



# Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre

SERVING THE COMMUNITY FOR OVER 25 YEARS

## Taking Urban Wildlife Issues to University Students

Changing attitudes about wildlife is often about changing people's perspectives, even slightly. It is like that example, used to explain a paradigm shift. You see a father on the subway with his two young boys who are acting up. People are judging his parenting skills or lack thereof. The father then says their mother just died, and he doesn't know how to deal with this and it seems the boys don't either. People instantly go from passing judgment on his parenting skills to feeling empathy for the family's loss. Having all the information really does impact the way we think about a situation.

This was our experience in our earliest education program, our hotline service. We used to handle thousands of calls each year from people having conflicts with wildlife. If a skunk moves under someone's shed and they had never seen a skunk before they were understandably concerned. Will the skunk ever leave? Could it spray their children? In many cases people wanted the animal gone immediately.

But when people got information about the biology and behaviour of the animal, their perspective would often change. Learning it was likely a mom looking for a safe place to have her babies gave them empathy for the animals. Learning that in a few weeks the babies would be bigger and mom would move them to a more natural area made the situation more manageable. The biggest relief would come when they learned skunks are laid back and spray only as a last resort.

While our Education Programs continue to evolve and the hotline service has been replaced by a website, we still believe that education is the key to changing attitudes about wildlife and helping people coexist with nature.

With our School Education Program well established, annually reaching over 1,000 Ottawa students, we have now expanded to include high school and university students. Reaching university students who will be tomorrow's professionals in such careers as teaching, municipal planning and environmental consulting and exposing them to urban wildlife issues is an exciting opportunity. To date we have presented to a range



of university courses like Natural Resource Management, History of Environmental Thought and Environmental Studies Research Seminars. Presentations are given on wildlife topics and involve discussions and group work. Feedback offered by students has been thoughtful with a variety of perspectives.

One session focused on Nature Deficit Disorder and the disconnect children today have with nature. Many of the students talked about the significant exposure they had to nature as children and how they could not wait to go outside to play. One person eloquently said nature was her "best friend" as a child. Students commented that playing outside was the way they socialized with friends, in contrast to today where kids socialize via facebook and texting. There was a common recognition that their exposure to nature was largely due to their parents, through activities like camping, nature hikes, walks in neighbourhood parks and even being "forced" to play outside. Learning this, we've incorporated it into our wide variety of community outreach programs for adults.

Another session included wildlife case studies on topical local issues for discussion, like the killing of a lynx that was seen hunting mice on the Gatineau Parkway. In examining the challenges and solutions for more progressive outcomes for wildlife, students offered insight such as our fear of wildlife is often unfounded and largely a result of misinformation and lack of education.

## Editorial

### A Tale of Two Cities



A well-respected naturalist living in another city in Ontario remarked to me recently, *"why is it that Ottawa has an environmentally-sensitive and well-educated population and yet government agencies in that city typically respond to wildlife concerns with guns and traps?"*

It would be very difficult to argue with his observation given the rash of recent wildlife incidents. In fact, the polarization between the public and officialdom, based on angry letters in the media, is growing.

Whether it was the lynx destroyed by the National Capital Commission in Gatineau Park without evidence that it was diseased, a family threatened by police in Chelsea because they urged an injured fawn be first assessed by a veterinarian rather than shot by the roadside or the elk that was killed by police in Ottawa because it wandered into the city via a natural corridor.

People from all walks of life want to talk about these concerns. In fact, even a day or two after the elk had been shot, I overheard conversations confirming how upset people were. They were not only sad, they were embarrassed. As Mohammed Adam, a member of the Ottawa Citizen's editorial board, expressed in 'If this elk never had a chance, no wayward animal does', *"we like to boast that one of the great attractions of Ottawa is how close we are to nature, so we have a duty to ensure that when an elk or such specimen calls, we don't reach out for the gun"*.

These and other incidents reaffirm how important the role of the Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre is. As the newsletter highlights, the Centre serves as a critical educational resource, not only in providing tools for progressive solutions to wildlife concerns but by engaging a variety of audiences, young and old, to reconsider and redefine our relationship with other species.

Donna DuBreuil  
President, OCWC

# Environmental Champions

It is a real pleasure to celebrate those individuals who contribute so heavily to a more informed understanding and appreciation for wildlife.



