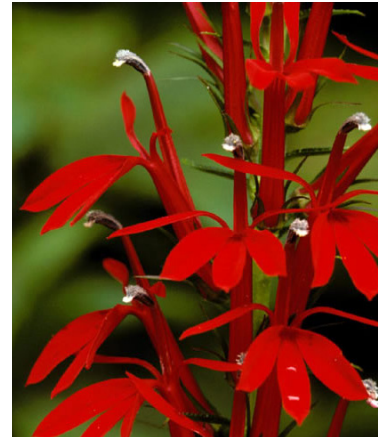


WETLANDS



The springtime morning chorus of a marsh wetland is a symphony of bird, insect and amphibian song. It's wonderful the way nature's creatures greet the new day, especially the birds. Few of us get to experience the morning chorus these days because over 80% of us live in cities and because of habitat losses.

Wetlands are among the most productive habitats on earth, home to numerous specialized plants and animals. There are basically four different types of wetlands including marsh, swamp, bog and fen. Marshes are open habitats that are either periodically or permanently covered by water. A marsh is a wetland dominated by emergent plants such as reeds (cattails), rushes and sedges. Swamps are wetlands dominated by trees and shrubs and can be flooded seasonally or permanently. Bogs are acidic wetlands where mosses are the dominant plants that build up over time to produce peat. There is little exchange of water in bogs and they are nutrient deficient and the least productive of all wetlands. Then there are fens which, like bogs, produce

peat. Fens are generally alkaline due to a groundwater inflow (springs) from mineral soils. Water moves slowly through a fen. Bogs and fens are more common in the north.

Wetlands have many functions and values. They are water filtration systems that improve drinking water quality. They recharge underground aquifers, provide shoreline protection, reduce flooding, provide spawning grounds for fish and habitat for over 600 species of plants and animals in Ontario. They are important to the survival of many species of amphibians and reptiles including leopard frog and spotted turtle. Over 100 species of birds live in or make use of wetlands.

Wetlands are threatened ecosystems. Our society has regarded wetlands as mere wastelands, infested with bloodsucking insects, of no use to humanity. However, wetlands are one of the most important and diverse ecosystems on earth. Today, we have lost 75% of our pre-European settlement wetlands to drainage and infilling. Protecting and restoring these special habitats to provide future generations with

a healthy, rich environment, is everyone's responsibility. Please support conservation groups, such as Ducks Unlimited Canada, Nature Conservancy and Lambton Wildlife, in their efforts to save our wetlands.

By Larry Cornelis
Return The Landscape

