



STAFF PHOTO/MIKE BARRETT

Michael Mesure shows just a few of more than 300 birds killed or injured in a six-hour period after flying into buildings around the Greater Toronto Area.

York Region's bird hazards put group in a FLAP

BY MIKE ADLER
Staff Writer

The gleaming glass of office towers on Allstate Parkway in Markham or East Beaver Creek Road in Richmond Hill is not a pleasant sight for Michael Mesure.

On early mornings in recent years the Thornhill resident has recovered many dead or injured birds at the base of York Region buildings, among them such delightful species as the golden-crowned kinglet, black-throated green warbler, wood thrush and white-throated sparrow.

"I can find anywhere from one to 20 birds at a given structure," said Mesure, founder of the volunteer group FLAP, the Fatal Light Awareness Program.

The group says building lights left on at night or reflections in glass during the day kill birds fooled by flying into what they perceive as sky, trees or bushes.

How many Mesure will find depends on seasonal migrations and how quickly he arrives.

Some injured birds drop onto ledges or fly off to die somewhere else. And scavengers — gulls, crows, feral cats, raccoons and even squirrels — will attack and eat injured birds.

In an interview last week, Mesure said he gets occasional phone calls from tenants in office buildings.

"What I'm always asked is what is a reasonable number (of bird strikes) before it becomes too much."

On early mornings in recent years the Thornhill resident has recovered many dead or injured birds at the base of York Region buildings.

Architects, designers and building owners have to change the way they look at glass, said Mesure, who sees the planned growth of new downtowns in Markham and Vaughan as an opportunity to design areas less dangerous for birds.

Through time, people have made glass more reflective both to reduce cooling and heating costs in the building and because it looks good. Mirrored structures remain popular, Mesure acknowledged.

But he added there are ways of preventing bird injuries, such as a non-reflective window film used

on public bus advertisements.

Unfortunately, the film's cost and five-year lifespan has made owners less than eager to apply it, Mesure admitted.

Another solution FLAP advocates is netting stretched taut in front of problematic windows.

"The birds bounce off that netting. It doesn't stop the collisions but it does stop the mortality," Mesure said.

It's estimated that 100 million birds a year are dying in North America because they collide with human structures. Even a shed with a single window can kill birds, Mesure insisted.

FLAP, concentrating most of its activity in Toronto's financial district has recovered close to 2,000 birds so far this year.

By the end of the season, the volunteers are able to rehabilitate and release about half the birds picked up.

In the fall, this is done near Lake Ontario. In the spring, many birds injured while migrating northward are let loose at the Kortright Centre for Conservation in Woodbridge or the Thornhill Golf and Country Club.

Anyone finding a bird that's hit a building can call FLAP at 416-366-3527.

Vision statement underwhelms regional councillors

BY JEFF MITCHELL
Staff Writer

What's your vision for York Region?

And more to the point, is it brimming with vitality, or just plain sleep inducing?

Politicians at a recent meeting of York's planning committee were critical of a proposed vision statement that's part of the draft document Vision 2026, an update of the Vision 2021 paper written in 1993.

The update is required because of the fast-changing face of York Region, committee members were told by Carolyn Kearns, a consultant working with The Randolph Group.

While they were in agreement with the spirit of the document and plans for public consultation, committee members were less than enthusiastic about the long-winded vision statement that's proposed to accompany it. It goes like this:

"York Region will be home to a diverse population living and working in safe, caring and thriving communities. York Region's unique natural environment and cultural heritage will be valued and sustained for future generations. Economic vitality, creative leadership and partnerships will support the achievement of a high-quality of life."

Ho-hum, according to Georgina Councillor Danny Wheeler.

"If I ever have trouble going to sleep, I'll call Carolyn and get her to read it to me," he deadpanned. "It doesn't excite me."

Kearns replied that Wheeler's sentiment was not uncommon among those who hear or read the proposed vision statement.

"You're not alone, I think, in your concern," she told Wheeler, adding there has been discussion among those working on the document about the need to "punch it up."

The vision statement will be among the components of the document to be discussed as the review process continues, she said.

The politicians were otherwise supportive of the presentation, which outlined the need for the update, as well as a schedule of consultation involving politicians, the public and municipal staff throughout the region.

Kearns said the updated vision document was deemed necessary because of the sweeping change that's enveloped the region since 1993, when Vision 2021 was produced.

The document is designed to be a blueprint for York, outlining important areas of focus and regional goals. Consultation on the draft document began in April.

"There have been a number of changes in the region's activity since (1993), and we need to make sure Vision 2026 reflects those changes," said Kearns.

Among the changes in the last eight years have been a growing, aging population — it is estimated the region will be home to 1.3 million people by 2026 — and a more culturally diverse mix of residents, Kearns said.

What has also changed, as a result of downloading and other developments, is the number of programs and services the region is responsible for, Kearns said.

In 1993, the regional budget was \$429 million, that's increased to almost half a billion dollars now, she said.

The completed document will include a regional vision statement as well as goals and recommended courses of action to achieve them, Kearns said.

Among the goals included in the draft document are:

- A quality community for everyone;
- Protection of the region's natural and cultural heritage;
- A vibrant economy;
- Responsive human services;
- Housing for residents;
- Managing the pace of growth;
- Adequate infrastructure for the growing region and
- An accountable regional government that listens.

These goals will be implemented through the region's business planning and budgeting, said Kearns, adding the vision document will also serve as a guide for departmental business plans.

Public consultation on the document begins Oct. 30 in Georgina and sessions will be held in the other eight municipalities during the first half of November.

For more information on the process, check the region's web site: www.region.york.on.ca



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