



Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre

CELEBRATING OUR 35TH ANNIVERSARY!

SERVING THE COMMUNITY

CELEBRATING NATURE

There is nothing that costs us less and gives us more than Nature

On a Personal Level

Thousands of Ottawa residents have taken to trails on the NCC Greenbelt and other natural areas, summer and winter. Studies show that our brain and body are hard-wired to need nature. Having access and using greenspace promotes physical activity, reduces stress and increases social interaction. The presence of greenspace is associated with decreased death rates, obesity, cardiovascular disease and improved mental health.

On a Community Level

As for nature's collective health benefits, trees reduce smog and pollution by filtering out harmful pollutants from the air we breathe; they provide shade and protect us from the sun while cooling off the environment during hot spells and they create attractive and liveable communities.

Wetlands are crucial particularly with respect to climate change, in preventing flooding, mitigating drought, storing carbon, and helping to clean our drinking water while providing essential habitat for an exceptional variety of wild species and recreational opportunities for us.

Protecting Natural Assets Requires Leadership

The Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre has been promoting 'green infrastructure' for more than a decade. The economic benefits associated with natural assets are increasingly recognized



Photo: Brett Foster

by governments. Progressive cities are rapidly moving ahead in putting policies and plans in place to protect wetlands, woodlots, even small meadows and bits of remnant habitat in communities.

There is no better example of leadership than that shown by the Federal Government and Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC) in the restoration of a debilitated Wetland and the rehabilitation of Naturalized Stormwater Ponds, all incorporating wildlife-sensitive planning, on the Carling Campus in Ottawa.

Working with other levels of government and the local community, PSPC has ensured that these natural features will not only provide key environmental services but will also serve to educate and encourage other such models.

According to Anita Vandenberg, MP for Ottawa West-Nepean, *"I can say the government is putting \$3.4 billion into climate adaptation and mitigation and*

nature-based solutions, but having a local example on the Carling Campus of a policy we have at the national level, one that people can see and that has involved the local community, can make a big difference".

Leadership is essential to protect our natural heritage. The Greenbelt has and will continue to be under threat due to City development pressure.

The extensive use of the Greenbelt by residents from all walks of life across the region and by visitors to the Nation's Capital demonstrates its importance. But we can no longer take the Greenbelt for granted, as bits of it are destroyed for roads serving private development and public transportation.

Working with residents, environmental organizations and community associations, we will be strongly advocating for the Greenbelt to be given Natural Heritage protection.

ENVIRONMENTAL CHAMPION

We celebrate, from time to time, those individuals that have significantly contributed to protecting the natural environment, adding to the quality of life we all get to enjoy



Sheila Perry, Past President of the Federation of Citizens' Associations (FCA), presenting Erwin with the FCA's Lifetime Achievement Award

For many, Erwin Dreessen is the 'Dean of Greenspace' in Ottawa. For the last 30 years, he has devoted countless hours, skillful advocacy and dogged determination to preserve and enhance the City's greenspace.

Erwin was a founding member of Greenspace Alliance of Canada's Capital in 1997, an organization that continues to gain a lot of respect for its constructive contribution to planning in Ottawa.

A native of Belgium, after undergraduate work, Erwin decided to pursue further studies in the United States. He and his new bride, Gert, arrived in New York City in 1966 and went by bus across the country. It was quite an adventure but they made it to California where Erwin obtained a Ph.D in Economics at the University of California at Berkeley in 1972.

They moved to Canada where Erwin worked as an Economist for B.C. Telephone for more than a decade before joining the federal government in Ottawa in 1987. He served as an Economist in various departments for many years, ending with Industry Canada, before retiring in 2009.

Erwin's contribution to protecting our natural heritage and his community service has been recognized in many prestigious awards including the 2002 Queen's Golden Jubilee medal and a Civic Appreciation Award from the City of Ottawa that same year.

In 2007, Erwin received the Ottawa Field Naturalists' Club Conservation Award and in 2020 the Federation of Citizens' Association's Lifetime Achievement Award.

