



Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre

Newsletter Spring 2010

LIVING WITH WILDLIFE

The Unwarranted Killing of Coyotes

The City of Ottawa responds to an average of 300 calls for dog bites each year. Number of coyote attacks? Zero. So how does one explain the 'wild west' coyote killing contests this past winter in Ottawa? You can't blame the media entirely for the debacle. Some of it has to do with commercial and political interests, part just a throwback to the primitive fear some people have about wildlife.



photo courtesy Michael Davies

Unfortunately, fear, even though irrational, has a way of spreading as the subsequent killing of the Greenboro coyotes demonstrates. These animals were part of a pack that had lived in the area without incident for a number of years and many felt their killing was a reactionary and unwarranted response.

Dozens of letters to local papers and city councillors denounced the attack on coyotes in Ottawa. The majority of people who spoke at a meeting in Osgoode stated they have lived with coyotes for years without a problem and were much more concerned about stray bullets from coyote hunters trespassing on their properties than they were about coyotes. Rural residents urged that just as livestock have to be protected so too do family pets.

A Wildlife Strategy for Ottawa - A More Progressive Approach

Frustrated with the negative response to wildlife concerns and the growing embarrassment it was causing Ottawa from across the country, community and environmental groups along with a number of city councillors proposed a more progressive approach.

"The Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre has been urging the city to adopt a comprehensive Wildlife Strategy for many years. While other cities in North America have developed 'Living with Wildlife' programs during the last decade, Ottawa, in spite of its substantial amount of green space and natural habitat, has not done so", said Donna DuBreuil of the Centre.

College ward councillor, Rick Chiarelli, proposed the initial motion, stating *"the pressure for a Wildlife Strategy has been a long-standing one but it's the current coyote controversy that has persuaded many people that Ottawa must adopt*

a more progressive and proactive approach to wildlife issues."

Wildlife Strategy – Approved by Ottawa City Council, February 24, 2010

Motion

Moved by Councillor Peggy Feltmate
Seconded by Councillor Alex Cullen

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that staff be directed to develop a comprehensive and integrated wildlife strategy for the City of Ottawa – included in a biodiversity strategy (or like product), centered on wildlife-sensitive planning, with a focus on public education and awareness programs – and involve appropriate City departments, the National Capital Commission (NCC), the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR), other relevant agencies and community stakeholder organizations in its development and implementation, including protocols to be required in conditions of plans of subdivision and site plans, and that said strategy go forward to a joint meeting of the Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee and the Planning and Environment Committee for discussion.

The strategy would i) include all species, recognizing in nature everything is connected ii) be anchored in wildlife-sensitive planning and deal with human-wildlife conflicts through community awareness and public education programs iii) bring community stakeholder organizations together with appropriate agencies to develop and deliver these programs.

According to West Carleton-March Councillor, Eli El-Chantiry, *"there is wide support for this initiative from rural and urban communities as shown by motions from the City's Rural Issues Advisory Committee, the Environmental Advisory Committee and the Forests and Greenspace Advisory Committee along with*

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Editorial

A New Era for Wildlife



The City's commitment to develop a comprehensive Wildlife Strategy is welcome news, even if long overdue.

One of the key principles of the Strategy is that it must include all wildlife and take an ecosystem approach, not attempt to 'manage' a single species, as happened this past winter with respect to coyotes.

People have also made it clear that they want community stakeholder organizations involved in this process. In the past there has been simply too little oversight and accountability for outcomes when wildlife concerns were left exclusively to interagency groups.

The killing of the Greenboro coyotes was controversial because the City of Ottawa and Ministry of Natural Resources field response talks about removing 'habituated' coyotes. It poses the question as to who decides what is habituated and on what basis. Is just seeing a coyote now reason to kill it? There are plenty of people who regularly see coyotes and have done so for years who would strongly object.

There needs to be more informed judgement applied. For example, people will continue to see coyotes more often during the fall and winter months. Coyotes are simply following their primary diet of mice that move closer to our heated homes over the winter, not stalking our women and children.