Photo: Courtesy of  
Diana Boudreault

While Donna Naughton is best known for her seminal work as the author of *"The Natural History of Canadian Mammals"*, as a biologist at the Canadian Museum of Nature, she has collected, illustrated, photographed and studied mammals in the lab and in the field for over thirty years.

One of Donna's jobs at the Museum was to answer questions from the public so anybody who phoned or emailed with a mammal question got sent to her desk. It gave her a pretty good idea of what the Canadian public wanted to know.

Given our Centre's focus on mammals, we were often frustrated by the fact that there was a great deal of information and interest in birds but not nearly so much on mammals. Thus, our appreciation for Donna Naughton's significant commitment and contribution.

*"The Natural History of Canadian Mammals"* began as a project over a decade ago when the Museum agreed it would be a

### Donna Naughton, Biologist and Author

great way to make a wonderful collection of mammal art more accessible to the public. The book has clearly been a labour of love for Donna who strove to write 800 words a day for seven years, even taking her laptop with her on vacation. The result is a comprehensive, beautifully illustrated and highly readable volume on mammals that was completed in time for her retirement in 2012.

The last book on mammals was A.W.F. Banfield's, published in 1974. Not only is this new book a lot more current but it includes information that the average reader will find very helpful, such as vocalizations and signs, showing there are a number of ways to mammal watch.

As Donna says, *"the ability to identify a creature and its attributes is necessary to make the leap to a real understanding and appreciation of it. At a time when the natural environment is more threatened by human activity than ever before, the decisions we make in the next few decades will be critical ones."*

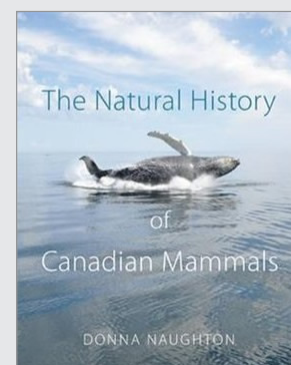
## A Unique Christmas Gift for the Wildlife Enthusiast in your Family

In fact, no wildlife lover should be without this exceptional book.

It is almost 800 pages long, covering Canada's 215 mammal species through photos, illustrations, maps and detailed stories. But it is much more than a scholarly work. Even when we are not using it as a relied-upon reference at the Centre, we find ourselves just flipping through the book, reading all about an individual species and thoroughly enjoying a fascinating detail about an animal we hadn't previously come across.

The book and its captivating photographs and illustrations is an absolute bargain at \$69.96 at the Museum of Nature or available on-line through Amazon, Chapters or Indigo Books for \$43.85.

It is sure to be a favourite with your family for years to come.





# Standing up for the Environment



Public Works and Government Services Canada continues to do just that on the Carling Campus.

Of the 370-acre campus, the majority of which is Core Natural Area within the National Capital Greenbelt, wetlands form a very important element.

It was in early April last spring when people using the trails on campus noticed a significant reduction in the level of water in these wetlands. It didn't take long to determine the cause. Someone had decided to erect a foot bridge as well as create a channel to redirect water away from the walking path. No doubt to keep their feet dry for the month or so each spring when the path has water on it.

However, what they didn't appreciate were the serious consequences this would have on the wetland. Draining it would affect countless hundreds of species of birds and mammals that rely on wetlands year round but none more so than during the breeding season.

Once brought to its attention, Public Works and Government Services Canada, including the Environmental Directorate and the Operations Team that manage the campus were very quick to rectify the problem. They removed the bridge and reinstalled a culvert to ensure that the wetland was returned to its original state.

It was only a matter of days before the wetland was once again teeming with life, to everyone's relief.

The Carling Campus is home to exceptional biodiversity. Our Centre has recorded sightings and/or tracks of 16 different species of mammals alone during our educational tours, winter tracking or general operations on campus over the past 21 years. One naturalist has even seen a fresh River Otter slide in the snow around the marsh. When you add the amazing species of birds along with aquatic life on campus, you begin to see its importance. It also supplies the vital linkages, both land and waterway connections, to the rest of the Greenbelt, that are crucial to sustain healthy wildlife and plant populations in this region.

Too often, human use of our natural areas trumps that of wildlife. Rather, Public Works and Government Services Canada is taking the higher road in protecting these vital areas and the biodiversity that depends on them.

