

OPINION

Stouffville Sun-Tribune

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Funding faith schools divisive

Re: Christian school backs Tory plan
Stouffville: Christian School principal Jake Vriend supports the Tory proposal for public funding of faith-based schools as "a matter of justice". He sees Ontario as a "hold-out province", implying, I guess, that other provinces have long ago got on this band wagon.

The present system discriminates in favour of Catholic schools. I'd like to think thoughtful Catholics might be prepared to review this, if only to avoid the consequences of this new proposal.

John Tory frequently mentions Quebec as having a similar system. In fact, Quebec disbanded the Protestant and Catholic systems in favour of one system with either French or English classes.

He doesn't mention Newfoundland, which was plagued with a multiplicity of religious schools in small communities. In spite of strong opposition, it moved to a single system. He omits mentioning Manitoba did away with religious schools early in the last century.

Mr. Tory and his candidates believe a system which encourages and supports Christians (perhaps divided into Anglicans, Presbyterians, Baptists), Sikhs, Buddhists, Muslim, Jews, Jehovah's Witnesses, whatever, to associate only with their own ethnic/religious group for 12 years, will unite Ontarians.

I believe it to be the most divisive proposal imaginable. How many new schools will be required? How many schools will see their student body decimated or become non-viable? Is this a sensible way to spend \$400 million?

As an evangelical Christian, I urge everyone to put common sense and our educational system ahead of any personal advantage the proposal offers.

BLAKE TUFFORD
STOUFFVILLE

Town embraced Terry Fox Run

I wanted to applaud all of Stouffville for a wonderful turnout for this year's Terry Fox Run. Our little town has certainly embraced this cause.

I was a volunteer and helped with registration. It was so moving to see people of all ages and handicaps signing up for the run/walk.

There were tears and people with pictures of loved ones pinned to their T-shirts, but most of all lots of hugs and encouragement. I wanted to do a little extra this year because this terrible disease touched our family.

I want to thank Stouffville run coordinator Sandy Schell Kennedy and her wonderful team for their countless hours of hard work and dedication.

CHRISTINA BAGGS
STOUFFVILLE



Species loss can weaken entire ecosystems

The World Conservation Union recently released its annual Red List of endangered species. For 2007, another 200 species were added to the existing list of more than 16,000.

But what many people don't realize is the decline of these species isn't just a sad story that's happening "out there" in nature; it's really a story that's happening to us, one we're doing to ourselves.

And it's making all of the ecosystems we ultimately depend on biologically poorer and more vulnerable.

Living in cities, it's easy to forget how much we depend on the services provided by healthy natural ecosystems — things such as cleansing water, filtering air and storing carbon to reduce global warming.

Our health and well-being depend on these services, which have also been conservatively estimated at being worth trillions of dollars to the global economy.

However, reading stories about how species are being pushed to the brink of extinction doesn't necessarily trigger alarm bells about our own future.

Many of the animals in these types of stories have exotic names from far-away places, such as the Yangtze River dolphin and the Western Lowland gorilla, so it's easy to gloss over it as someone else's problem. The reality is, in an interconnected world, their problem is our problem.

As hard as it may be for some people to believe, the other species of the world don't exist just to look pretty and give tourists something to photograph.

They actually fulfill ecological niches. Their mere existence is often vital to the overall health of the ecosystem.

Losing a species or having one pushed to the brink of extinction can have what biologists call "cascading" effects on the entire region.

Consider the role of large



David Suzuki

with Faisal Moola

primates in tropical forests. In these forests, large primates play several important roles, one of which is in seed dispersal. Many tropical primates are frugivores. That is, their diet consists largely of fruit. While small-seeded fruit trees may have a large number of species, including mammals, reptiles and birds, to help them spread their seeds, large-seeded tropical fruit trees rely largely on bigger mammals

— especially primates.

When primates such as monkeys, apes and chimps eat fruit, they physically spread the seeds over a wide area of forest floor. So the animals receive sustenance from the fruit, while the trees get their seeds spread across a large area, allowing them to grow elsewhere, which then provides more food for the primates. It's a mutually beneficial relationship.

When large primates are hunted to greatly reduced numbers, as they increasingly are, it can have a profound impact on the ecosystem.

For example, a recent special edition of the journal *Biotropica* focused on the impact of what's called the "bushmeat" trade, local hunting that often includes primates.

In one study, researchers from the University of Illinois looked at two sections of Peruvian forest.

One section had been heavily hunted by local people using modern weapons such as shotguns

and had lost more than 80 per cent of its large primates.

The other section was protected from hunting. The researchers found there were 55 per cent fewer species of large-seeded fruit trees in the unprotected forest and 60 per cent less of the fruit trees themselves. In other words, once the large primates were gone, the trees that depended on them started to disappear, too.

Of course, as the researchers point out, this has a number of unfortunate consequences.

It makes the forest less hospitable to large primates, so they are less likely to be able to ever come back.

Having less fruit tree diversity makes remaining primates more vulnerable in times of scarcity.

Humans depend on the services provided by healthy ecosystems, so it's in our best interests to conserve the creatures that live in them.

Take the Nature Challenge and learn more at www.davidsuzuki.org

LETTERS POLICY

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