

GETTING TO KNOW WILDLIFE



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Too often we extol the virtues of 'exotic' wildlife in other countries, while taking for granted and sometimes even showing disdain for those animals that live in our own backyard. Maybe this is just part of our human tendency to not place value on what we already have.

But, frankly, once you come to know more about local wildlife, you will find they are every bit as fascinating as those found in a tropical rainforest. Besides, urban wildlife has shown the resilience and adaptability that is needed to live with us. No mean feat. These animals are very much part of the mosaic that supports biodiversity, our life support system, in this region.

Last year, through this column, we brought you some interesting facts about local wild species, their natural history along with tips on how to better coexist. This year,

we will be sharing with you some of the personal experiences we have had with different species and individual animals when doing wildlife rehabilitation.

For anyone involved with wildlife, you walk a fine line when talking about experiences. Certainly, the Centre avoided contributing to anthropomorphic views in assigning human characteristics to animals. We have all seen those 'cute' photos, for example, of a rescued baby squirrel cuddled up with the family dog or someone hand-feeding a Canada goose. These depictions always made us cringe, not only because of the likely negative outcome for the animal but because it conveyed that we humans are not comfortable with wildlife being wild, unless we can somehow tame or domesticate it. And, that is sad.

On the other hand, we also deplore that wildlife are, at times, depersonalized and treated only as a

population to be used as a 'resource'. No doubt it is easier to justify doing what we want to animals if we can avoid treating them as individuals and as sentient creatures.

Our experience in rehabilitating wild species, however, showed us that these animals' basic needs were not that much different from our basic needs. That is after you strip away all our non-essential i-pads, cell phones and big screen TVs. What we both require is shelter in the form of a den, nest or house, the protection, nurturing and training of our young, a food source and habitat or a neighbourhood to live in.

So, we will be sharing with you over the coming season in this column some of the personal stories of individual animals we cared for when doing wildlife rehabilitation for many years. We think it will give you a new appreciation for local wildlife while celebrating our similarities and our differences.