

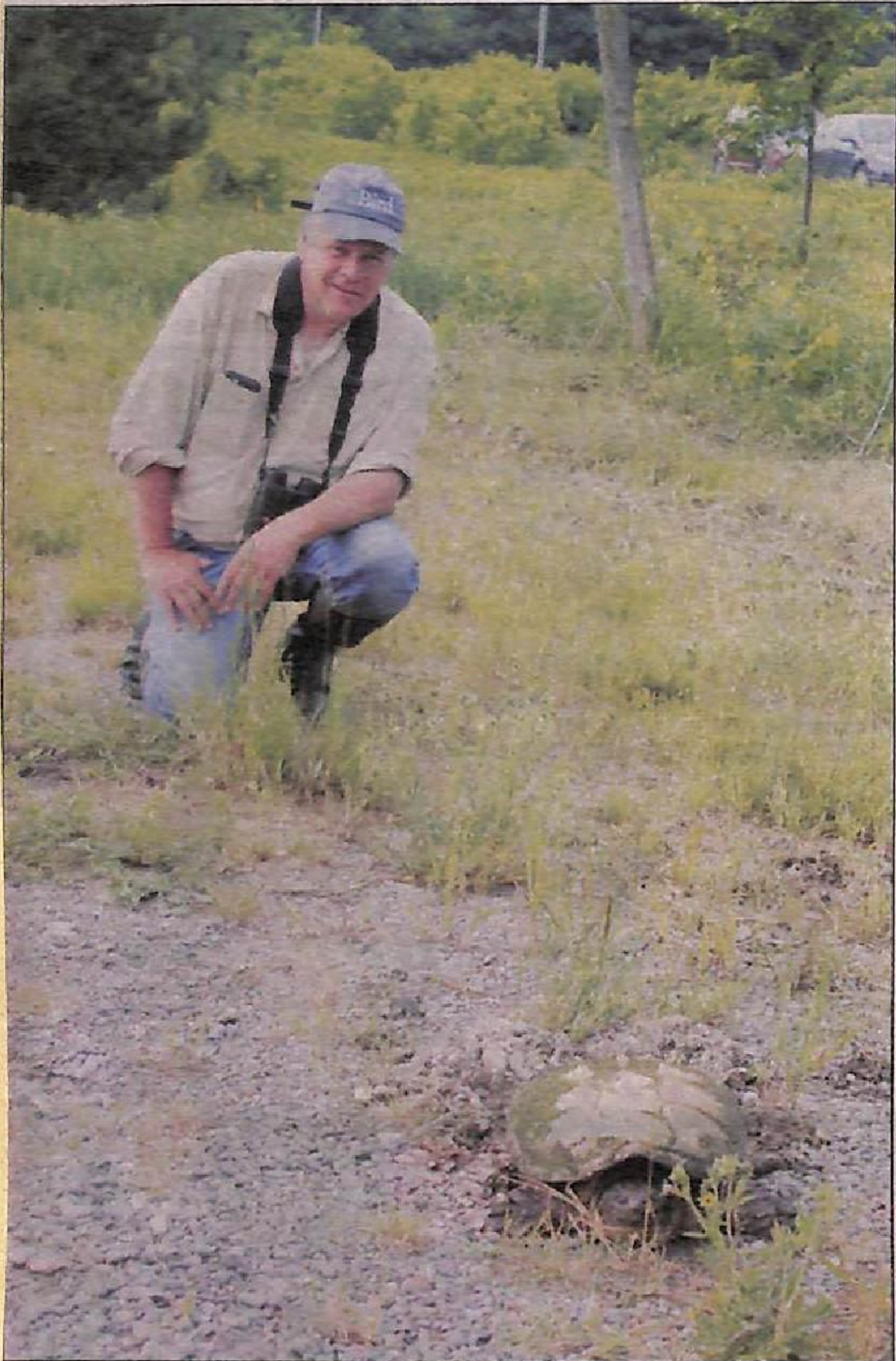
Sanctuary trail system extended around Cramahe Township marsh

BRIGHTON

INDEPENDENT

JUNE 16/16

By John Campbell



A snapping turtle laying eggs in the parking lot at Lone Pine Marsh Sanctuary on Maple Grove Road was an unscheduled attraction for opening the expanded trail system June 11. Sanctuary board member Doug McRae led visitors on an early summer walk. Photo by John Campbell

Cramahe Township – The trail at the Braham Tract of the Lone Pine Marsh Sanctuary has been extended, and the board of directors that oversees its management invited the public to join them in an early summer walk June 11 to mark its opening.