## Wildlife Gets a New Recruit



Last winter a university professor we work with introduced us to Justine Payne, a Carleton University student. Justine is currently working on a honours Bachelor of Arts Degree in Environmental Studies with a minor in Biology. Justine is very interested in environmental and wildlife education and awareness and was interested in the work the Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre was doing with respect to human-wildlife interactions in urban areas.

Justine's diverse interest in all urban wildlife shines through in her enthusiasm and willingness to assist in a range of tasks at the Centre. She has helped with assessing the beaver pond and surrounding wetlands near the Centre, planted trees, attended a session we participated in at Ottawa University as well as helped compile the discussions group material from the course. Justine's fresh perspective is inspiring.

Justine spent this past summer working at Murphy's Point Provincial Park as a park naturalist and interpreter where she organized and presented natural heritage education programs to a wide range of audiences. Justine is back at classes and also has a part time job, but despite her heavy work load she still has time to help with an educational brochure being developed by the Centre. Justine's efforts are greatly appreciated by the Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre and we know her commitment and dedication to wildlife will have a lasting impact!

# It's not easy being a Mother Squirrel!

We used to joke at the Centre that if we humans had as difficult a time caring for our young as wildlife do, we'd simply drop them off at the Children's Aid Society.



*Mom rolling up baby into a 'donut' shape to be able to carry it. Considering that the baby would be more than a third of her weight and she needs to leverage it so as to be able to climb the tree, this is quite remarkable.*

The four tiny baby squirrels, with eyes barely open, were growing very hungry and cold. They would not survive much longer on their own. Their mother had been gone for many hours. A block away, the mother squirrel was frantically trying to escape a so-called 'humane' trap. The homeowner was preparing to take the trapped squirrel to a forest miles away.

This sad story is repeated hundreds of times during the spring and summer birthing season. It leaves thousands of baby animals to die a slow and painful death and homeowners taking an action without realizing the very inhumane outcome for the animals.

You see, female animals come closer to our properties each spring, seeking

out covered shelter in eaves, chimneys, garden sheds and under steps as a safe spot to have their young, away from predators, when their newborn babies are most vulnerable. Squirrels can have their babies as early as late February. Those leaf nests or dreys they occupy high up in trees would offer little protection against the elements or predators while the trees are still bare.

Those seeing a wild animal around their property during the spring and summer birthing season should assume it is a female with babies nearby. We urge people to never block the animal's access or trap and relocate her but, instead, remember that it is a TEMPORARY situation. Once the babies are weaned, the

family will move back to a more natural area and people can then safely do the required animal-proofing.

Fortunately, there are wildlife advocates like Royleen Robinson who have not only learned to live with wildlife but have come to enjoy them. When several large dead trees were being taken down by her condominium association in the late fall of 2011, Royleen was concerned that the squirrels had already built their winter nest in them. After determined efforts by Royleen with the city and others, the tree removal company was asked to place a nesting box, provided by the Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre, high up into a nearby tree to give the squirrels alternative shelter.



*Young squirrels coming out to explore the branches around the nesting box. These juveniles are about 10 weeks old and will continue to stay close to Mom for the next few weeks or longer.*



# A Squirrel's Story

By Royleen Robinson

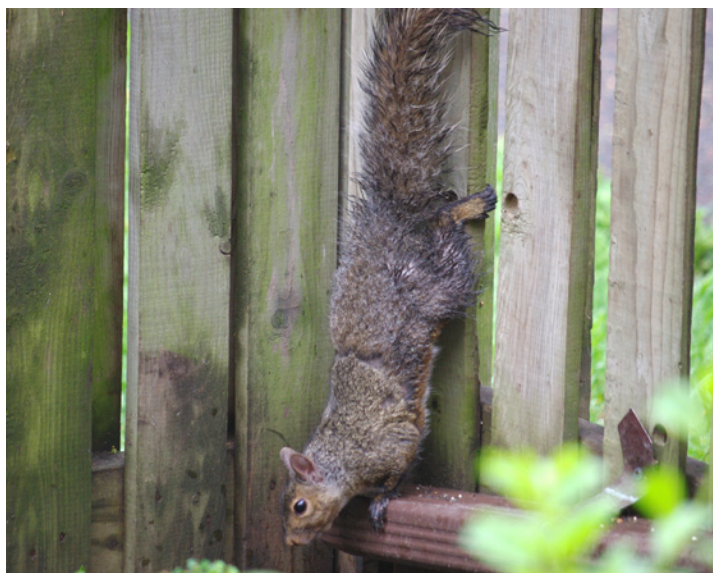
The amazing dedication that a mother squirrel gives to raising her young is shown in my photographs. It began on May 11th, 2013 when I observed a Mom squirrel carrying a young black one...both were soaked to the skin. The young one fell but Mom picked it up and got it into the Condo safely. She then fetched, one at a time, two other babies and placed them in the Condo.

