help educate and create climate justice catalysts in Scarborough. This includes Climate Action Scarborough, where our first project is to host a Climate Conference, filled with workshops and guest speakers.

So, I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your support of the Ontario Nature Youth Summit. I am very grateful for the experience, as it has allowed me the opportunity to make memories and take inspiration that will last a lifetime.

Sincerely,

Deleenn Kershaw

Me holding a black rat snake, as a part of the Scales Nature Presentation (below):



Some Photos I took over the weekend (below):



