



# Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre

SERVING THE COMMUNITY FOR OVER 30 YEARS



Photo credit: Sally Hansen

## Moving Beyond Protection for Species At Risk

We humans seem to only value things when they are in short supply. Like rare wines, gemstones and wildlife. It's only when we've pushed a wild species to the brink of extinction that we show concern, elevating it to the special status of 'Species at Risk'.

But, even here we fail. The Ontario Government has received strong criticism from numerous sources, including the Province's Environmental Commissioner, Dianne Saxe, whose 2017 report states that Ontario's system for protecting species at risk, run by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNR), is a catastrophic failure: *"In the best case, the MNR has created a system that leaves itself with a minimal role to play; in the worse case, it has created a system designed to fail"*.

At the heart of this failure is the 'Overall Benefit Permit' system set up by the Province. Leave it to politicians, in catering to industry interests, to come up with a positive-sounding name for what is almost always a detrimental outcome for the environment. How

can you destroy a forest for a development with thousands of new homes and miles of paved infrastructure and believe that there can possibly be any benefit for the wild species that depend on this habitat?

### A New Course is Needed

The singular focus on Species at Risk only sets the bar for more failures. Instead, we must change the circumstances that has caused the problem – most frequently a loss of habitat, the lack of consideration for wildlife in the planning process and the resistance to taking an ecosystems approach.

Most of all, we must embrace all species as having a critical role to play in healthy ecosystems.

A recent World Wildlife Fund (WWF) report shows that Canadian wildlife is facing 'serious challenges'. A total of 451 species is in decline – roughly half of the total mammals, birds, fish, reptiles and amphibians studied saw their population decline by an average of 83 per cent between 1970 and 2014.

*"We need to think about an ecosystem approach, because what's happening to an entire ecosystem, whether it's pollution or loss of habitat or climate change, affects multiple species, including the ones that are in decline"*, said David Miller, WWF Canada's CEO.

### The Importance of a Biodiversity Strategy

Biodiversity is part of a healthy city and access to nature is key to the mental and physical health of its residents. The reality is that most of us connect to nature in our cities. Whether its watching squirrels in Strathcona Park, hearing songbirds in a Hunt Club backyard or catching a glimpse of a fox on a Kanata golf course.

But, you can't protect what you don't know or value. Progressive cities have developed Biodiversity Strategies, finding out what they have, what to do with it and enlisting the help of other stakeholders to preserve and protect it.

They recognize that all wildlife is important and that in nature everything is connected to everything else.

## Editorial

### What a Difference a Decade Makes



You know you are on the right side of change when a group of high school students complain that their new school eliminated a natural area, leaving them with a barren school yard; when a six-year old remarks that she had to explain to her father that garbage shouldn't be put out until morning if you don't want wildlife to help themselves;

or, after a presentation, there's a line-up of people asking us about everything from living with beavers on their property to becoming involved in protecting natural areas in their community.

A decade ago, people would call the Centre, upset about a wildlife or greenspace issue, expecting us to take an action they thought was necessary. Now, people are rallying together to become the guardians of treasured pieces of habitat in their community.

This is, no doubt, because so many natural areas have already been lost. People have come to recognize that by the time the community is made aware of a development proposal, it is already too late to have much of an impact.

Whether it's the Friends of Carp Hills, the Champlain Park Community Association in fostering forest succession in Champlain Park, Big Trees Kississippi, an attempt to save trees from intensive in-fill development in the west end, or a group of residents that remain diligent in protecting Goulbourn's wetlands, people are very involved. And, who better to advise municipal planning departments of what exists in these areas and the value it represents to the community.

In this issue of the newsletter, we are celebrating those that are taking action to preserve wildlife habitat or are working in a variety of ways to give wildlife a voice. Everyone has a role as an *'agent of change'*. You can influence your family and friends, your neighbours and those who ask for your vote.

#### Education Remains Key

Beyond protecting habitat, education will continue to play an important role in helping communities live in greater harmony with the natural world. The Centre's education and outreach programs are increasingly called upon as a resource by schools, community organizations and individuals.

We are encouraged that City Councillors Mark Taylor, Jean Cloutier, David Chernushenko and Marianne Wilkinson are using this resource to provide helpful information to residents, eliminating unwarranted fear, giving people the tools to resolve wildlife conflicts humanely and, best of all, helping them enjoy wildlife and nature in our City.

Donna DuBreuil  
President, OCWC

## In Defence of Crows

You may have observed that those wildlife species that can often outwit us humans are not among our favourites. Fortunately, the mean-spirited attitudes that once deemed certain animals less welcome than others is slowly disappearing, thanks to the voices of people like Claudette Claereboudt.