The reference made by an MNR biologist at a meeting in Osgoode that only 'bad' coyotes would be targeted for removal is naïve. Coyotes are neither bad nor good, they are simply reacting to our behaviour. By not intentionally or unintentionally feeding coyotes and by taking responsibility for protecting our pets and livestock, we eliminate the potential conflict.

Fortunately, the majority of the public get it. 'It's a people problem, not a coyote problem.' Another example of why a coyote response needs to be part of the City's integrated Wildlife Strategy.

Donna DuBreuil
President, OCWC

Motherhood is Hard Work!



4 week old
Grey squirrels

By Kate MacNeil

Just like us, Grey squirrel moms have been busy getting ready for spring. In February they were working hard to find a safe place to have their babies. As early as the first of March, 3-5 naked, eyes closed young can be born.

Grey squirrels often nest in impressive tree top dreys made from leaves and sticks. Unfortunately, these nests are very exposed in the early spring as there is no foliage to conceal vulnerable young from predators.

It is for this reason these clever creatures seek out alternative shelters for a temporary safe spot for their babies. This may include a garden shed, a chimney, an attic or even under a BBQ cover or grill, especially when dealing with Red squirrels. Regardless of where they move in, mom squirrel still makes a nest to keep her young warm and safe. She can use grass, leaves, filling from patio furniture and some of her own fur. She spends much of her day feeding and cleaning her helpless young.

Squirrels develop at a quick pace and by the time they are 4 weeks old they are fully furred and their eyes are starting to open and by 8 weeks they are mobile and active, and coming out with mom. In most cases, by this time mom will move them to a more natural setting.

So if you have an unexpected resident this spring, remember to give a grace period- it helps the squirrels and ensures you are not left with helpless babies.

If you are having a conflict with wildlife, before you take an action, check out www.wildlifeinfo.ca for advice.

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support from the Greenbelt Coalition of Canada's Capital Region and numerous letters from residents across the city."

Nick Stow, a Senior Planner in Land Use & Natural Systems at the City of Ottawa will be the lead on the Wildlife Strategy. It is expected that a committee will be struck shortly to get on with the task. "While it took the unwarranted deaths of area coyotes to move forward with a Wildlife Strategy, we are relieved that this initiative is finally underway. We thank all those who lent their voice to help make this happen and we will be regularly reporting to you on what we believe will be positive developments", said Donna DuBreuil of the Centre.

Animal Stories

Even though we no longer do wildlife rehabilitation, the animals we have helped over the years are never far from our minds. In fact, having had the privilege of caring for these special animals has reinforced our commitment to giving people a better understanding of them.

FRED WAS ONE SMART LITTLE FOX

By Donna DuBreuil

The little red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*) was found in a ditch, close to where his mother had been killed by a car. The vixen had been hit while moving her offspring and this tiny fox, save for several scrapes, had been lucky enough to have been thrown clear.

Terrified and shaking with fear, he would lunge making threatening noises but which sounded more like a feeble sneeze. We knew we had to overcome this fear and meet his need for warmth, food, shelter, and a sense of security – the primary needs of all young animals including the human animal – to ensure normal social development.

Thus, Gary and I took “Fred” home for the first leg of his rehabilitation. He quickly adapted, accepting me as a temporary replacement mom. Barely four weeks old, it was fascinating to watch his early development and learn just how much a fox’s behaviour is instinct – bred in the bone so to speak. Even without siblings, his play routines involved sneaking up and jumping on an old sock and wrestling it into submission or grabbing some treasure and frantically searching for a place to cache it.

Observing the differences in Fred’s response to Gary and me taught us about the relationship between the kits and their parents – the dog fox and vixen. It is in late January or early February that red foxes (often monogamous) court and mate. After a gestation period of approximately 52 days, the kits are born. The average litter contains five helpless, small kits weighing less than a quarter of a pound, explaining why the vixen stays with them so constantly, acting as a thermal blanket in the still frozen ground of March. During this time, the dog fox brings food to the vixen and continues to share parenting responsibilities



Fred taught us that ninety percent of a fox’s behaviour is pure instinct, bred in the bone so to speak.

until well after the young are weaned and forging on their own.