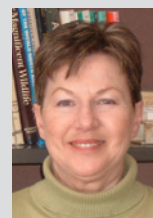
"What I most admire is that Erwin created a 'big tent' within Greenspace Alliance, by encouraging and supporting other environmental initiatives. While many of our organizations focus on a specific interest, be it climate change, transportation or tree protection, Greenspace Alliance has embraced the wider vision. Erwin took the time to listen and learn about specific wildlife and biodiversity concerns, the focus of our Centre and, more importantly, in speaking out on behalf of these issues," said Centre President, Donna DuBreuil.

While Erwin and Gert have their own separate interests, Gert volunteered with the Ottawa Public Library, they are a team. *"I recall them dragging display boards and spending hours talking to the public at environmental events over the years,"* said Donna.

Although Erwin remains very interested and involved in Greenspace Alliance, he stepped back from the lead a few years ago, with Paul Johannis very capably assuming the role as Chair. We are fortunate that Greenspace Alliance remains very much a welcoming umbrella organization for many of the environmental challenges we're facing as a society.

Editorial

'Shrink the Change'



It's not surprising that we feel overwhelmed by current affairs – war, residential schools, the pandemic, climate change and protests that show divisions

within our country.

Because we feel powerless to fix these large problems, we might opt to do nothing.

However, a book called 'Switch: How to Change Things When Change is Hard', offers a solution. Its authors stress that, counterintuitively, big problems *"are most often solved by a sequence of small solutions, some times over decades"*. 'Shrink the Change' became a kind of motto by the Obama team when in office with the President's version being *"better is good"*.

It prompted us to use this issue of the newsletter to celebrate those individuals that follow this prescription to do good in our community.

Erwin Dreessen has spent years working for the protection of greenspace; Anita Utas advocates for wildlife, challenging inhumane practices while using her artwork to raise awareness and support those caring for wildlife; and Damian Piper, a TV Broadcast Journalism student at Algonquin College, put together an excellent investigative report on the City of Ottawa's outdated and damaging environmental practices.

We salute the many others, like you, who work on behalf of wildlife and the environment. Individually we can do so little, together we can do so much.

Donna DuBreuil
President, OCWC

Having had the privilege of caring for so many wild animals, all with special personalities, has reinforced our commitment to giving people a better appreciation of them

A SKUNK WITH ATTITUDE



By Donna DuBreuil

Homer was orphaned when his mother, uprooted by construction, dropped him when startled by a truck.

Just a few weeks old, his eyes were still closed but his distinctive markings were already visible. Because he was so young, he didn't have the defensive posture common to baby skunks and very quickly adapted to his caregivers as substitute moms. He had an excellent appetite, firmly grasping the bottle in his forepaws while resting his chubby back feet on it for extra leverage.

Baby skunks are quite adorable with soft-as-velvet pads for feet and an attitude that exudes confidence. As soon as his eyes opened, he started the play/practice routine of lifting his tail high and forming a perfect U of his body to aim his lethal weapon at pretend opponents.

He would stamp his feet and then slide each one gracefully backwards looking like Michael Jackson doing the moonwalk. Occasionally he would perform this routine with such vigor that he'd lift his rear end entirely off the floor like he was doing a handstand.

Because it was some weeks before other baby skunks came into the Centre, Homer developed a spoilt 'only-child attitude'. When introduced to three new baby skunks, who were smaller than him, he was a total brat. He stomped aggressively and circled the three who were huddled together for protection, squealing at them and aiming his little

bum with serious intention. It was quite hilarious to see this baby skunk throwing a temper tantrum like a three-year old in a toy store.

However, within a few days, they were best of friends, playing and sleeping on top of one another although Homer was definitely the leader of the pack – partly because he was bigger but mostly because of his confident attitude.

When it came time to take them on nightly walks to learn the ways of the wild, the smaller skunks would follow Homer in a single line and Homer would follow me as I was still considered the mother of the tribe.

Living on a country property, we were able to meander across fields, lifting rocks in search of slugs and investigating logs in the forest for edible delicacies. A neighbour who would sometimes see us on these outings would call out "*it's Mother Superior and the Sweet Sisters of Charity*", given their black and white habits. Goodness knows what he said behind our backs.

