

TREES 'N' TRAITS: WHITE BIRCH – "GENEROSITY"

Neil Baldwin

By Victoria Day, the trees of Grey-Bruce have leafed out and seemingly all of a sudden new additions to the forest canopy give a different character to our woodland areas. This nine-part series asks you to open your mind and your senses to reflect on how you relate to the trees you step amongst in those areas, and perhaps even how those trees relate to you.

In this installment, we explore another easy-to-spot species, white birch. The defining characteristic of this tree is the tough, pliable outer bark, which is easily removable, can separate to layers and resists water and decomposition. What differentiates white birch from its yellow cousin (also found in our area) is that it is a sun-loving tree which needs lots of brightness to thrive. And thrive it does, growing rapidly in both single-trunk and multiple-stem variations, typically for a period of six decades and then it starts into a decline.

Birch is truly the giving tree. We all know about the canoes, but its bark has been used for a myriad of uses over time: containers large and small; clothing; facilitating communication as scrolls; even wrapping the dead. Allow yourself to consider the degree to which you, or someone close, embody traits of the birch. Like the tree's intense need for sun, this temperament requires

lots of energy and illumination to flourish. But for all the energy required to nourish their growth, birch give back tenfold as they allow others to have pieces to help support their own growth and survival.

With generosity often comes sacrifice. Birch must be careful not to let too much bark be stripped off, for it will severely compromise the tree. And those using birch must be mindful not to use the bark too thinly or else it loses its utility. The intense growth and giving can take its toll but what appears as a premature decline in growth is really just another phase of birch's giving life as it starts to provide cavities for wildlife and other forms of habitat and shelter. Similarly, people who embody the birch will continue their generosity as long as they allow themselves to change pace and give in different ways.

If you are a birch and need a boost, try seeking out the close company of this tree which, incidentally, is considered magical in some northern European cultures. My favourite is along the 8km Jones Bluff loop on the Bruce Trail. White birch will have your back at various spots with the added bonus of panoramic vistas overlooking the Cape Croker headland and far beyond to Georgian Bay. Next month: Pines. 

I'm Ready For My Close-up!

Zoe Kessler

"Alright Mr. DeMille, I'm ready for my close-up." Who could forget those immortal words spoken by Gloria Swanson in the 1950 film classic *Sunset Boulevard*, as Norma Desmond, an aging star. Imagine my surprise when I found out much, much older aging stars (like, ten plus billion years old) were also ready for their close-ups and were being photographed by eager, talented astrophotographers all over Grey-Bruce.

As a fledgling astronomer, I had no idea this was even possible. Yet there in the dark fields of the E.S. Fox Observatory, the glow of laptop computers accompanies telescope-mounted cameras with special imaging capabilities. The Bluewater Astronomical Society (BAS) boasts several competent astrophotographers, who are only too glad to show you the ropes.

On June 3, BAS is delighted to welcome guest speaker and astrophotographer Stuart Heggie to its monthly meeting (at E.S. Fox). Heggie is a long-time Grey-Bruce resident with over 20 years' experience in astrophotography, including giving talks at the Ontario Science Centre (Toronto). He'll display some of his spectacular astrophotographs and offer tips on how to take your own. "The very first thing you should be doing is looking up," says Heggie. Familiarizing yourself with the sky, both day and night, is the best starting place. Come out to hear about this intriguing hobby and find out if the Andromeda Galaxy (or Comet Lovejoy, or Saturn, or any of the many stars in the night sky) are ready for a close-up.

In the movie, Norma Desmond says: "You see? This is my life. It always will be. There's nothing else. Just us. And the cameras. And those wonderful people out there in the dark." I couldn't have said it better myself, Norma.

Join us at our June 3 meeting, or come out and be one of those wonderful people out there in the dark at our public viewing night on June 12. We won't make you a star, but we can show you plenty. For details, check out BAS's website www.bluewaterastronomy.info or Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/bluewaterastronomy>. 

Let your voice be heard!

NOTICE OF PUBLIC MEETINGS

The public is invited to attend upcoming public meetings to help inform the future direction of Community Foundation Grey Bruce's Vital Signs® report. If you are interested in the vitality and well-being of your community, please join us!

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 3, 2015, 7-9 PM
Harmony Centre, Owen Sound (890 4th Ave. E)

THURSDAY, JUNE 4, 2015, 7-9 PM
Wes for Youth Online, Walkerton (4 Park St.)

FOR MORE INFORMATION
call 519.371.7203 or visit
www.communityfoundationgreybruce.com

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