This early bond between the kits and vixen explained the attachment that Fred developed with me. Even after he moved into the Wildlife Centre and had exposure to other people, he would emit a strange melodic greeting call when he heard my voice. It would be followed by an exuberant welcome where he would circle around me, crouched low to the ground, with tail moving furiously, ears flat back, and a facial expression best described as a lopsided grin before attempting to nudge at the corners of my mouth with his muzzle. This would be capped by rolling over on his back with legs up in the air all of which is identical to the food-begging and submissive behaviour shown by young foxes to their parents in the wild.

The next leg of Fred’s care required the critical role of special foster volunteers – one of more than 80 families the Centre relied upon. Once Fred was joined by two younger orphaned foxes, they went to Calvin and Lise Franklin who had a large rural property. Calvin, an exceptional builder, constructed a huge cage complete with logs, a transplanted coniferous tree, an above-ground nesting box and a “starter” underground den which the foxes completed.

Once ensconced in his new lair, Fred assumed the role of older brother and protector to the two young foxes who retreated, when people were around, to their underground den. A fox’s diet is made up of small rodents, rabbits, occasional birds and insects so it was not surprising to see Fred react with lightning speed in grabbing a grasshopper that happened into his cage.

As the foxes grew older they became very wary of people except for Calvin and Lise, their caregivers. Although Gary and I only visited the foxes on two occasions over the summer, Fred’s remembrance of us did not wane. On our last visit, Fred showed me his old greeting behaviour before quietly sitting beside me. It was a special moment when he delivered several high-pitched yips, clearly intended to serve as a signal to the young foxes who came out for the first time to cautiously inspect me.

The foxes were released in late August and moved not far from the Franklin’s house to a ravine with a small creek where they occupied several old woodchuck holes. Appearing less frequently, they made the transition back to the wild with Calvin last seeing Fred and one of the younger foxes chasing each other around a tree one moonlit night like two flame-coloured torches.

'WITH A LOTTA HELP FROM

The Centre is very fortunate to have visionary individuals and organizations that are committed to wildlife and education programs along with an effective voice for progressive practices on behalf of wildlife in Ontario.

TONY AND ELIZABETH GRAHAM FUND WILDLIFE EDUCATION PROGRAM



Tony and Elizabeth Graham, founders of Tony Graham Toyota and community philanthropists, have given a \$10,000 donation to the Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre.

The gift will be used to help deliver the Centre's popular Wildlife Education Programs. *"It comes at a pivotal time when there is growing recognition that key to preserving biodiversity is the need to develop respect and appreciation for wildlife"*, says Donna DuBreuil, President.

Elizabeth and Tony have always loved animals and enjoy the abundant wildlife they see around their home on the Ottawa River.

"Watching the large numbers of Canada Geese gathering on the river each Fall is a particular thrill", says Elizabeth.

The Grahams have supported the aims of the Centre since it was established in 1987. They have rescued orphaned squirrels, sought advice on humane ways to resolve conflicts with groundhogs and given generous financial help to ensure that local wildlife receive assistance.

Their leadership on behalf of animal welfare and the environment is based on the same principles on which they've built a successful business as well as contributed to social and health needs in the community.

Elizabeth quotes William H. Johnson *"If it is to be, it is up to me"*. But like all suc-

cessful leaders, the Grahams realize that it is the building of a strong team that gets the job done.

When Tony's mother was a patient at Saint-Vincent Hospital they saw first hand how badly outdated the facility was and spear-headed a campaign to raise millions of dollars to make it into the first-class rehabilitation and long-term care hospital it is today. They recruited others to join the team. Debbie and Larry O'Brien took on the leadership for the next successful phase of the campaign with Elizabeth noting that *"just as Canada Geese*

rotate the lead in their long flights, so too can we benefit from enlisting partners".

The Grahams like to point out how very fortunate we are to live in a community that is so generous and feel it a privilege to 'do good when you are doing well'.

Seeking advice and involving others is a way of life for the family. Many years ago they joined the Canadian Association of Family Enterprise (CAFÉ) so that there would be a plan in place when it came time to turn over the business. Today, their son Patrick is the Dealer Principal of Tony Graham Toyota while daughter, Maureen, is in charge of Property Management and Training. They also have two grandchildren.