Towards the end of summer, it was clear that the skunks were ready to go out on their own. One warm evening, we simply left their cage door open and off they went. On a couple of occasions we'd spot them around the property. Homer, because of his size, was easy to pick out but he didn't venture near which was the way it should be.

However, there is a footnote to this story. A month later we were having a party with many guests out on our deck. One was showing off our dog Ernie's elaborate dog house, which he never used by the way, and when she pushed open the custom made entrance flap, who should come out but Homer. He was not at all happy to have had his nap interrupted, chasing people all around the lawn, stamping his feet while they ran in full flight. According to those watching from the deck, it was the best after-dinner entertainment they'd had in a long while.

But parties weren't for Homer. He didn't return.



*My neighbour in seeing the little skunks in a single file behind me called out "*it's Mother Superior and the Sweet Sisters of Charity*", referring to the black and white habits of my wee charges. Goodness knows what he said behind our backs.*



With respect to environmental leadership there is a local model for the City of Ottawa to follow. The Federal Government, Public Services and Procurement Canada, rehabilitated stormwater ponds on its Carling Campus, providing ecosystem services to the community and benefiting wildlife.

Make your Vote Count this Municipal Election

This Fall's Municipal Election will give a new face to Ottawa City Council.

With an opening for a new Mayor and a number of vacant Council seats, there is an opportunity to see not only a change in leadership style but a re-ordering of priorities.

Let's face it, the City of Ottawa has not been a leader in environmental matters. In fact, compared to other major cities, it has been a laggard. For example, it is one of only a few large cities in Canada that does not have a Biodiversity Strategy.

The City's New Official Plan certainly doesn't provide any reassurance this will change in that even the word "biodiversity" appears only 4 times in the Official Plan's 300-plus pages and annexes.

An Opportunity for Change

The good news is that the current status on these issues at the City doesn't reflect the views of the larger Ottawa community.

There is renewed, strong determination to see the protection of greenspace and natural habitat in Ottawa. Perhaps this is due to the clear recognition by families of the value of greenspace during COVID-19; or, the imminent threats greenspace is facing because of poor development planning and the pressure for new roads; or, the growing awareness that climate change is forcing cities to better protect 'green infrastructure' as a critical asset.

What the Centre will be doing

- The OCWC will be focusing on 1) protection of Greenspace, including the National Capital Greenbelt 2) protection of Wetlands as an important part of green infrastructure and a key resource in protecting biodiversity 3) actions that support a harmonious relationship with wildlife, specifically the use of modern flow devices as an alternative to the outdated practice of killing beavers and assurance that the Protocol for Wildlife Protection during Construction is actually implemented.
- In the lead up to the fall Election over the next months, the OCWC will be working with residents and environmental groups to build awareness and gather public support around these issues. We would welcome any ideas that you might have in this regard.
- Closer to the Election, the Centre will be surveying candidates for their position on the above issues.
- We will keep you abreast of plans, letting you know the results of the survey, as it will need to have your support, when candidates ask for your vote, to be successful.

What You Can Do

Let your current councillor, community association and local newspaper know that protecting Greenspace and Wildlife matter to you. Building awareness well in advance of the Election is important to ensure that these issues don't play second fiddle to other pressing needs.

Not sure who your current City Councillor is? Visit the City of Ottawa at <https://ottawa.ca/en/city-hall/mayor-and-city-councillors> to find out.

Giving Voice to Community Concerns



Worth a Dam

Not your typical student, Damian Piper is a former professional Stone Mason, with experience in community radio, who switched careers to enrol in TV Broadcast Journalism at Algonquin College.

While on assignment for The Fulcrum, the University of Ottawa's English language newspaper, he was intrigued by a story about the City of Ottawa's practice of killing beavers.

What started out as Damian's interview with an Ottawa South resident, upset about beaver killed in a neighbourhood creek, turned out to be so much more.

'Lester', the beaver had gained fans among families and their children who enjoyed watching him on their daily walks. When killed by the City, for no justifiable reason, it prompted residents to start a petition that quickly garnered close to 20,000 signatures, demanding more progressive approaches to living with wildlife.