It was clearly just a temporary arrangement as she went off and I watched her build a leaf nest in a nearby tree, before relocating all three young ones to it. The leaf nest obviously didn't provide the degree of protection she wanted as several days later, I saw her struggling to carry the young ones up - no mean feat considering their size - to the nesting box provided by the Centre.

I figure if a squirrel can go to these lengths to raise her young, then we humans can at least give her a grace period to do so. Understanding that if they choose a spot in our soffit, it is not to frustrate us but only to keep their young safe for a short period of time.



*Safe at last with one of the young ones peeping out the entrance of the nesting box.*



*Mom climbing down fence to retrieve baby on right. See separation of hair on Mom's back. New hair has grown back on her shoulders where she had plucked it in order to line the nest when the babies were first born during the cold March weather.*



*As you know, the Eastern Grey Squirrel species can be quite variable in colour. The mother was grey in colour but she had this black baby and two grey ones.*



## Serving the Public

We are very proud of the wide range of audiences our programs serve. We think it is vital to invest in all people, 5 year olds who are fascinated with the vocalizations porcupines make, residents who may be having problems with beavers taking down trees or have questions about the coyotes they hear singing in the distance at night, or a community group who just want to better live in harmony with the natural world.

And while we also welcome and have had some positive experiences with people working in different positions within some municipalities in Canada, we remain committed to our primary focus of working with the public. We believe that governments often take the pulse of the public so this is where we can work to ultimately encourage more progressive policies that will have a positive impact on our environment. Here are a few ways we have been reaching out to the public:

## Education Assistant



Even though one of our main program areas is our In-School Wildlife Education Program, it doesn't mean we get the summer off. Each summer our work continues as we visit a range of summer camps throughout the city. During one of our visits to a City of Ottawa Day Camp I was lucky enough to have an 'assistant' for the day.

As I was setting up my laptop and projector a young boy, about 6 years old, walked over to me from having snack

time on the floor nearby and asked what I was doing. When I told him I was doing a presentation about wildlife his eyes got wide and a huge grin appeared on his face. I asked his name and he told me it was Sebastian. His camp counsellor then came and brought him back to finish his snack. A few minutes later I was ready to get started. About 70 little faces stared up at me from the floor where they were sitting, waiting patiently.

Just as I started to talk, one child popped up and walked towards me, it was Sebastian. Sensing his interest I invited Sebastian to sit on the floor next to my chair, he seemed happy with this idea. About 3 slides into my presentation, just as a photo of a young fawn appeared on the screen, Sebastian popped up once again and stood next to me. The next thing I knew he was perched proudly on my knee. I continued on with my presentation and Sebastian seemed satisfied with his front row seat.

Throughout my talk I get up quite frequently and show the children puppets, or porcupine quills and other hands-on materials. Each time Sebastian would patiently sit on my chair for a few minutes then I would feel a slight tug on my shirt cuff and when I would look at him he would shyly point at the chair. Back we would go. Near the end of the talk he was working my laptop, passing the puppets to the other kids and pointing to children who had raised their hand to select whose story we would hear next.

As I packed up, one of the counsellors came and thanked me for being patient with Sebastian. I told her it really was my pleasure. I don't know if I made a difference in Sebastian's day, but he sure made my day!

## Getting to Know OUR Neighbours

The Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre is located on the former Nortel Campus. It is a lovely oasis surrounded by trees and natural habitat. Most people who visit comment that it feels so far from the city and is like being in the deep woods. As you can imagine we have many wild neighbours that we are quite familiar with. We recently met and began working

with some of our 'people' neighbours, the Crystal Beach and Lakeview Community Association.