There are now three loops in the 56-hectare property off Maple Grove Road, totalling about 3.5 kilometres. One passes through meadows where grassland birds such as meadowlarks and bobolinks, both threatened species, make their home. The non-profit organization mows the area once a year in the fall, when the birds are done nesting.

“That helps keep it in grass and that’s what the bobolinks and meadowlarks like,” said sanctuary board member, ecologist and ornithologist Doug

McRae.

“We’re managing it actively for those species,” because if you left the field untouched for a decade it would be “solid goldenrods” and the birds would leave, he said.

Another loop winds its way through a former cornfield that will be left to mature naturally, undergoing a series of changes called succession.

“We’re going to let this field go and just let it fill in,” McRae said, noting dogwood and willow have started to appear.

The acquisition of the cornfield by the late founder of the sanctuary, Muriel Braham, “was brilliant because it really did help buffer the marsh” from the chemical impacts of “agricultural practices going around it.”

The public is welcome to walk the property, McRae said, “you don’t have

to be a member” of the organization that looks after it.

“We don’t allow motorized vehicles or horses,” or dogs, because of the stress they can cause wildlife. Hunting isn’t allowed, either.

Hundreds of gees arrive at the marsh in the fall, and there are numerous wood ducks and mallards that breed there.

Another species that’s threatened seen at the provincially significant wetland are barn swallows.

They were abundant back in the 1950s but “have disappeared from north of the Canadian Shield,” McRae said.

“There are none nesting in Algonquin anymore. They’re still fairly common in this habitat but this is the only place they are anymore. All the swallows, even tree swallows, are less common. Purple martins are vanishing.”



Doug McRae led visitors to Lone Pine Marsh Sanctuary in Cramahe Township on an early summer walk through fields and meadows, describing a habitat that’s quite diverse, supporting large populations of birds, mammals and insects. Photo by John Campbell

Cramahe Township council has knuckles rapped for in-camera session

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Cramahe Township – Council was wrong to hold a closed session last December to discuss a proposal from Lakefront Utility Services Inc. (LUSI) about the operations manager position at the Colborne wastewater treatment plant.

Amberley Gavel Ltd. reached that conclusion after investigating a complaint from an unidentified individual who argued the closed session Dec. 15 contravened the Municipal Act.

The investigator agreed, saying Cramahe Township had “breached the open meetings requirement of the Municipal Act.”

Cramahe Township has appointed Local Authority Services as its closed meeting investigator, paying it a retainer for its services. LAS delegated its powers and duties to Amberley Gavel to undertake the investigation and report to council.

Clerk Julie Oram told Amberley Gavel council had discussed the proposal in camera, believing it was “a matter dealing with the ‘security

of the property of the municipality.”

However she said in retrospect an exemption under the Municipal Act having to do with labour relations might have been “more appropriate and applicable given that the proposal could have been perceived by the Township’s unionized employees as a potential contracting out of bargaining unit work.”

But, neither explanation holds up, Amberley Gavel said in a report prepared by Nigel Bellchamber.

Council’s discussion was whether or not the township would contract with LUSI to fill the role of overall responsible operator (ORO) and provide management services. There was nothing in the discussion directly related to loss or damage to municipal property or the protection of public safety.

As for the argument the matter had “labour relations implications,” Bellchamber noted the union had advised staff it “would not have an issue with third party ORO services and consulting services.”

Current employees are not ORO

certified and they are not responsible for assessing infrastructure or resources, so hiring LUSI had no implications for labour relations or negotiations, he said, and consultation with the union had already taken place with the union prior to the closed meeting.

The only decision council made at the time was to direct staff to bring the matter forward to the Jan. 12, 2016 meeting, when the township

agreed to hire the utility for a 12-week period to assess the plant’s infrastructure and staffing.

Bellchamber in his recommendations said best practice for council is “to discuss as much as it can in an open meeting and [to] go in-camera only on those portions of the subject matter that properly meet the exemptions criteria.”

Mayor Marc Coombs said council will “have to be extra careful”

about going in camera when the report was received as information June 7.

“It’s a serious matter,” and council members will have to make “very clear to everybody” their reasons for not wanting to discuss an issue in public, he said.

“It doesn’t hurt to take a second look [and ask ourselves]: Do we really need to go in camera to discuss this?”