Thickson's Woods Land Trust

Summer 2016
Newsletter 50

A Walk on the Wild Side; Nature in the Woods and Meadow

We're extremely pleased to announce that **Warren Toaze**, one of our most popular acts at the **Nature Festival**, is back to confound visitors with his sleight-of-hand. You may think you've figured out his secrets during the two years he's been away, but I'm willing to bet he's got some new tricks up his sleeve, or under his hat. I'd like to think that he could work his magic to keep the rains away, but that would be too great a responsibility to place on even his broad shoulders. Come to think of it though, it was during his absence that the rains came down, so maybe he does know how to control the weather.

Also returning after a year's absence is geologist **Norbert Woerns,** who will show you rocks from around the world and enthusiastically answer all your mineral questions.

One of last year's most popular destinations was the **Enchanted Garden**. **Warren Brailsford** has been busy ever since creating new hidden secrets to enthrall one and all. On the way to the Enchanted Garden, look for an opportunity to discover some of the smaller surprises in the nature reserve. Members of the **Matt Holder Environmental Education Fund** will help you explore the miniature world of insects, spiders, seeds and sand.

Back again are the always popular wildlife shows, **Creepy Critters** and **Speaking of Wildlife**. Volunteers from **Home Depot** will help budding carpenters build creations to carry proudly home.

You might get a chance to release a warbler or chickadee after **Elizabeth** and **Roger** have placed a numbered aluminum identification band on its leg at the bird banding station. **Carolyn** and **Steve** will show you many shapes and sizes of insects.

Skilled artists at the face-painting table will decorate your smile with intriguing designs.

At noon **"Trilogy"** will entertain you with tunes about nature while you enjoy lunch by **"Fine Dining"** and yummy goodies from the bake table. And don't forget to check to see if your bid on some treasure at the silent auction is still in line to win.

Eastern Chipmunk (*Mike McEvoy*).

Thickson's Woods Land Trust, Box 541 Whitby, Ontario L1N 5V3
Tel: (905) 725-2116. Email: nature@thicksonswoods.com. Web Site: www.thicksonswoods.com
Charitable Registration # 11926 3176 RR0001

COMING EVENTS

Saturday September 17

Birds, Beavers and Butterflies Nature Festival

9:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

Don't forget to get out your favourite recipe and cook up something yummy for the bake table. And if you have any nature-related treasures you'd like to donate for the Silent Auction, call **Dianne** at **905-433-7875**.

Saturday November 26

Garlic Mustard Dig

9:00 a.m. to noon.

Dress for the weather and bring your favourite tool for uprooting this persistent invader. Walk east from the big green sign at the southwest corner of the meadow, along the Waterfront Trail, to the path leading south into the woods.

Fond Memories of Thickson's Woods and "Camp X" Marsh

by Jim Richards

Many years ago (OK, about 63 of them in fact), as a youngster, I was engaged in the school-boy hobby of collecting birds' eggs. I did not own binoculars and I didn't have a field guide, but then both my eyesight and hearing were a little sharper than today. The Oshawa Public Library had a copy of Peterson though, and when I found a previously unknown species, I would make a sketch, accompanied by field notes, then visit the public library.

Along with a friend, also engaged in the "hobby" we visited Camp X Marsh (Corbett Creek) at Thickson's one June, after riding our bikes from north Oshawa. With sealer jar rubbers around our pant legs (to guard against leeches), we waded around the marsh looking for nests. A new species for me that June morning in 1954 was the Least Bittern. I recall reaching the east end of the marsh and having security guards from Camp X descend on us, wanting to know what we were doing there. We didn't want to say "Looking for birds," so we said "Looking for turtles," and they told us to leave.

Not knowing much about the breeding habits of birds back then, we visited the following year in early May. Not many birds were nesting in the marsh at that time, but we did discover Thickson's Woods. Needless to say, it was still dominated by tall, handsome White Pine trees. I recall finding a nest of Loggerhead Shrikes in a hawthorn, about where the 'meadow' is today.

In addition, we discovered that there were countless species of songbirds we had never experienced before, as this was the peak of spring migration. It was a wonderland for birds and there were very few if any birders then. Thanks to a few people many years ago who started the 'Trust', it's still great, only there are more visitors!