They held a family day in early fall with a nature scavenger hunt, biking and other fun activities. Our Centre provided a presentation to wrap up the day's events. The presentation talked about many of

the wild animals in the area and some of the neat things they do. The audience ranged from 4 years old to their grandparents. At the end of the presentation during the question session we learned the level of enthusiasm and interest about wildlife definitely does not depend on your age.



# Making an Impression at Aboriginal Affairs



To many of us in Ottawa, fall has become synonymous with the launch of the annual United Way Campaign. One of the ways to give is a program where people can make contributions to a charity they designate.

This summer we were invited to participate in a fair at the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development to talk to employees about the work we do. Raising awareness about our programs would hopefully gain their interest in supporting our work.

We were glad to have to had the opportunity to engage more people on urban wildlife issues and would be extremely appreciative of anyone who considers allocating us as their charity this year.

# More Encounters With Canada



Last fall we talked about Encounters With Canada, a program of the Historica-Dominion Institute, which is our country's largest and foremost youth forum. Every week of the school year, 120-148 teens from across Canada (ages 14-17) come to Ottawa. Here they discover their country through each other, learn about Canadian institutions and explore exciting career options.

This spring during their Environment and Ecology week, spending a day at

the Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre was one of the options for students. It was just as exciting this year when a bus full of students from across the country arrived at the Centre for a day devoted to learning about urban wildlife issues. Students were given a presentation and participated in discussion groups. One of the day's main focus was on beaver and the vital role they play in maintaining wetlands, and the significant array of species that depend on these wetlands.

We were fortunate to have a resident beaver pond we could walk to with the students. They even got their hands dirty while helping us plant some trees. It was a jam-packed day and we hope we made an impact about the important role all species play in healthy ecosystems.



# A Road Trip to Help a Turtle



Living near a highway that crosses wetlands is always a nerve-wracking experience. Particularly from May to July, the nesting season for turtles. Besides travelling from one body of water to another, turtles typically look for loose, sandy soils in which to lay their eggs along the shoulders of roads.

When we spotted a turtle one morning in the middle of the opposite lane of traffic, we immediately turned around. However, by the time we got back, a vehicle had passed over it. While the truck hadn't hit the turtle, the pressure from its downdraft had flipped it over, resulting in several large fractures in its shell, with quite a bit of bleeding coming from the wounds.

We felt the only chance for this turtle was to get it to the Kawartha Turtle Trauma Centre in Peterborough. Representing a seven-hour round trip journey from Ottawa, we wanted to ensure the injuries were treatable before undertaking the trip.

Unable to reach the Centre, we contacted its founder, Dr. Kristy Hiltz, a veterinarian who runs the Sherbrooke Heights Animal Hospital in Peterborough. We emailed

her photos and a description of the turtle's injuries. She responded that, with prompt medical attention, the turtle had a good chance of recovery and agreed to remain open after hours until we arrived.

So we headed to Peterborough on another animal rescue adventure. We arrived to a warm welcome from Dr. Hiltz who was very appreciative we had been willing to drive the turtle all the way from Ottawa.

She examined the turtle, talking about the procedure which would require drilling small holes in the shell and using wire to secure it together until it could regenerate. This would take time but she was optimistic. Repairing fractured shells has changed significantly since we did rehabilitation. Formerly, an epoxy patch was used, however, this is no longer recommended as it can hide underlying infections that can be fatal.

On our drive back to Ottawa, it seemed only fitting we had to stop for a turtle crossing the highway where it passed through prime wetlands. We pulled over and gave it a helping hand across the road. It could have been the twin of the Painted turtle we had just dropped off.

We spoke to Lindsay Maxim at the Centre from time to time to see how the turtle was doing and were delighted to get photos from her six weeks after the turtle's surgery to see

what a remarkable job they did in giving this fellow a second lease on life. In early July, the turtle was released back into the area it came from, only this time, well removed from the highway.

## About the Kawartha Turtle Trauma Centre

KTTC is the only rehabilitation centre dedicated solely to providing medical and rehabilitative care to Ontario turtles. It operates under the leadership of Executive Director, Dr. Sue Carstairs. Almost all of the turtle species found in this province are at risk – the majority due to development and the loss of habitat accompanied by the dramatic increase in the number of roads.

Learn more about this exceptional facility at [www.kawarthaturtle.org](http://www.kawarthaturtle.org).

## OUR THANKS

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