

## NATURE RESERVES

# Stone Road Alvar Nature Reserve

A truly outstanding array of rare habitats and species is packed into Stone Road Alvar, a 42-hectare property of oak-hickory woodland, oak savannah, red cedar savannah, old-field thicket, and open alvar communities. Forty-four provincially rare and 33 regionally rare plant species are found at Stone Road Alvar.

Alvar is an Estonian word that describes a limestone plain covered with scattered vegetation that endures extreme wet and dry conditions. Alvars have their own unique flora adapted to the extreme heat, variations in moisture and rocky calcareous soil.

Most of the open area is characterized by scattered shrubs and limestone outcrops. Here, visitors may find small elusive plants such as Smaller Skullcap, False Pennyroyal, and Narrow-leaved Vervain. From late July to early September, all of the open areas are ablaze with the yellow of Coneflowers, purple of Nodding Wild Onions and white clusters of the Whorled Milkweed.

The scattered oaks are predominantly Chinquapin Oaks which, despite their stunted appearance, are often well over 100 years old. Of special note is the local abundance of Downy Wood Mint, a plant that in Canada is confined to Pelee Island.

In the open oak-hickory woodlands near the road, visitors may find Miami Mist, a rare member of the waterleaf family, blooming in profusion in late May. Ontario Nature's Stone Road Alvar Nature Reserve boasts two plant species that occur nowhere else in Canada, the Navel-shape Corn-salad and Yellow Horse-gentian.

Stone Road Alvar is also prime habitat for the endangered Blue Racer snake. As well, five rare butterflies occur quite commonly at Stone Road - the spectacular Giant Swallowtail, the Tawny Emperor, Acadian Hairstreak, Hackberry Butterfly, and Sachem Skipper. Carolinian bird species such as the Yellow-breasted Chat and the Blue-gray Gnatcatcher like the property's dense thickets.

Ontario Nature acquired the Stone Road Alvar nature reserve through a campaign spearheaded by Dr. Stewart Hilts and Donald Kirk. It was financed through a loan from the Ontario Heritage Foundation, and then paid back by

generous donations from Federation members, local naturalist clubs and funds made available through the Carolinian Canada Program.

The Essex County Field Naturalists' Club are the official stewards of the Stone Road Alvar nature reserve.

Pelee Island has two provincial nature reserves - Fish Point and Lighthouse Point - both are worth visiting. Don't forget to visit the Pelee Island Heritage Centre in the township hall at the west dock.

### ***How to get there***

Stone Road Alvar is located on Pelee Island which can be reached by ferry from Leamington or Kingsville from late March to early December. Book ahead if you plan to take your vehicle across. On the island, take the Shore Road south to East-West Road. Follow this road east for 4 km until you come to a densely wooded area on the south side of the road. Turn south onto Stone Road and continue just past the old schoolhouse on the right side. Here there is a narrow opening in the thickets, where a path has been established. **WALK ON THE GRAVEL NATURE TRAIL ONLY** to help protect the rare, fragile species that are present.