Elizabeth and Donna attended high school together and while they didn't know then that they would become such great animal lovers, they do now, swapping tales on various rescues.

Elizabeth tells the story of how, with several dogs already residing in the household, she met someone walking a dog in the local park and struck up a conversation. Learning that this was to be the dog's last walk because the owner could no longer care for it, Elizabeth handed the person her phone number and said *"just in case you have no other alternative, please call me before euthanizing this dog"*. Well, she received the call and took the dog in without having had a chance to talk to Tony who turned out not to be very pleased. Initially that is, for the dog that became known as Shadow, never left Tony's side. Shadow was a Lab mix that died in 2008 at the grand old age of 18.

Elizabeth and Tony explain that they support the Centre because *"we admire the work it does and want to make sure that good advice is available when we next have a question about a groundhog in our garden!"*

FROM OUR FRIENDS'

and the protection of the environment. Their support has made it possible for us to deliver exciting and timely

TD FRIENDS OF THE ENVIRONMENT FOUNDATION SUPPORTS CENTRE'S PROGRAMS



There are few environmental projects in our community that have not benefited from the support of the TD Friends of the Environment Foundation. Working with an Advisory Board of community volunteers, the Foundation has deep roots within the community.

The Foundation has contributed over \$50M in funds to over 18,400 grassroots envi-

ronmental projects in Canada since it was established in 1990, being one of the earliest corporate philanthropic endeavours to recognize the importance of the environment.

A recent grant of \$5,260 from the Foundation will assist the Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre in expanding its outreach into area schools and the community, providing young and old alike with the tools to live in greater harmony with nature.

The Centre's wildlife education programs are built on its more than 20 years of experience

in hands-on animal care for a range of species from river otters to deer and in helping to resolve over 100,000 human-wildlife conflict calls.

"The Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre would not have been able to serve wildlife or the community nearly as well were it not for the support of the TD Friends of the Environment Foundation over the years", said Centre President, Donna DuBreuil.



Carleton University Students held their 23rd annual Charity Ball in January. Since 1988 this remarkable initiative has raised over \$240,000 for local charities, each year selecting two charities, one with an environmental mandate and one with a humanitarian mandate. OCWC was fortunate to be the environmental charity selected this year. We are grateful to the students for their commitment to the community.



Angela (Pilon) Beauregard spent the summer of 2001 as a hard-working and well-liked Wildlife Intern at the Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre. She is now a teacher at Sacred Heart School in Cornwall. Fortunately for us, her interest and commitment to wildlife has not waned. Last Fall she chose the Centre as the beneficiary of a fund-raising project at her school. Angie recently sent a generous cheque from the teachers and staff at the school in the amount of \$630 for the Centre's education programs. Receiving the support of former students like Angie is the best endorsement we could ask for.

GRAHAM CREEK RESIDENTS PUT BIODIVERSITY PROTECTION INTO ACTION



The year 2010 is the International Year of Biodiversity. There is no better example that it is individual citizens who will lead the way in protecting biodiversity than that shown by residents along Graham Creek in Ottawa's west end.

Frustrated by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and the Rideau Valley Conservation Authority's advice that the only way to deal with beavers taking down trees around their homes was to trap and kill the animals, they opted for a different solution.

Homeowner, Kate Partridge, felt that killing the beavers was *"purely reactionary and would not provide a sustainable long term solution as this very suitable habitat would continue to attract other beavers, setting up a predictable cycle of lose trees, kill beavers, lose more trees, kill more beavers"*.

As an alternative, residents turned to the Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre and learned that beavers are a keystone species, critical to maintaining wetlands and the many species that depend on these areas. Based on the Centre's advice and assistance, residents volunteered their time and money last spring to wrap more

than 50 of the older larger trees to protect them from the beavers.

Then, last fall, with the support of College Ward Councillor, Rick Chiarelli and the City of Ottawa's Forestry Department, residents planted more than 150 trees along a challenging ravine at the back of their property. Not only will this repopulate the tree cover but many of the new trees selected are fast growing species that will provide both a food source for beavers and a root system that will help to stabilize the steep banks along the creek.

