

# GETTING TO KNOW WILDLIFE - Porcupine Mother Gives Birth



By Donna DuBreuil

President,  
Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife  
Centre – [www.wildlifeinfo.ca](http://www.wildlifeinfo.ca)

This is the tale of a special porcupine that arrived at the Centre one Christmas Eve when we did wildlife rehabilitation.

A concerned homeowner had observed the porcupine in an open field where it had barely moved for nearly a week. He knew something was very wrong so he brought it to the Centre. Our initial assessment indicated the porcupine was experiencing weakness in its hind end but there were no clues as to what was causing the problem.

So, it was off to the vet where x-rays showed, to our relief, that there were no breaks or fractures to be found. Feeling puzzled as to why the porcupine was unwilling to climb, yet forever optimistic in the possibility of second chances, we continued to care for the porcupine in a large indoor cage

for the duration of the winter.

Still determined to give the porcupine more time, once spring came, we set her up in an even larger outdoor cage with several trees and fresh branches thinking this might inspire her to rise to the occasion and begin to climb.

To our dismay, she still wouldn't climb. So after months of getting to know this wondrous creature, it was with heavy hearts that we had to make the difficult decision to have her euthanized. A porcupine unable to climb a tree clearly could not be released.

On the eve of April 23rd, the night before her scheduled vet appointment to be euthanized, fate took an unexpected twist when the porcupine gave birth to a beautiful 595 gram baby. To witness such an extraordinary event and see mom caring for and nursing her little one was very moving.

But, even more of a miracle was the fact that one morning a week later, both the mother and

baby had climbed one of the trees and were perched together with the baby softly murmuring as the mother cleaned its face.

We waited for several months to make sure that the mother's climbing ability remained strong before releasing them together on the large wooded property of one of our foster volunteers.

Months later, we heard a possible explanation for the adult porcupine's inability to climb. Sciatic nerve pain during pregnancy due to the pressure placed on it by the growing uterus can lead to pain, numbness and weakness in the legs, explaining the porcupine's unwillingness to climb. The baby's timely entry into the world not only saved its life but the mother's life as well.

This is still the height of the wildlife birthing season. Always check the website below before taking any action that you may regret.