It was then, about age 12, that I asked for a pair of binoculars and a Peterson Field Guide for my birthday (my ability to sketch was not all that good...). That ruined my dad's dream of turning me into a ball player. After that first spring at Thickson's Woods, I was 'hooked' on birding, and have been fortunate to remain so up to the present time. I should mention too, that back in the 50's, you hid your bins under your jacket or in a knapsack as you certainly didn't want fellow teenagers to know you were a "bird-watcher."

Least Bittern (*Jim Richards*).

Birding at Thickson's Woods in the 1960s

by Ron Tozer

I have kept detailed notes of my bird and other nature observations since 1955, when I was 14 years old and joined the Oshawa Naturalists' Club as a charter member. I do not know when club members started bird-watching ("birding" had not been invented yet!) regularly at Thickson's Woods, but some of us certainly did so by the early 1960s. We knew it was a "hotspot" for migrating birds. A couple of "life birds" that I saw in those years at Thickson's still remain vivid memories. Seeing a species for the first time is an exciting birder experience that can never be repeated, at the risk of sounding like Captain Obvious!

I was birding at Thickson's Point (as it was then called) with Ora Sands and A.A. (Al) Wood on the morning of 9 May 1962. I got a quick glimpse of a male Hooded Warbler in thick vegetation, a bird I had never seen before and which was much rarer in this area than it is now. In my excitement to get my companions "on the bird", I momentarily could not even remember its name! I blurted out to Ora and Al, "I will show you in the book!" Much to my relief and theirs, we all eventually got good looks. George Scott, my birding mentor back then, came to Thickson's in late afternoon that day and saw the bird as well. Others observed it at least three times the next day.

Hooded Warbler (*Jim Richards*).

Orange-crowned Warbler (*Jim Richards*).

Another "lifer" was the Orange-crowned Warbler that I saw at Thickson's on 12 May 1963. My notes show "a great influx of birds" that day. I was out from 8:30 am to 9:00 pm, recorded 105 species, and visited "Thickson's Point, Whitby, Scott's Marsh, Phillip Murray Woods, Bonnibrae Point, Beaton's Point (Oshawa Second Marsh) and Ghost Road Bush." I was at Thickson's Woods from 8: 30 to 11:00 am and observed 14 warbler species, including the Orange-crowned. In my journal, I carefully documented its overall greenish colour and yellow under-tail coverts.

During the many years since, I have had lots of great birding days in Thickson's Woods. All those who have made this possible through their efforts to preserve it are to be highly commended.

GIFTS THAT WILL LAST FOREVER

Metres of the nature reserve have been saved in the name of:

Carrie and Lurana

Victor Parsons

Thank you to everyone who gave a friend or loved one a share in this living legacy — a gift that will last forever!

On our website we recognize all past donations to honour friends and loved ones

News from the Matt Holder Environmental Education Fund

by Phill Holder

It seems that I spend more time at Thickson's Woods than at home these days! This wonderful spring and summer have given the opportunity to add a considerable amount of information to our understanding of the reserve's biodiversity.

We now have a static bat detector that has the most advanced technology in bat call recording. Located high in the woods, it switches itself on at dusk and off at dawn and records every bat that flies within range. We have collected hundreds of gigabytes of data that will be analyzed during the winter. We will have definitive identification of all the bats that visited the reserve this year and although our most common bat is the Big Brown, we have recorded six of the eight Ontario species, including two species at risk, Little Brown Bat and Tri-colored Bat, both designated as endangered.

We have continued hosting bat walks with **Toby Thorne** and a butterfly walk with **Jenna Siu**, which coincided with the completion of the pollinator garden constructed by **Roots and Wings Home School Co-operative**.

Our new Pollinator Garden and our first blooms - Blue Vervain (*Phill Holder*).

A lot of hard work went into the creation of the garden, which was sponsored by the fund, and although the dry summer was a challenge, there are lots of flowers on many of the plants. Hopefully, next year, when the garden is in full bloom, many more butterfly species will visit.

Jenna Siu showing a Cabbage White Butterfly to budding naturalist Evelyn, during our Butterfly Walk (*Eileen Nixon*).

Very few snakes have been recorded, although we were encouraged when **Nigel Parr** found a yearling Milk Snake during one survey trip.

Yearling Milk Snake (*Nigel Parr*).