After interviewing Donna DuBreuil at the Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre, Damian learned that the killing of beavers was a long-standing practice by the City that was not only inhumane but environmentally damaging and a significant waste of tax dollars, compared to modern solutions to coexist with wildlife.

It led Damian to contact Mike Callahan, a beaver expert in Massachusetts who has installed more flow devices than anyone else in North America. Modern flow devices are designed to prevent flooding while keeping beavers and their important ecological services on the landscape for a fraction of the cost the City of Ottawa is currently spending on beaver management.

Mike was astounded that Ottawa spends \$150,000 a year on a trapper saying *"this is money being flushed down the drain when it could be used for the one-time cost to build more than 70 flow devices, a solution that would protect City infrastructure while saving taxpayers the annual cost of both the trapper and the extensive staff time needed for maintenance."*

Damian also met with residents in Stittsville angry about beavers being trapped along the Trans Canada Trail and the destruction of a Provincially Significant Wetland turned into a Municipal Drain to support development.

Damian's investigative reporting skills benefit from his disarming questions and manner. His thoroughness has led to a wider focus, including the little protection of trees and the current lack of political will to protect the City's natural assets.

It has resulted in three, one-hour Podcasts by Damian, interviewing residents, environmental advocates, city staff and a city councillor that expose contradictions and misinformation, shedding light on the real story behind these community concerns.

You can listen to these Podcasts at Unpublished Ottawa, search for 'Fulcrum Radio Beaver'.

Want to keep abreast of what's happening in your community when it comes to the environment?

Mainstream print media has changed significantly in the last decade. Declining advertising revenue has resulted in a shrinking product and much less coverage of local issues that matter to people. It makes resources like some of the following ones invaluable, so be sure to follow them on a regular basis:

Unpublished Ottawa

(unpublishedottawa.com) is designed to foster participation in our democratic process by providing a forum for people to contribute letters, articles, and comment

The Fulcrum

(thefulcrum.ca) is the University of Ottawa's English Language Newspaper, covering news both on and off campus

Stittsville Central

(stittsvillecentral.ca) is an example of an on-line community newspaper that posts stories several times a week

For the Love of Learning

We were recently gifted some wonderful treasures from a long-time supporter. Many lovely books that we initially thought would be a great addition to our main library. One dating back to the 1930s, the John James Audubon's 'The Birds of America', had been passed down through her family.

She also included books about animals that she had kept since her childhood. Hearing about this early exposure to nature, very much influenced by her mother, through books and how it inspired her love of the natural world really resonated.

I, too, was fortunate to not only be given the gift of a connection with nature at an early age but also an appreciation for books and the love of learning instilled in me by my mother.

The donor's collection inspired the idea of a space at the Wildlife Centre dedicated to a Children's Library, with a lending component for some items to be signed out. This will allow us to showcase these special books as well as share some of the games, puzzles, and nature magazines we have acquired over the years.

Items would be signed out at no cost, like our snowshoe lending library. It will be a nice complement to our Education Programs when children visit the Centre, further enriching their experience.

At a time when acquiring more and more things seems to be the norm, we love the idea that children will have access without having to purchase or collect.

We are excited to not only connect children to the wonders of nature but also to help foster a curiosity and love of learning. We anticipate the Children's Library will be set up by the Fall of 2022 and look forward to keeping you posted.

Connecting People to Nature



What is the saying, the only thing constant is change? I think we all can relate to that over the past two years. In the Fall we were optimistic about returning to more in-person programming, but we had to, once again, manage our expectations and dance with the shoes we had on.

Instead, we continued to give virtual presentations to a wide range of groups and were able to provide snowshoes for many to enjoy. Seen here are members of the 40th Ottawa Pathfinders having some winter fun thanks to our Nature Lending Library.



Photo: S. Hansen

Living With Wildlife

Spring, a time of renewal, means more wildlife are out and about. Here are some tips and resources for questions you might have. You can keep this chart for future reference.

