

## Greenwings Take On Purple Loosestrife

By Barbara Edie

The Greenwing program is designed to get young people 17 years of age and under involved in projects that will increase their awareness and appreciation of wetlands and wildlife habitat. That's exactly what happened when 56 grade nine students from Lockport, Man. hit the ditches and waterways near their school to collect seed heads of a nasty weed called purple loosestrife.

"The local project was a perfect fit for our ecology unit that studies biomes and ecosystems," says Daryl Loeppky, the Lockport School teacher who helped organize the event. "Picking loosestrife and removing the weed from our wetlands has tangible benefits and a practical application. And it definitely raised awareness among the kids."

The kids were taking off their shoes, going into the water and really getting into it."

In addition to taking to the fields and getting some hands-on experience, the students were given information about wetlands and a video presentation about the menace of purple loosestrife.

The campaign worked well on many levels says Cory Lindgren, the Manitoba Purple Loosestrife Project coordinator. "When you consider that a mature purple loosestrife plant is capable of producing three million seeds in a year, removing those seeds reduces the spread of the plant," he explains. "The students worked on an area of a half mile long by three metres wide. That's literally millions of seeds removed."

Adds Lindgren, "Projects where any community group or wildlife organization can adopt a wetland or river-bank for half a day can make a difference to the environment." Add to that the increased public and community awareness and there is an even bigger impact, he says. "Only through community activities can we really get a handle on purple loosestrife."

The Lockport School project was part of the Greenwing Adopt-A-Class program, where individuals, corporations and foundations are invited to sponsor a class, youth group or an entire school division. This project was sponsored by the Shell Environmental Fund. The Lockport students enjoyed the

event so much that they are considering making it a regular fall outing, says Loeppky. Similar Greenwing projects were carried out with school groups in Saskatchewan, Alberta and another area of Manitoba, all supported by the Shell Environmental Fund, adds Dyck. They are planning many others for next year, including one in Ontario.

The purple loosestrife weed replaces all native vegetation, creating a dense purple landscape nearly devoid of wildlife. The weed arrived from Europe more than a century ago and has infested wetlands across North America. The problem is growing rapidly and dramatically disrupting the ecological balance. For more information about purple loosestrife, visit the Ducks Unlimited Web site at [www.ducks.ca](http://www.ducks.ca).



Shel Zalkewich

**Manitoba students collected over 600 pounds of purple loosestrife seeds at a recent Greenwing Adopt-A-Class outing.**

He adds that by telling others about their purple loosestrife adventure, these students will raise awareness in the community. "The majority of students had a lot of fun," says Loeppky. "It was a beautiful day and we created a contest between the two classes. All totaled, they picked 606 pounds of loosestrife seed heads."

"That's pretty good for a morning's work," adds Alvin Dyck, the Greenwing coordinator in Canada. "Educationally, projects like these are very important," he explains. "Exposure to introduced species, that is, those that do not belong, helps people realize that this (purple loosestrife) is a big problem. Personal experience and involvement can only create a better connection to the environment and appreciation of conservation."

Dyck says when the group of students arrived on the scene, the area was awash with the purple weed. That quickly changed. "When we left, you couldn't see the purple loosestrife anymore.