Jennifer Shepherd, landscape architect with the city's forestry services has indicated the

City will provide a further 150 trees this spring.

Councillor Chiarelli said *"while the property is owned by the city, residents of Graham Creek have put a lot of sweat equity and their own resources into the project, demonstrating the value of partnerships in protecting this exceptional natural area"*.

Graham Creek homeowner, Sue Twine, said *"the expertise and support of the Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre has helped residents to understand beavers' important contribution to the ecosystem and to be able to adopt progressive ways to resolve conflicts and live in harmony with nature. Overall, we will all benefit from the beauty of Graham Creek, including the hugely diverse wildlife."*

Plans to protect biodiversity will never become a reality unless there are citizens like the residents of Graham Creek who are prepared to bring them to life. *"This is truly a model project that shows you can preserve biodiversity through the initiative of homeowners and the cooperation of city governments like Ottawa"*, noted Donna DuBreuil. Hopefully, with the launch of the City's Wildlife Strategy, there will be many more such projects.



Grooming a new generation of environmental stewards



By Debbie Lawes

Kate MacNeil grew up with a passion for nature. Whether it was camping, hiking or just exploring the woods in her backyard most of her childhood was spent exploring nature. When Kate moved to Ottawa in 1998 she was worried that her connection with nature would be harder to maintain within the city. So when she heard about a Wildlife Intern position at the OCWC she was intrigued. Now 12 years later says she couldn't have wished for a more rewarding career path.

As Coordinator of the OCWC's Education Programs, Kate works with area students to share first-hand stories of urban wildlife and educate kids from all walks of life about the importance of living in harmony with nature.

"Kate not only brings real passion to her role but her versatility and talent are great assets to local wildlife and those of us who care about the natural world", says Donna DuBreuil, president of the Centre.

Her presentations are based on her years of experience working as an intern and as

coordinator of the OCWC. During this time, the Centre was caring for over 1000 animals each year and running the highly regarded conflict resolution service—a telephone hotline that assisted more than 100,000 people in dealing with wildlife problems humanely and effectively.

Today, Kate is applying that hands-on experience to teach children that raccoons, beavers, coyotes and other wildlife are a natural part of Ottawa's urban and rural landscapes that should be appreciated and understood, not feared.

"Children today sometimes don't have the opportunity to explore the wonders of nature, whether it be catching bugs, collecting pine cones or digging in the dirt to find worms," says Kate.

Given the opportunity, however, these same children jump at the chance to learn about wildlife. Through activities, games, hand-on materials (including antlers and porcupine quills) and the occasional field trip, Kate says children are very open-minded when it comes to understanding our connection to the natural world.

"When we meet children who have apprehension about animals, I find that once engaged, they are far more receptive than most adults when it comes to understanding why animals behave the way they do."

So far this year Kate has worked with over 700 students from 11 schools, doing over 30 presentations.

And these future stewards are more than willing to do their share. Kate recalls a Grade 2 student at Bayshore Catholic School who expressed concern about a neighbour trapping squirrels. When

Kate was handing out OCWC bookmarks, she asked for a second. *"She said she was going to put it on top of her neighbour's trap. She wanted to be sure he got the message."*

