



Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre

SERVING THE COMMUNITY FOR OVER 30 YEARS

Remembering Gary

By Kate MacNeil

We frequently refer to Gary as 'Co-Founder' of the Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre. While true and very impressive, it is only part of the story. Gary's work over the Centre's history is truly amazing, albeit often low key.

When I started working at the Centre more than 23 years ago, we were still doing wildlife rehabilitation. Gary was a constant support, he would return from his full time job at the end of the day and get busy doing wherever needed to be done. He oversaw the cage building, not just for the Centre enclosures, but also the cages for more than 75 foster volunteers who cared for wildlife on their property. This included a highly complicated two-chamber cage for a pair of river otters, with one cage in the water and one on the top of the embankment, connected by a culvert.

Gary was often the lead hand in wildlife rescues and releases. A release of an adult coyote comes to mind. The coyote had been at the Centre for several weeks for treatment of a severe case of mange. Once better, Gary and I returned him to the area he was found. One side of the road was quite heavily treed, the other side was a golf course. It seemed obvious to us both, so we walked through the trees and scrub, each holding an end of the hockey stick through the cage carrying the coyote. After about 20 minutes of huffing and puffing, we felt we were in far enough. But, when we opened the cage door with a few words of encouragement and good wishes for our furry friend, he darted out, back to where we came, and crossed the road to the golf course. He did the journey in a couple of minutes at most. Gary and I had a good laugh all the way back to the van.

Another favourite story involved Gary showing a new intern how to handle a large, adult raccoon being treated for an infection. Gary entered

Co-Founder Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre

Gary David DuBreuil

May 7, 1941 –
September 1, 2021

Gary passed away in hospital from complications of Parkinson's. He was the much-loved husband and best friend of Donna (Thomas).



It is unlikely that the Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre would have come about without Gary's hard work and commitment. He assumed many tasks at the Centre. In fact, there wasn't much he didn't do – from managing financial and administrative responsibilities, rescuing and releasing wildlife, building cages, to sweeping the floors.

Gary's dry and often self-deprecating humour, big heart, and loyalty will certainly be missed.

The outpouring of respect and affection in remembrances not only from long-time friends but also from individuals he went to public school, high school, played sports with, worked with or knew through the Wildlife Centre highlight what a positive impression he made on people. The common thread in all of these very touching tributes talks about Gary's genuine warmth, kindness and generosity.

Gary's memory is woven into the fabric of the Centre and will live on through the countless stories of his adventures and misadventures involving wildlife.

the cage and ran the snarling raccoon up the side so he could give the injection in its thigh. It was the intern's first day on the job and she looked understandably nervous watching this procedure, knowing it would soon be part of her duties.

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Gary and a volunteer installing part of the elaborate otter cage.

Remembering Gary

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The raccoon, which Gary had by the scruff of the neck somehow twisted free and sunk its teeth into Gary's arm, with blood literally spurting in all directions. With the intern's eyes the size of saucers, Gary very calmly said, *"I'm only going to show you this once – this is NOT how you do it"*.

When we stopped doing rehab and focused more on education and outreach, Gary built our educational displays, delivered us and all our materials to events near and far, as well as helping with many administrative tasks.

In addition to all his contributions to getting things done, Gary's personality was equally valuable in the Centre's success. His kindness, towards both animals and people, his sense of humor and patience was felt by all who met him. He would crack jokes that made everyone smile, even after exhausting 14 hour days; he would answer questions and reassure members of the

public who had brought in animals for care and perhaps most important, he always picked up Baskin and Robins ice-cream cakes for birthdays.

In his gentle way, he advocated for wildlife and our programs, whether it was to the staff at the post office, the accounting firm or the bank, he always took the time to talk with people, educating them about wildlife issues in a very unassuming and genuine way.

He is missed by all who knew him, but we are so grateful for all of the wonderful memories and everything he did to make this world a better place for animals and people.

Editorial

Giving Wildlife a Voice



I am very grateful for the many remembrances and support offered at the time of my husband, Gary's, death. It is heartwarming to know that Gary's personal qualities and commitment to wildlife are valued.

It reinforces our Centre's determination to continue to give wildlife a strong voice.

This issue of the newsletter demonstrates the growing number of Ottawa residents that are joining us in this mission.

A decade ago, people would call the Centre, upset about a wildlife or greenspace issue, expecting us to take an action. Now, people are rallying together to become the guardians of persecuted species like beavers and natural habitat under threat in their communities.

Ottawa has a well-informed population that will not accept outdated, environmentally damaging and inhumane practices by the City that are based on a tired rationale for which there is no evidence. This issue highlights some of the exceptional people who are standing up and challenging the City of Ottawa's harmful actions.