Claudette is a well-known artist, living in Regina Saskatchewan. This is a letter she had published in the Globe and Mail last year.



Photo credit: Barry Kent MacKay

Four winters ago, on a minus 30 C day with a fierce wind blowing, I heard frantic cawing coming from the light standard in front of our house. A crow was trying to hang on to its perch in the wind, complaining bitterly.

Since I feed the other birds (and the hares) when it's very cold, I quickly slathered peanut butter on stale bread and took it outside. I must have looked foolish waving a peanut butter sandwich in the air during a blizzard, but the crow figured it out. From the warmth of my front room, I watched him alight next to the sandwich, check it out, pick it up and disappear with it.

He's probably around all year but comes back to that light standard every winter on very cold, ugly days. Then he requests and gets his dinner from me. He is no freeloader, he has never abused my small generosity and does not bring his friends. This is between him and me. He does not harass the smaller birds who use the feeder, nor does he caw early in the morning. He has been a perfect gentleman, to me anyway.

Why do so many people seem to feel killing our wildlife neighbours because they annoy us is righteous? They have as much right to share the Earth as we do. A little respect and kindness always go a long way – with anybody. Try it.

Claudette Claereboudt, Regina



## Animal Stories

# Overcoming a Rough Start



By **Kate MacNeil**

Beaver kits are born in the spring or early summer and are well furred with their eyes open. They measure about 5 inches long, weighing approximately 500 grams. Young can take to the water days after birth and are skilled swimmers within weeks. The kits remain in a family unit with their parents and yearlings from previous litters, for the first two years of their lives.

The first baby beaver I had the pleasure to meet weighed in at about 1kg, approximately the size of a bag of sugar and was only a few weeks old, meaning it would be still nursing.

Homeowners had found it wounded, on their property. They lived near a wetland where there was development construction occurring. They felt that the lodge was likely destroyed, leaving the kit orphaned. It was covered in blood and was very lethargic. It was very clear that it had to be seen by a vet immediately.

The vet determined the beaver kit was likely mauled by a dog and was lucky to

be alive. It needed fluids for rehydration and its extensive punctures were cleaned and sutured. A tube had to be inserted to help some of the wounds drain and it was put on a treatment of antibiotics to help fight infection. On top of all that, it also came back with a terrible hair cut! This little kit was having a very rough start to life.

But this little bundle of fur was filled with spunk and attitude that was immediately evident and he seemed to be running the show from the get go. All the other animals at the Centre had a feeding schedule, based on their age, and when it was feeding time they ate. Well, not little beaver. I would take him home for late night feedings, I would try at 11:00 p.m - not hungry; 12:30 a.m. – nope, not yet; 1:30 a.m. – eureka, he ate. I quickly learned that little beaver's feeding schedule was, "whenever little beaver wanted to eat!"

Next would come his post dinner swim in a large Tupperware container in my bathtub. Sometimes he would splash and play, other times he would just enjoy a

leisurely swim. When he was finished he would put his tiny paws on the edge of the plastic tub and let out a small whistle, it reminded me of a little bell you would ring for the butler to come. I would take him out and towel him off, often he would fall asleep in my arms. I can only imagine how hard it would be for such a social animal to be without the care and nurturing of its parents and siblings.

After a month, little beaver was clearly on the mend, the wounds had healed, he was growing and even his funny haircut was almost gone. Since the kits remain with their parents for the first two years of life, we needed a longer-term home. Luckily, there was a rehab facility in the Muskokas that had other beaver kits as well as wetlands for his eventual release.

I was a little bit worried about how our little beaver would adjust to his new surroundings. No surprise, just fine. We received regular updates on our "Bossy Beaver" as he became affectionately known, until he was successfully released back into the wild.

## Beaver Facts

- Family is very important to beavers who mate for life and tend to their young for 2 years.
- All family members work together to maintain the lodges, dams and to put down the winter food cache.
- Beavers are amazing engineers and can alter habitat to suit their needs.
- Beavers play a key role in creating wetlands, which are critical for healthy ecosystems.
- Beaver ponds help to prevent flooding while retaining water during drought.

# Connecting to the Community

## Individuals Making a Positive Difference for Wildlife



**Ross and Claudia Owens** found a baby squirrel over 20 years ago and brought it to the Centre for care. After seeing the operation of volunteers and staff feeding and caring for a range of animals, Claudia, an

animal lover at heart knew she had to be part of this.