This hot, dry summer has been a bonus for the crew studying moths, and Thickson's Woods continues to amaze us. Last year we recorded and released 650 moth species, which was spectacular. At the time of writing the newsletter we have breezed past the 900 mark and are well on our way to the original (some said impossible) goal of 1000 species. "Mothing" is tremendous fun and we are rewarded every session with some amazing new species. David Beadle, Mike King, Dennis Barry, Margaret Carney, Mike McEvoy, Phil Reyenga and I make up the "TW Moth Study Group" and it continues to be a joy.

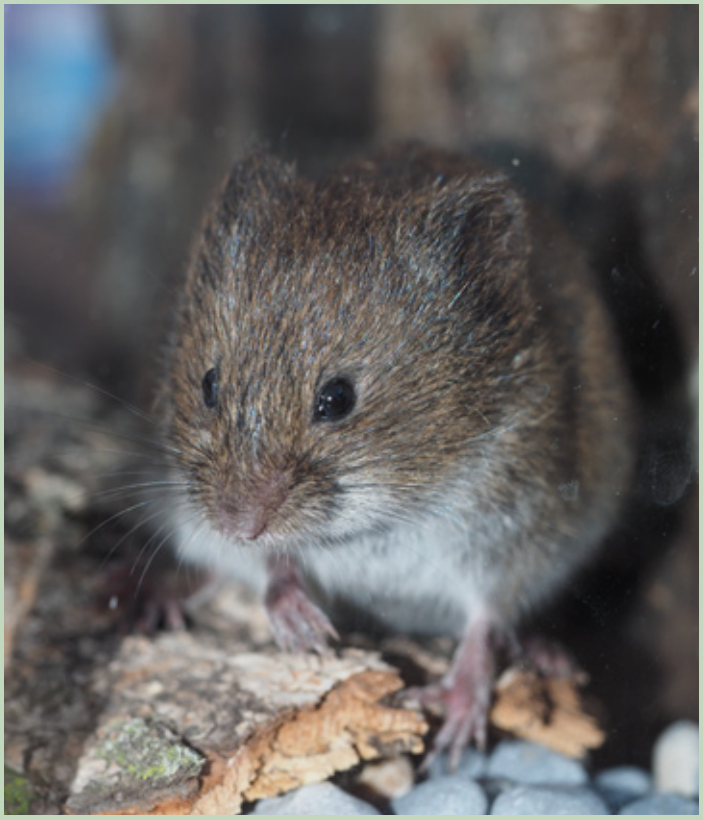
One of our latest species, Large Tolype (*Phill Holder*).

During one of our moth mornings in late May, Dennis Barry heard a Yellow-throated Warbler high up in the White Pines. David Beadle was quick to snap a few photographs, which was lucky, because the warbler spent most of its stay at the top of the pines, hidden from view. This is the fifth record since the species was first seen in the reserve in 1991.

An exciting addition to the bird checklist, if accepted by the Ontario Bird Records Committee, is a very rare Piping Plover that Glenn Coady spotted as it flew along the lakeshore, stopping briefly on the beach. The bird checklist total is now 317.

Yellow-throated Warbler, May 29, 2016 (*David Beadle*).

Talking of excitement – the latest research is a study of small nocturnal terrestrial mammals. We know about the raccoons, opossums, squirrels and skunks, but know little about the mice, shrews, moles and voles that come out after dark. We have a MNRF permit to live-trap this group of mammals, and on our first night had a 30% success rate in the traps. Mostly White-footed Mice, but we also caught Meadow Vole, Northern Short-tailed Shrew and a Masked Shrew, a great start to our study. **Fiona Reid** and **Nigel Parr** handle all the animals and take all the data, **Mike McEvoy** photographs the animals and **Diane McCurdy** and I assist with laying the trap lines. Collecting is not allowed in the reserve. All animals and insects are released unharmed at their point of capture.


Meadow Vole caught and released on August 26th 2016 (*Mike McEvoy*).

IN MEMORIAM

Recent donations have been made in memory of these special people:

Glenda Madoff
Betty O'Connor
Stan Skinner

We join their families and friends in mourning their passing, and acknowledge their unique contribution to the rich web of life on planet earth. On our website we recognize all past donations made in memory of friends and loved ones.