Alternatively, as shown in the Wetland Rehabilitation Project on the opposite page, residents and our Centre are delighted to partner with governments on progressive ventures that benefit wildlife and the environment.

Donna DuBreuil
President, OCWC

A Wetland Win Thanks to Partnerships



It was exciting to see how last year's enhancement of the recently restored wetland looked when everything greened up. Even with the dry summer, the wetland provided important habitat for many species.

This project was made possible by the unique partnership of government and community organizations including the Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre and the support of Anita Vandenberg, MP Ottawa West-Nepean. We look forward to officially celebrating the success of this project in the spring.

Canada Summer Jobs Program



The Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre is pleased to have been successful in securing a placement under the Canada Summer Jobs Program this year, thanks to the support of Ottawa West-Nepean MP Anita Vandenberg. Due to the challenges of the pandemic, we decided a part time position would be the best fit.

Alison Elliott, a recent graduate from the University of Waterloo's Faculty of Environment, joined the team in early May and worked until August as a Nature Interpreter for the Centre.

Alison's creativity and dedication were very evident in the projects she worked on, including updating signs for the OCWC trail network focused on fun, COVID-friendly, self-led activities; developing games for kids that will be put to good-use once the Centre reopens to in-person events; and designing enjoyable summer activity sheets for seniors in the Ottawa area.

Alison felt her "summer with the OCWC has been fulsome and fun! The work that the OCWC does is much appreciated and needed by communities all over Ottawa and I can't vouch for it enough. The role of the Nature Interpreter was diverse, fun, with a good mix of self-directed and collaborative work."



Alison's creativity and talent is demonstrated in this lovely sketch of a river otter.

Beavers and Wetlands

Sylvie Sabourin is a member of a group of residents that have worked tirelessly for years to protect Stittsville's wetlands and wildlife.

Although it's David versus Goliath, they continue to fight the 'appropriation' and destruction of these natural areas being used by the City of Ottawa for drainage to support development.

Sylvie has had published two books of her photography, one of which shows the concerning changes to this wetland over the last decade.

Photographs, in the following compelling story show the wonder and magic of the wetland along the Trans Canada Trail and the deadly threats it faces.

The Gift of Trust

By Sylvie Sabourin

They say actions speak louder than words. For the beaver family that lived along the Great Trail, words were not even a concept, but actions showing trust certainly were. They trusted me. They trusted probably most humans, at least the ones who did not seem to pose a threat. And it is the story of that trust that ought to be told, rather than the one of the irreparable acts that broke it.

As the lodge was built and channels were dug into the muddy bottom of a stream, as mud was applied to channel the water, and cattails dragged into the lodge, as I stood there silent, day after day, sometimes just only for a few minutes, trust grew.

The family of beavers was going on with its business, often smelling the human scent hanging in the air, making eye contact, ultimately learning there was nothing to fear from the human standing there. The adults deepened the channels, rerouted them, brought mud on the banks, rearranged branches on the lodge, cementing them with more mud. They grazed on the new grass growing on the muddy flats they created and chewed on birch branches but a few meters from me. They brought many leafy meals for the two generations of kits waiting to feed on them.



Photo: Sylvie Sabourin

Under my eyes, the kits tried to dig and collect the mud, pulled small twigs, swam around. They explored the habitat and every day ventured a little bit further or did a little bit more to help upkeep the channels. They came close to where I was, as curious of me as I was of them, trusting I was no threat. Over time, I was afforded rare glimpses of the "secret life" of beavers.

One day, a grooming session between one adult and a young was starting as I arrived. They looked at me standing there, only a few meters away, and kept grooming each other until they were done.

Another day, one of the smaller young ones in a playful mood went and swam around the huge adult who was motion-

less, resting maybe after hard work. It circled it, nudged it, swam right under its nose. Like all young mammals would to get the attention of a parent and play a little.

Another time, one of the adults set off on a small trail they had made heading to a grove of trees. It stopped, looked back, waited for the other adult to follow. Mom and Dad were going to fetch dinner, I thought. Indeed, they shortly came back with branches for their young. I gingerly, quietly, almost apologetically, went into that birch grove from the opposite end of it that was accessible on foot.

As I discovered a whole new side of the beaver's habitat, I knew I was now truly in their territory. In my heart I

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gave thanks for being there, apologized for the intrusion, and slowly and lightly tread around, careful not to leave a mark, looking at all these felled trees and the chewing work with both awe and a deep humbling feeling.