From April – October she would spend each Monday pitching in. There was no task too big or too small, feeding, cleaning, laundry. She even brought in homemade muffins, which contributed greatly to staff morale after a weekend of long hours.

Ross, Claudia's husband, also became involved with the Centre, helping with day-to-day tasks as well as working with Gary DuBreuil as the main cage builders. Building everything from nesting boxes for squirrels to large outdoor cages.

Claudia and Ross have remained long-time supporters of wildlife and coexistence. A few years ago they installed flow devices on their rural property to coexist with beavers. They found a win-win for all, the beaver was able to remain, providing ecological benefits, and the issues of flooding were addressed on residents' property and municipal roads, saving taxpayers money.

We are grateful for Ross and Claudia's involvement over the years, their support for wildlife is immeasurable.



*One of the squirrels fostered by Brett*

**Brett Foster** was introduced to the Centre over 25 years ago after seeing an article and becoming a foster volunteer. This meant taking over the care, caging and release of a range of animals such as flying squirrels, rabbits and woodchucks.

This was only a part of the contribution he would make for wildlife and the Centre. Brett developed the records system for the Centre. This required computer expertise along with a first-hand understanding of the operation. This system allowed us to keep detailed and searchable records of dozens of foster volunteers, hundreds of animals and thousands of human-wildlife conflict calls each year.

This system was vital to the rehabilitation operation. It meant with a few clicks we could find the complete medical history of an animal or find the record of a caller outlining their problem and what advice was given in case a follow up call was needed.

When our program evolved to Education and Outreach, the system helped us to keep track of schools we presented to and the number of students we reached. It also allows us to keep our Contact files up-to-date, meaning we can keep in touch with volunteers and supporters.

Not only did Brett develop this system, the on-going support he provided during our rehab days was immense. And, as if that was not a large enough contribution, he still helps with computer support today, that is dedication!

**Margaret Churchill** demonstrates the ways wildlife can touch people's hearts and the connections we make with animals.

Last summer, the Centre received a call from a family looking for advice as a raccoon had entered through a cat door and given birth to six babies in their basement. These are the calls that wildlife centres hate to receive as they normally end badly for animals.

But this was the exception, the family were willing to give the raccoons a grace period. The Centre heard from the family over the summer with questions and updates. The experience was positive, for both the raccoons and the family, demonstrating that

getting to know other species can be richly rewarding.

Margaret Churchill, the homeowner, turned this experience into a charming book about the true-life adventure of a raccoon mother who suddenly gave birth in the basement of an Ottawa home one day. The book takes you through what the author learned about raccoons in general and how her respect and admiration for the mother grew into a trusting and fun-loving adventure with her six babies.

The book is now being converted to a children's book that will be available in the upcoming months.



For more information, you can reach the author at [margchurchill653@gmail.com](mailto:margchurchill653@gmail.com).



## Impact Community Can Have

# CBLCA Community Rallies to Protect Greenspace



The Crystal Beach Lakeview community is a lovely, mature area in Ottawa's west end, with easy access to the Ottawa River and the NCC Greenbelt. People have chosen to live there to be close to nature.

It was, therefore, no surprise that this community came together to ensure that precious greenspace was not a victim of planned Light Rail Transit (LRT). *"Building a modern transportation system should never be at the expense of the environment"* said Ian McConnachie, chair of the Transportation Committee of the Crystal Beach Lakeview Community Association (CBLCA).

When, as part of the LRT project, a Light Maintenance and Storage Facility - basically a sleeping yard for trains - was proposed by the City that would have eliminated a very large natural area, residents voiced their strong opposition. Among the dozens of comments *"my family has visited this forest on a weekly basis (almost daily in winter) and have seen deer, porcupine, coyote, fisher, fox, raccoon, skunk and many species of birds"*, said one resident. The City was forced to choose another site, at least for this element of the project.

*"Through the hard work of CBLCA members like president Monica Patten, Ian McConnachie, Peggy McGillivray and others, they identified and documented concerns while providing recommendations to protect the health of Stillwater Creek, prevent downstream erosion and tree loss, reduce the impact on the floodplain by restoring and utilizing an adjacent wetland and allow for safe wildlife movement by underpasses and the restoration of a wildlife corridor"*, said Donna DuBreuil, president of the Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre.

*"We were delighted to collaborate with the Crystal Beach Lakeview Community Association on this project and inspired by their determined and effective voice on behalf of the environment. We look forward to continuing to work with the Association to ensure that the rich biodiversity in this area is protected"*, said DuBreuil.

## Graham Creek Revisited

A decade ago, residents living along Graham Creek in Ottawa's west end were concerned that beavers were taking down trees in the ravine at the back of their properties.