A Look Back at the History of Thickson's Woods

by Dennis Barry

In this 50th edition of Thickson's Woods News we thought it might be interesting to look back at what has happened since the journey to protect the woods began. Perhaps too, we should consider what went before.

A walk on the beach along the Lake Ontario shore reveals part of the history. The variety of rocks is surprising; a mixture of granite, quartz, limestone and oil shale, among others, provides clues to a violent past that helped shape the landscape.

Some 13,000 years ago, the space occupied by what is now Thickson's Woods Nature Reserve would have been beneath the waters of Lake Iroquois, the forerunner of Lake Ontario. Its shoreline was several kilometres to the north along the southern boundary of Brooklin .

Massive ice sheets that formed during the most recent glaciation scoured the landscape, bulldozing great quantities of soil and rock from far to the north. As the glaciers melted, much of the debris was deposited to form what we now know as the Oak Ridges Moraine. Smaller rocks and gravel formed the beach along the north shore of what became Lake Ontario.

The ridges and valleys in the woods itself may have formed as the lake gradually established its current footprint. Or they may have been shaped as water drained from the northwest into the depression that is now Corbett Creek Marsh. The floor of the marsh is gravel rather than mud, so it probably wasn't a kettle lake formed by the melting of a huge block of ice left behind after the main body of the glacier melted.

Initially there would have been no vegetation, just jumbled piles of mixed soil, sand and rock. The climate would have been brutally cold still, with intense winds blowing off melting ice sheets farther north.

During warmer parts of the year, more southerly winds would have carried spores and seeds of hardy plants from gradually vegetating regions farther from the retreating glaciers. Pioneering species would have been those now found in Canada's high arctic. Lichens would have started to grow on rocks. Gradually, low, well-insulated plants such as cotton grass and hardy wildflowers would have established a foothold in sheltered depressions in the thin layer of soil that thawed a bit deeper each warm season. Dwarf shrubs such as arctic birch and willow, and a variety of grasses and sedges, would have gained a foothold.

Small insects blown in on the wind might have been the first animal life, but eventually birds such as

Arctic Cotton Grass, top, and Woolly Lousewort (*Mike McEvoy*).

Muskox (*Mike McEvoy*).

ptarmigan would have been able to find enough food to survive. Large mammals such as woolly mammoths, musk oxen and caribou would have arrived, at least seasonally, to take advantage of the new food source. Large predators such as saber-toothed cats and wolves, and eventually humans, would have followed the herds of herbivores.

Long before the first Europeans appeared in the 16th century, there was probably a farming community of Iroquoian people living on the higher ground between the two branches of Corbett Creek north of the marsh. Their longhouses, thatched with elm bark, would have been surrounded by a defensive palisade of tall stakes. Outside would have been clearings planted to corn, squash, beans and possibly tobacco.

The land beyond their clearings would have been unbroken forests of maple, beech, oak, white pine, hemlock and yellow birch. The creek valleys and marsh edges would have had elm, white cedar and willows.

Corbett Creek Marsh would have been home to black ducks, green winged teal, trumpeter swans and Canada geese, their numbers swelled by countless migrating waterfowl during spring and fall. A dominant bird in the surrounding beech and oak forests would have been the passenger pigeon, appearing in millions whenever a bumper crop of mast offered abundant food for their young. Wild turkeys would have wandered the woods as well, feeding on the bounty, and wood ducks might have come to share the feast.

Many birds present today would have been absent. There were no mourning doves or cardinals, no mockingbirds or house finches, and, of course, no starlings or house sparrows. Grassland species such as savannah sparrows, bobolinks and meadowlarks would have been absent, or restricted to clearings resulting from agriculture, forest fires or abandoned beaver ponds.

Mammal populations, too, would have been much different, including moose, elk and perhaps woodland caribou, with their associated predators, cougars and wolves. White-tailed deer would have been much less numerous than they are today. There would have been smaller carnivores such as lynx and fisher, but no coyotes.

With the arrival of European settlers, the lands surrounding Thickson's Woods underwent dramatic change as the forests were rapidly felled and burned to make way for farm fields.

Savannah Sparrow (*Sherwood McLernon*).