- Females seek shelter in eaves, chimneys and under steps as a safe spot, away from predators to have their young. It is TEMPORARY so it's important to give a grace period and research your options BEFORE taking action so that you don't create orphans www.wildlifeinfo.ca
- There are effective deterrents you can use to keep wildlife out of your flower beds and vegetable gardens as well as information on all other wildlife concerns www.wildlifeinfo.ca
- If you have a bird in distress or a baby animal that you believe may be orphaned, check with a wildlife rehabilitator in your area

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|----------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <u>Birds</u> | Ottawa Valley Wild Bird Care Centre | (613) 854-2849 |
| | Safe Wings Ottawa | (613) 216-8999 |
| <u>Mammals</u> | Rideau Valley Wildlife Sanctuary | (613) 258-9480 |
| | Holly's Haven Wildlife Rescue | text (613) 222-4719 |
| | Ontario Wildlife Rescue | www.ontariowildliferescue.ca |

- To assess whether an animal may be orphaned or for information on temporary care for the animal until you can find a wildlife rehabilitator www.orphanedwildlifecare.com
- If you have a wild animal that appears sick or injured call the City of Ottawa 311
- For large animals such as Deer, Moose, Bear or Coyote that are injured or in distress, the National Capital Commission (NCC) will respond if the animal is on the Greenbelt or other lands managed by the NCC (613) 239-5353

Caring for Baby Squirrels – A Volunteer's Perspective



Despite caring for literally thousands of baby squirrels while working at the Wildlife Centre during our rehabilitation days, I never had been a squirrel foster volunteer. This changed a number of years ago when I found an orphaned squirrel and got to experience this wonderful opportunity firsthand.

I found the small baby alone in my yard. I knew to look for others but had no success. Given the location, far away from trees, it was likely dropped, possibly by mom while moving or a predator.

It is important they be raised with other members of their species to be properly socialized, so this meant I needed a friend or two.

This proved challenging as it was late in the season. The irony was not lost on me, when we did rehab, it felt like it was raining baby squirrels, some years 400 baby squirrels would pass through our doors, now I needed just 1 and there were none to be found.

I finally won the squirrel lottery and connected with someone who found another single baby. The only issue was that it was only 3 weeks old, meaning its eyes were still closed. At this point the first squirrel was 6 weeks old, meaning it was quite active and happily eating solids.

With no choice, we had to give it a try. What a pleasant surprise, they cuddled, it was love at first sight.

We had to make some adjustments, given the size difference. The older squirrel needed to be practicing climbing, but we had to make sure the smaller was safe from a possible fall. We put the cage on its side with plenty of padding for protection. Like any younger sibling, the race was on to catch up, not wanting to miss out on anything. The younger one would grab and wrestle, while the older, and still much larger, squirrel would be very gentle, but trying to get away to climb and hone his acrobatic skills. After their play sessions it was once again cuddle time.

It was neat to have such a special bond and to see how my friends and family reacted, especially those who were not around for the rehab days. Without fail most started out with a questioning look about why we had baby squirrels but as soon as they 'met' them, they got it. We always said that if people could meet a baby squirrel, most would have a much more favorable view of this intelligent and resilient species.

My husband, admittedly not an 'animal' person was perhaps the most interesting to watch. Maybe it's like people who don't like kids, but then have kids and the story changes. He redesigned the nesting box that would be put high in a tree for a temporary home for the squirrels after they were released. It went from a nesting box to a squirrel condo, with enhanced safety features to keep them protected from predators. The downfall was it weighed about 10 lbs, but he was up for the chal-

lenge of hoisting and securing it high in the trees.

The squirrels definitely became part of the family meaning they came to the cottage with us. We ensured their cage was set up with a view of the lake and the kids were great providers of a constant supply of acorns and fresh branches.

As the squirrels got older and we moved the large cage to our garage, my husband would put fans on them if he felt it was too hot and gave them lots of extra treats.