And among all the fully or partially cut trees, there was this birch, just felled, with bright autumn leaves still rustling in the breeze. Looking around and figuring the beavers would not show up, I decided to leave. “No, wait. Just one more minute. Just in case,” thought I. And from behind the cover of the freshly fallen foliage, a few seconds later I saw it. The larger beaver was walking right toward me, probably not seeing me at first, not smelling me since the wind was contrary. It stopped, chewed a branch at the far end of the tree, looked up at me, smelled the air and, unfazed, proceeded to get closer to me. As I was standing there, my heart missed a beat. Silly questions descended on me at once: are beavers aggressive on land? What do I do if it gets closer? Barely voiced in my mind already dismissed in the aura of trust and perfect serenity floating around.

The beaver was the biggest of the clan, the male probably. The biggest I have ever seen. I stood still and opened myself to that encounter. It came even closer, started chewing on a branch, merely a meter from me. In awe, I slowly raised my camera and took some photographs. The beaver stopped, looked up at me,

made eye contact, smelled my presence... and resumed chewing. After cutting the branch, and dislodging it with an astonishing brute force, it proceeded to drag it toward the water about fifty meters away, where its kits were waiting for supper.

Thanking silently and profusely Mother Nature for the privilege she had given me, I left the grove as I had come in, still in awe over what had just happened there: that was TRUST. Raw. Beautiful. Wordless. Unadulterated trust. I so deeply wish this story of glimpses of the life for beavers had a beautiful ending, as beautiful as the trust that family of extraordinary creatures put in me all these months.

Unfortunately, suffice to say reeling with the shame of belonging to the same species than whomever did it, that the whole six of them, three generations of healthy beavers, were “disappeared” in the following days.

And ever since, it has been gnawing at me... that feeling of not having been able to prevent their fate, the feeling of broken trust, not by my actions, but by the mere belonging to the same species that did it.

So, in their memory, and in the memory of that beautiful trust they put in me, that other creature of Nature that I am, I just wanted to share these encounters and photographs. I owe them that much, since I was powerless to save their life...

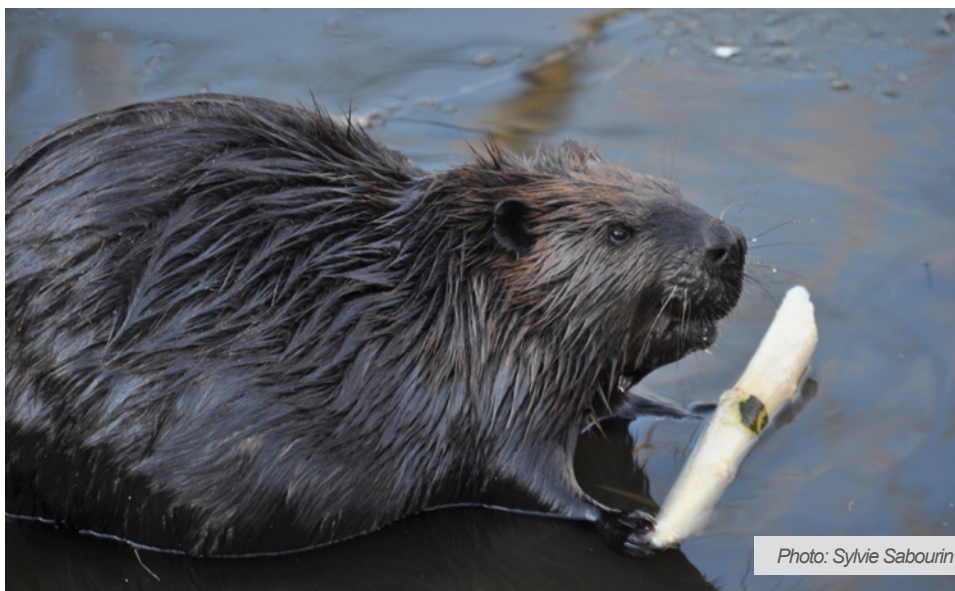


Photo: Sylvie Sabourin

The Amazing Castor Canadensis

Beavers Contribution

There isn't a single species that benefits our watershed more than beavers. Beaver dams improve the flow and quality of water, functioning as natural sponges that store runoff water and slowly release it, preventing flooding and erosion.

Beaver ponds recharge our drinking water aquifers, stabilize the water table and maintain stream flows during droughts. As a keystone species, beavers also create critical habitat for hundreds of other species, including those that are endangered.

Family Values

Beavers have an elaborate society in which the female is the central figure. As a matriarchal family, it is the female that directs the dam and lodge building.

Adults mate for life. Mating occurs in January and February and following a 100-day or so gestation period, three or four kits are born in May or June.