John Corbett settled on the property in 1830, officially Lot 20, Broken Front Concession, East Whitby Township. The large white pines in the woods itself were spared because they were reserved for possible use as masts for sailing ships in the British navy. The area was known as Corbett's Point and the road as Corbett's Side Road. The wide beach in front soon became a popular picnic spot. There are many photos in the Whitby Archives at the public library showing outings, including the 1913 picnic of the Chevrolet Motor Company.

By the early 1900s the area surrounding Thickson's Woods was still a series of farms raising a mixture of livestock and crops. Part of what we now call "The Meadow" was an orchard with heritage apples such as northern spy and greenings. In 1919 the land that included the woods was purchased by James Norman Thickson, who subdivided part of it, bulldozed some roads through and sold off about 30 cottage lots.

In 1942 the farm to the northeast of the marsh became the home of Camp X, a secret spy-training and code-breaking centre. Secret agents trained there played a major role in the liberation of Europe during World War II. The marsh, the lakeshore and, no doubt, the woods itself became part of their training ground, as they learned the deadly skills necessary to carry out their missions in occupied Europe.

Following the opening of the St. Lawrence Seaway in 1959, water levels in Lake Ontario were controlled by dams at the exit of the lake into the St. Lawrence River. Higher water levels in the lake during winter and spring, when water was stored to operate locks during the shipping season, has since contributed to erosion of the beach in front of the woods.

During the 1960s Thickson's Woods became a popular birding destination for members of the recently formed Oshawa Naturalists' Club, among others. The club had an opportunity to purchase the property in 1967, but couldn't manage to do so.

In the late 1960s Michael Zygocki, an Oshawa home builder, bought the woods and the roadways for possible future development. In 1983 he sold timber rights to a lumber company out of Guelph. They felled and removed sixty-six huge white pines. That galvanized concerned naturalists to take action. Mr. Zygocki was persuaded to sell the woods. He insisted on selling the roadways as well, since they were of no use to him without the land behind.

A $30,000 down payment was raised, Thickson's Woods Heritage Foundation was established, and a fund-raising campaign began to find the necessary money to pay off the $60,000 mortgage plus interest.

Yes, I want to help protect Thickson's Woods Nature Reserve. It's a very special place!
We need spaces where plants and animals can thrive and people can relax in nature.

Here is my tax-deductible contribution of $ _____ Date _____

Name _____ Address _____

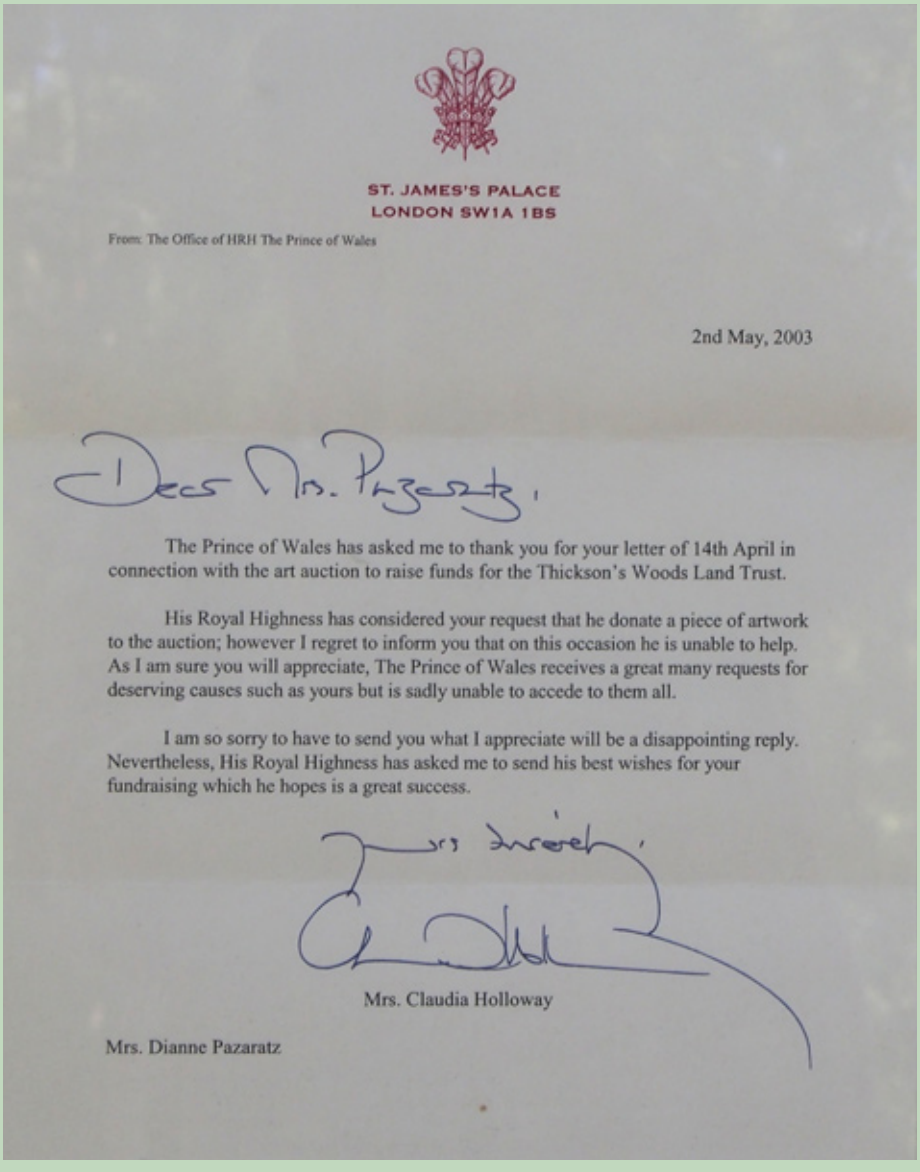
City _____ Prov/State _____ Postal Code _____ Tel. _____