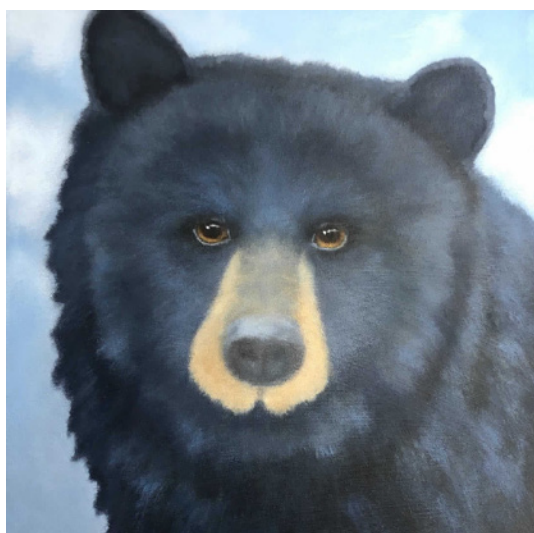
Even our resident chipmunk was pleased with the addition. Mostly because he would sneak into their cage and abscond with the specialty nuts and seeds. Often filling his cheeks so full, that he couldn't fit back out of the cage.

Release time was bittersweet, we were all excited for them to explore the big, wonderful world, but we were attached and very worried. It brought back many memories of the concerned calls we would get from foster families. Sometimes letting go is hard!

The soft release went well. After a week, they disappeared for several days, which was very stressful, but they then returned! Everyone was so happy they were ok. They had some specific marks that allowed us to easily identify them.

As the weather got cold, we would see them less often and they transitioned to the wild. I will always be grateful our family got to have this special experience.





Anita raises awareness "about the plight of our beautiful wildlife and helps the organizations that protect them." A portion of sales of all animal paintings, prints, and art greeting cards is donated to wildlife rescue and animal rights organizations.

Appreciating Nature Through Art

We wanted to celebrate the wonderful individuals we meet who contribute so much to our work to connect people to nature, protect habitats, big and small, and give wildlife a voice. We are fortunate to have so many remarkable people in our 'wildlife family', many have been involved for decades, often dating back to our rehabilitation days.

Doctors, diplomats, artists, home-makers, members of parliament, farmers, teachers, and a tech company CEO who fostered baby rabbits, were involved in our program. A litter of baby raccoons were actually fostered at one of the embassies in Ottawa.

This diverse group all share a concern and passion for wildlife and nature. One of these remarkable people is Anita Utas.

We first connected with Anita over a decade ago when she worked tirelessly to challenge the City of Ottawa's outdated and inhumane practice of trapping beavers. She met with councillors, arranged community meetings, applied tree protection, and even assisted with school presentations to educate children about the value of coexisting with wildlife.

We knew that Anita was an artist but did not realize the role that nature and wildlife played in her work.

Anita received her honours degree in Art History as well as her Bachelor of Education at Western University. After working as an art teacher with the public school board, Anita traveled overseas and spent seven years teaching in international schools in South East Asia and South America. She has traveled extensively and draws upon these experiences as inspiration for her landscape paintings. Her love for animals is expressed in her continuing series of wildlife paintings.

"My landscapes often capture ephemeral moments as viewed in nature; the quiet magic when the day moves to dusk, the reflection of a forest in a lake, the softness of a misty morning. I

am drawn to the calming forces of far-off vistas; landscapes that are beyond simple visual identification."

Anita's connection to wildlife is evident in her art, we are so impressed not only by her talent but her ability to capture the spirit and soul of the animals she paints.

Anita has been painting professionally for over 12 years. She is represented in galleries across Ontario, and her work is included in corporate and private collections in Canada, the U.S.A., and Europe. To view her work you can visit www.anitautas.com

Anita continues to be an advocate for wildlife and nature and is always on alert. She connects with community members on a range of wildlife issues, actively challenges outdated practices that harm wildlife, such as the coyote killing contest in Belleville and the on-going trapping of beavers in Ottawa.

Working with people like Anita, and seeing their passion and commitment serves as great inspiration to us, particularly on some issues that are decade-long battles.

OUR THANKS

OCWC gratefully acknowledges:

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Wildlife Fund*

The William Muir Hawes
Wildlife Fund

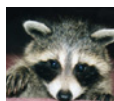
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