Kits nurse about six weeks but early on start eating tender shoots, most often brought to them by their father. Once kits are weaned, all family members take part in raising them. Kits stay with their parents for two years before they leave home to find a mate and create a habitat of their own.

Let's Allow Beavers to Save Us from Ourselves

Quite apart from their exceptional service to our environment, there is much to admire about beavers. As in Sylvie's story, their work ethic, devotion to family and peacefulness makes the beaver a very worthy Canadian emblem. We humans now have to prove that we are worthy of them.

All in a Days Work



This fall we were excited to welcome our first in-person group since Covid. Some of the Olde Forge participants who visited the Centre for a presentation and enjoyed a walk on the trails

By Kate MacNeil

We value the support of our members and donors and are always excited to give you an update on our projects and progress. As a small organization, working on a wide variety of projects, there really are no two days alike.

Some of our 'regular work' includes doing presentation to schools, seniors' groups as well as lunch and learn sessions for workplaces; delivering ivermectin for animals with mange, responding to public inquiries about how to solve human/wildlife conflicts, updating the website, keeping up on our accounting and the list goes on.

In addition, we normally have a few 'extra' issues each week. In early June, during our virtual Board meeting, the Centre's phone began ringing, then my cell phone started buzzing, something was up. There was a raccoon that had been badly burnt during a major fire and it was hiding under a dumpster. Some very compassionate members of the emergency services response team had tried to contain it but were unable.

Someone connected them with us, and while we haven't done rehab in over a decade, we still have large carriers, nets, gloves, as well as experience and an automatic response button for wildlife in distress. I went to the site and thankfully we were able to get the raccoon contained. Then to the vet for an assessment. Unfortunately, the poor little thing was so badly burnt it needed to be euthanized. This was very sad, but at the same time we took comfort knowing that it was not suffering a slow and painful death out there on its own.

Some projects we work on take years, especially when it comes to obtaining more progressive practices and policies with respect to wildlife and the environment. Someone described it like trying to push a boulder up a hill, and asked how we don't get discouraged? Good question!

One project was the restoration of the degraded wetland adjacent to our Centre, on the NCC Greenbelt. As many of you know, this project has finally come to fruition, thanks to the vision of some key people and important partnership

between different levels of governments and community stakeholders.

We are very proud of the wetland restoration and wildlife-sensitive planning that has been accomplished, but what is not seen are the years of work our Centre put into the initiative. Meetings, presentations, and more meetings and presentations, organizing stakeholder groups, site tours and monitoring, but when the pieces finally fall into place, and years of effort are realized, it is almost a surreal experience that we don't truly take the time to celebrate.

Possibly because we are dealing with yet another decade-long challenge. In this instance it is trying to convince the City of Ottawa to implement flow devices at beaver conflict sites. These devices are cost effective and allow us to utilize the ecosystem benefits of beaver, instead of the status quo of trapping and killing them.

Our Motivation

It is hard to understand why there is such resistance by the City, but our motivation is simple. We have nothing financially to gain, we would get no funding from the City or from the installation of flow devices, it doesn't bolster our budget, rather the opposite, as we spend countless hours of time devoted to this, and we don't have to worry about 'saying' the right thing to get elected.

We are working and will continue to work on this because it is the right thing to do. Environmentally - we talk about climate change, and extreme weather, both flooding and drought, yet the City continues to trap the very species that helps in this fight; Fiscally – the City continues to waste taxpayers dollars on reactive and repetitive approaches, money that certainly could be better allocated within the City; and Ethically – as animals are killed out of ignorance.

One of our supporters said, *"All you can do is continue to shine light on this darkness."*

City of Ottawa Needs to Stop Killing Beavers

The Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre is calling on the City of Ottawa to finally put in place progressive practices to coexist with beavers.

More than a decade ago, City Council directed staff to develop a Wildlife Strategy that *"would facilitate and foster a more harmonious relationship with all wildlife. Council's direction was motivated not only by general concerns for biodiversity and harmony with nature but by specific issues and complaints arising from the City's policies and procedures for dealing humanely with individual animals or populations of animals."*

Yet, with respect to beavers, City staff continue to completely ignore that Council direction. For example, in 2011 invoices paid by the City of Ottawa to trappers amounted to \$31,823. By 2017 invoices had increased to \$45,019 and, by 2018, the trapper billed the City of Ottawa a whopping \$156,710.

Stormwater ponds and natural areas in our communities provide recreation for residents and the opportunity to observe and learn about beavers. People are appalled that these beavers are being killed - sometimes suffering for minutes in conibear traps while they struggle and drown. These traps also pose a real risk to pets and children using these recreational areas.