e-mail _____

Cheques can be payable to Thickson's Woods Land Trust.
Mail to: Box 541 Whitby, ON L1N 5V3 (Charitable Registration # 0674382-52-13)

Rubbing Shoulders with Royalty

by Margaret Carney



I don't remember how the topic of royalty came up in conversation. But the next time I was at TWLT board member Dianne Pazaratz's house she took me to her computer room and showed me a framed letter hanging on the wall. Dated 2nd May, 2003, the gracious note from HRH the Prince of Wales' secretary, St. James's Palace, so nicely turned down Dianne's request for a piece of artwork for our meadow fund-raiser that it left me with a warm fuzzy feeling. I was as amazed by her chutzpah in writing to the prince as I was by His Royal Highness's encouraging response.

Dianne's story reminded me of my own brush with royalty, of the Canadian variety, during an art raffle to help purchase the woods in the 1980s. I guess it shows how desperate we were to protect Thickson's Woods that both Dianne and I went way out of our comfort zone, begging for art. I remember how jittery I felt when the famous, talented Robert Bateman wrote me back saying yes, he would donate a sketch of a red-tailed hawk to help our worthy cause. Totally naïve about the art world, I nervously wrote back saying we'd be happy to pay for postage when he sent it, plus I let him know when we might be home for delivery, as it likely wouldn't fit in Dennis's and my small rural mailbox. Bateman kindly and magnanimously had what turned out to be a painting, not just a sketch, shipped and put on display at two GTA galleries, greatly upping the sale of raffle tickets, and helping us retire the debt.

Warm fuzzy feelings for royalty? You betcha.

Thickson's Woods Nature Reserve

15th Annual

Birds, Beavers & Butterflies Nature Festival

Learn about nature from the experts!

Enjoy exciting activities - fun for all the family!

Saturday, September 17
9:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

Adults $5 Kids $2 Families $10 (Cash only)

More Festival Fun!
- Silent auction
- Yummy bake sale
- Refreshments by Divine Dining
- Nature art & gifts

Please note that for the protection of wildlife, dogs are not allowed in the nature reserve.

(Please lug-a-mug / water bottle.)

Join the Experts!
- Bugs and botany ID
- Bird banding
- Geology
- Guided nature walks

Special Events!

- Enchanted garden walk
- Build your own nature box
- Speaking of Wildlife 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m.
- Magic Show 11:00 a.m.
- Creepy Critters 12:00 Noon

For Kids 2 to 92!
- Face painting
- Wishing tree
- Hawk Watch
- Lunchtime Nature Concert

All proceeds support Thickson's Woods Nature Reserve.

Directions: from Hwy 401 in Whitby, take Thickson Road south to the Waterfront Trail. Follow the signs.

Info: 905-433-7875 or www.thicksonswoods.com E-mail: nature@thicksonswoods.com