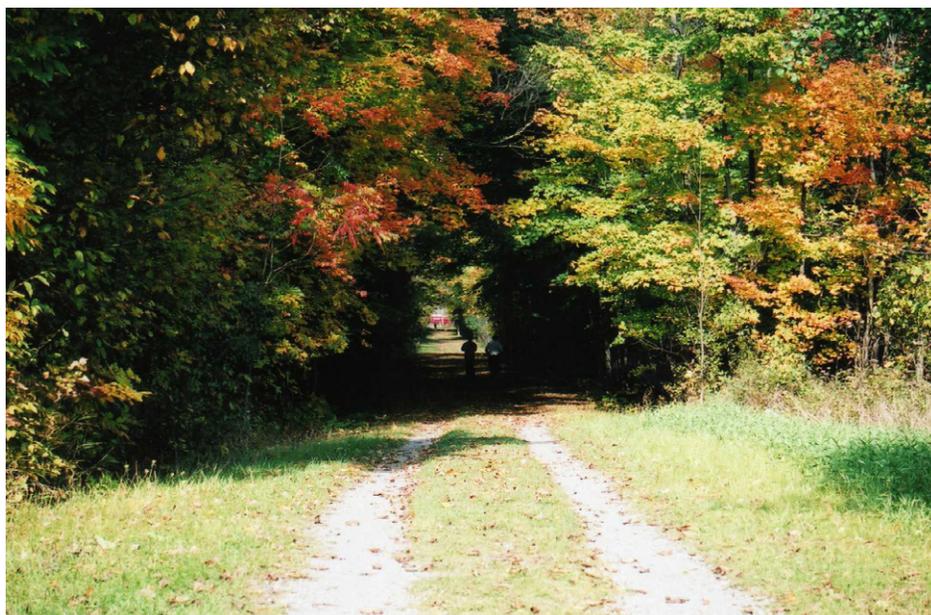
This spring Kate had the great pleasure of visiting her daughter Anna's Senior Kindergarten class. Anna was a wonderful assistant, helping pass puppets out to the students and helping work the power point. Perhaps the highest praise came from her daughter's words the next day when she said, *"Yesterday was the best day ever, I would love to renew that day again and again."*

The goal of the Centre's programs go beyond working with children and have been called model programs that *"successfully mobilize communities in sustainable and innovative approaches to living in harmony with nature",* said Sue Twine, a Graham Creek homeowner.

Kate laughs at the running joke at the Centre that whenever someone is having a wildlife problem, whether an animal has moved into their attic or an animal is eating their garden, people often act like this is the personal responsibility of Centre staff. Like it was one of our misbehaving children who have picked the tulips from their garden. The good news is that Kate does not mind at all. A big reason she works to promote an understanding of wildlife is because she is also concerned with those who may be having a wildlife problem. Kate explains that she takes so much enjoyment from nature, she wants others to be able to enjoy this amazing gift. To take joy and peace from nature and not feel threatened by it.



The Greenbelt Coalition of Canada's Capital Region – www.greenbeltcoalition.ca



The Greenbelt Coalition of Canada's Capital, of which the Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre is a member, is continuing to play an active role in the National Capital Commission's review of the 1996 Greenbelt Master Plan. The review is to be completed in 2011.

The Coalition was formed in 2008 to provide a community-based voice to ensure the preservation and enhancement of Ottawa's beloved Greenbelt. Its membership includes virtually all of the major environmental and

community organizations in the national capital region.

"We see the Greenbelt as a "natural oasis" with expansive views of the Capital, significant natural areas, and agricultural, forest and heritage landscapes – a model of biodiversity in an urban setting", said Sol Shuster, Chair of the Coalition.

Because such a significant proportion of the Greenbelt is natural environment it is crucial to wildlife. All the more so given that the extensive development surrounding the Greenbelt

has eliminated so much wildlife habitat. It is the primary reason the Centre believes there must be a strong voice for wildlife concerns within the Coalition.

"I am very pleased, thus far, that Coalition members are willing to listen to and give special consideration to wildlife issues", said Donna DuBreuil of the Centre. Included in the objectives or goals of the Coalition is protecting the Greenbelt functions and boundaries as a biodiversity reserve; enhancing natural areas within the Greenbelt and expanding the Greenbelt to complementary areas; preserving and protecting the Greenbelt's wild species; maintaining wildlife corridors and restoring those that are now broken; and providing a more informed understanding and respect for wild species, in order to mitigate human-wildlife conflicts.

Coalition Chair, Sol Shuster, worked very hard, along with the Centre, to see the Wildlife Strategy approved by the City of Ottawa. His argument that wildlife do not observe political boundaries was most effective, as was the support of other Coalition members, Heather Hamilton, Sterling Knox and Agnes Warda.

We hope you will check out the Coalition's website, www.greenbeltcoalition.ca, and add your name to its mailing list for notifications of activities such as walking, cycling and bus tours of the Greenbelt over the course of the year to raise awareness of the importance of maintaining and improving the continuity of the natural areas for wildlife and for us.

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www.wildlifeinfo.ca