Cities across North America, like London Ontario, are using progressive conflict-prevention practices such as flow devices to keep beavers and their essential environmental services on the landscape.

So why is Ottawa continuing the outdated, costly, environmentally destructive, and inhumane practice of killing beavers?

As they say, follow the money The cost of the trapper is a very small portion of the overall beaver management cost. The real cost to taxpayers is buried in Ottawa's Municipal Drainage, Road and Stormwater budgets. It involves continual



City of London – Flow device in Hyde Park Stormwater Pond

inspection and the frequent cleaning of culverts and ditches using City equipment and manpower. It is the protection of this unnecessary work that is often behind the resistance to adopt cost-effective prevention measures.

With the City 'appropriating' an ever-increasing number of natural creeks, ponds and wetlands for stormwater purposes to serve development, Ottawa must make the minor adjustments to work with nature and not against it. Beaver trapping must stop.

Residents Challenge the City

It is inspiring to see the community standing up for nature and wildlife. Residents continue to challenge the City's inability to coexist with Beaver and the lack of transparency and open communication. A petition started by community members on this issue has garnered more than 16,000 signatures and counting.



Photo by Greg Lister, Lester the beaver provided a wonderful educational opportunity for residents and their children.

Our community is deeply saddened to witness firsthand the City of Ottawa's inhumane approach to dealing with Lester the beaver. The optics are very clear, based on canned responses, no firm evidence has been given by the City about potential risks to residents or damage to infrastructure.

The City is taking the easy way out of this situation as it moves in the opposite direction from co-existing with nature. In spite of requests, they will not tell us how they are following their own approved wildlife policy which is heavily focused on co-existing with nature.

The City won't divulge what they have done with Lester. The public is owed an answer and explanation as to whether they have killed him or moved him which would also be a death sentence.

It's heart-breaking for so many of us residents and our children to watch.

Greg Lister

I have been extremely disappointed with the lack of response shown by the City of Ottawa. We are not asking for the City to abandon it's intensive development schedule nor to make any drastic changes; we are simply asking for them to seriously consider humane tools so we can live alongside the beaver population.

These tools will save taxpayer dollars as well as the lives of wildlife, yet the City persist in ignoring our repeated emails. They have not provided any evidence showing that harm could befall City infrastructure or local residents, nor are they providing any transparency or oversight into their decision-making process.

There is no reason why we can not live alongside a Canadian icon, such as a local beaver.

Robert Grant

A Wee Mink

By Kate MacNeil



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

The 4-week old little female mink arrived at the Centre and like many other young animals she was weak and lethargic. She was very dehydrated and had a few fleas and ticks but otherwise seemed okay. We gave sub-Q fluids and within two days she was moving at lightning speed.

Mink are members of the weasel family, an adult weighs around 1.5-3 lbs. Their diet consists of rodents, frogs, fish and birds. With a diet like that, it was not surprising that our new friend had sharp, tiny white teeth. She would happily bite and lick at the feeding syringe as if she had not eaten for days. Although she loved to eat her formula, she was not a fan of getting her face washed afterwards and she would make all kinds of squeaking noises. She sounded like a toy.

Soon it was time for her to move to a large cage in the library. We placed a variety of toys, sticks and plastic tubing in her cage to keep her busy, and boy did it work. She did not stop!

One of her favourite moves was swinging like Tarzan on the stuffed toys hanging in her cage. Her other favourite manoeuvre was the fireman roll. She would knock down a stick so it was on a 45 degree angle. She would then climb up the cage, jump onto the top of the stick, roll herself into a ring like a donut and slide down.

I had read years before that weasels moved like water flowing over rocks and that trying to catch one was like trying to catch mercury. I am old enough to remember breaking the glass thermometer and catching the mercury between two pieces of paper. Catching this little mink was indeed like trying to catch mercury! We would catch her to weigh her and give her cage a thorough cleaning and staff would emerge sweating and smelling from the squirt of musk they received.

For the rest of the summer we enjoyed her impressive acrobatic routines and when she was released back into the wild she bounded away with all the energy and curiosity she normally demonstrated.

Check out the OCWC Website www.wildlifeinfo.ca

Due to its size, the newsletter offers only a snapshot of what the Centre is up to. Got a wildlife question? Need an information resource for a wildlife project? Want to book a Wildlife Presentation? Visit our Website to be in the know. Keep it handy for future reference.

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OUR THANKS

OCWC gratefully acknowledges:

*Ruth and Ray Wesenberg
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Special thanks to: Ryan Kelson, Design