

Turn the Lights Out!

As the anniversary for the blackout approaches and events such as the Muskoka Star Party are gearing up, it is important to understand why so many people are concerned about the loss of the natural sky.

One poorly understood effect of light pollution is its effect on wildlife.

Light pollution is the emission of artificial light into areas where it is unneeded or unwanted. It is mainly caused by obtrusive outdoor lighting that casts light sideways or upwards into the sky where it is wasted.

To get an idea of how prevalent light pollution is, take a look at the lighting fixtures on you and your neighbors' properties. Any fixture that shines all or a portion of its light to the sides rather than towards the ground pollutes the sky with excess light and inhibits your ability to appreciate a natural night sky.

As outdoor lighting expands into new areas, it illuminates and affects habitats that are already threatened by other disturbances.

The length of light and dark influences the activities of many plants and animals. Changing or extending the length of day using artificial lighting disrupts natural diurnal rhythms of organisms and can even be the cause of deaths.

Light pollution is particularly harmful to nocturnal and migratory animals as well as to animals in flight. It is the period of uninterrupted darkness that controls most of the activities of these animals, and artificial disruptions can induce unnatural activities and behaviour.

While light may help some animals move during darkness, it causes disorientation in others, resulting in exhaustion or "reckless" behaviour. Some insects, migrating toads, and salamanders are attracted to light, and then aimlessly fly or walk around the light source, increasing their likelihood of being preyed upon or run over.

Moths are also attracted to light at night. Light can interfere with a female moth's ability to attract a mate and find prime spots to lay her eggs, leading to her larvae having inadequate conditions to develop.

Outdoor lighting has also been found to disrupt moth navigation and to suppress flight, ultimately interfering with mating, dispersal, and migration. Moths attracted to light also face increased exposure to predators such as bats and birds.

Most frogs are predominantly nocturnal and reproduction, foraging, predator avoidance, and social interactions are all affected when a dark area is illuminated artificially. Nocturnal salamanders also face similar problems.

The presence of artificial lighting on beaches and roadways near nesting areas greatly affect the survival of newborn turtle hatchlings. This lighting often confuses hatchlings and causes them to crawl inland instead of towards water, where they can get run over, predated upon, or die from dehydration.



Millions of birds are killed each year by crashing into windows or die from exhaustion after becoming confused while trying to navigate by artificial lights instead of the stars.

The first thing you can do to combat the effects of artificial lighting on Muskoka's wildlife is to simply turn out your lights. Only use outdoor lights when necessary and ensure that you are not wasting energy and harming the natural environment by allowing light to spill up into the sky.

And enjoy the natural night sky.