Discouraged by the advice of the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry that the standard practice was to trap and kill the beavers, they sought other advice. Homeowners felt that killing the beavers, as had happened in the past, was purely reactionary and would not provide a sustainable solution.

*"This very suitable habitat will continue to attract beavers, setting up a predictable cycle of lose trees, kill beavers, lose more trees, kill more beavers"*, said homeowner Kate Partridge.

Enter the Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre whose mission is to help people live in greater harmony with nature. *"Education and prevention of problems are our key messages rather than the outdated approach of killing wildlife whenever it poses an inconvenience to us"*, said Donna DuBreuil of the Centre.

Ms. Partridge organized a meeting of homeowners and invited the Wildlife Centre to make a presentation and provide recommendations as to what might be done. Homeowners heard from the Centre that beavers are a 'keystone species', crucial to maintaining habitat that supports a wide variety of animal and plant life.

This allowed homeowners along Graham Creek to put into context that the amazing natural area they get to enjoy in the middle of the city, where Great Blue Herons are observed fishing for frogs and the many species of birds and mammals they see, would not likely be there without the beavers.

The Centre recommended protecting significant trees by placing a wire cage around them while leaving and supplementing other trees that regenerate quickly as food for the beaver.

Homeowners paid for the materials and wrapped more than 50 trees and, with the support of Councillor Rick Chiarelli, they

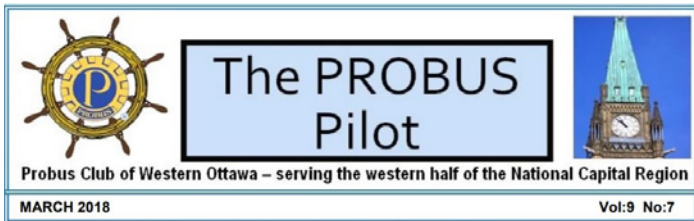


obtained 300 young trees from the city which they planted.

On visiting the site last year, we were very impressed with how lush and green it is. One homeowner, not knowing who we were, said somewhat defensively, *'there's a beaver in the creek and we want it there!'*

Kate Partridge, the homeowner who spearheaded the project, said *"it's great to live in a city with such abundant wildlife and have the expertise of the Wildlife Centre to help us live in greater harmony with the natural world"*.

# Connecting to Nature – Backyards and Beyond



This spring Donna and Kate had the opportunity to be the guest speakers at the Probud Club of Western Ottawa's March meeting. The Club is part of the international organization of Probud Clubs designed to serve retired and semi-retired professional, business and like-minded people.

Despite being a snowy day in early March the turnout was great, with close to 100 members in attendance.

Kate talked about the variety of programs through which the Centre educates people about wildlife and helps foster an appreciation of the natural world. The Centre's pro-

grams help get kids connected to nature through school presentations and Nature Discovery Workshops. We also work extensively with residents to help protect wildlife and habitat in their neighbourhoods.

Kate also talked about the wide range of species we share our spaces with, some of the human-wildlife conflicts that can occur as well as things we can all do to coexist.

The Club expressed their appreciation for the Centre's work and acknowledged the importance of educating the community about the need for preserving wildlife and their habitat. And, that it is important we remember that we share our environment with other species.

Kate and Donna both enjoyed the opportunity to engage with such an informed, energetic and welcoming group. The members had lots of questions and comments following the presentation that ranged from planning issues involving the LRT extension to Kanata to the installation of flow devices to be able to coexist with beavers on their property.

## National Capital Commission Takes Initiative

The Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre, along with other stakeholder groups attended a public consultation session last June held by the National Capital Commission (NCC). The focus was to gain input for the renewal of their Environmental Strategy.

Following this session, the NCC adopted the framework from the Federal Sustainable Development Strategy (FSDS). It is the Federal Government's primary vehicle for sustainable development planning and reporting. It sets out priorities, establishes goals and targets, and identifies actions to achieve them.

The NCC is currently identifying targets and developing action plans for its new Sustainable Development Strategy. Given the broad mandate of the NCC, they have determined that 10 of the 13 long-term goals outlined in the FSDS will be included in their strategy.

The NCC held further workshops in November which were well attended including Federal Government (Public Services and Procurement Canada; RCMP); Municipal Government (City of Ottawa Ecologist, Forester, Public Health); NGOs (Nature Canada, Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre, Safe

Wings Ottawa); as well as Community Associations and individuals.

The NCC presented the first draft of the targets and action plans it had developed and attendees were asked to comment. The wide range of topics included sustainable agriculture to how the NCC will handle contaminated sites on their lands.

The Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre stressed the need to protect all wildlife species, not just those species at risk, the value of wetlands and the need to utilize green infrastructure. They also reiterated the wealth of knowledge and resources that can be found in various organizations and community associations and that collaboration and transparency are vital.

The NCC plans to have a Draft complete this spring, consultation and approvals to follow, with the expectation of launching it in September 2018.





# Kate MacNeil Appointed OCWC Executive Director

The Board was delighted when Kate MacNeil recently accepted the new position of Executive Director at the Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre.

*"No one could be better qualified for the position than Kate as she has been involved with the Centre for 20 years, working in all aspects of its evolution during that time",* said President, Donna DuBreuil.

Kate graduated from Mount Saint Vincent University with a Bachelor of Science degree in Biology. She has worked with the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry doing lake surveys and as Coordinator of Stewardship Programs with Nature Canada.

She joined the Centre in 1998 and soon became Coordinator, responsible for hiring and supervising staff as well as recruiting, training and managing over 150 volunteers for a Wildlife Rehabilitation Program that cared for upwards of 1,200 wild mammals, ranging from flying squirrels to river otters, each year.

For the more unusual species like river otters, it involved considerable research and collaboration with experts in other countries along with a huge amount of time investigating suitable release sites to ensure the best possible outcome for the otters.

During this time, Kate also managed the Centre's highly-regarded Wildlife Conflict Resolution Service, dealing with over 7,000 calls annually, providing callers with humane and effective advice on wildlife problems, thereby drastically reducing the number of orphans that would have otherwise resulted.

In 2005, when the Centre shifted its focus to education and community outreach in an effort to improve the lot of all wildlife, Kate became Education Coordinator. She has developed and delivered programs to thousands of students in the region and has connected to thousands of others in presentations to a wide range of organizations and groups. Kate's enthusiasm, energy and creativity, along the first-hand knowledge she has gained in caring for wildlife, make her a much sought-after teacher and presenter for young and old alike.

As the demand for the Centre's programs has grown significantly in both number and variety in the last decade, Kate has taken on increased responsibility. She works with community groups on wildlife and habitat protection, assists with Pilot Projects on behalf of species such as Beavers and Coyotes and works with organizations across the country to



"I feel fortunate to be part of such a worthwhile organization that not only works on behalf of wildlife issues but also helps people discover, enjoy and protect nature", said Kate on her appointment as Executive Director of the Centre.

develop and promote progressive alternatives to outdated practices that harm wildlife. In addition, she has assumed increased responsibility for program development, financial administration and community relations.

*"I find it extremely rewarding to work as part of an organization in which there are such measurable results for both wildlife and people",* said Kate.

*"We are fortunate, as an organization, to have someone so well equipped and experienced in assuming the role of Executive Director as Kate MacNeil,"* said Dr. Dan Rodgers, Vice-President of the Centre.

# A Nature Adventure

For 30 years the Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre has been educating people about wildlife and helping to foster an appreciation of the natural world.

The OCWC continues to work hard to connect children to nature and get them excited about the wildlife we share our spaces with. We are very fortunate that, in the Nation's Capital, not only do we have an abundance of nature to explore at our finger tips, but we also have a significant range of species that live in and around our City.

Through our School Presentations and Nature Discovery Workshops we are reaching children of all ages and from all walks of life, we believe that nature is a gift that everyone should have the opportunity to enjoy.

There is growing evidence of the benefits nature has to offer people of all ages. It is far reaching, encompassing mind, body and spirit. For children this means improved concentration, building confidence and promoting creativity and getting them moving.

There could be no better time to focus on reconnecting people to nature and the benefits it brings. Not only are we living in a time in which adult lives seem so chaotic, demanding and over scheduled, but this is also becoming the norm for many children. It is not surprising we are seeing increased rates of anxiety, depression and obesity among children.

Getting outside to play sounds simple, but sometimes we seem to complicate things. Through our programing, it is



Students at Farley Mowat Public School having fun learning about wildlife

evident that with opportunity and encouragement and some contagious enthusiasm for the natural world, most children embrace nature exploration with open arms and smiling faces.

So take them outside, Gatineau Park is fabulous, but so is the small patch of green space at the end of your street. Don't just play on the play structure the next time you go to the park, take your kids to explore the tall grass or trees along the way, walk along the pond and they will be amazed to see the frogs leap to the safety of the water, stop to listen to the lovely call of the red-winged blackbird, or play detective with the tracks in the mud. You don't have to go far to have a Nature Adventure!

## Donation Coupon

Yes I want to help wildlife



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