



Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre

Newsletter Spring 2011

Building a Constituency for Wildlife

More and more people are speaking out on behalf of the protection of wildlife and green space. Perhaps it's because we are finally realizing that our disconnection from the natural world is exacting a significant toll on the quality of life within our communities.

When Ken Gray, Ottawa Citizen columnist, talks about the city being at war with itself, the most prominent examples involve the loss of green space - the Beaver Pond Forest, the Leitrim Wetlands, Landsdowne Park and Les Soeurs de la Visitation convent in Westboro.

Award-winning author and Citizen columnist Phil Jenkins puts it more directly, referring to these places as where you go to 'think', whether it is by a river or in the woods or in a park. And he believes that the better a city thinks, the better it is. He argues that *"a decision as to what percentage of Ottawa should remain undeveloped, and what and where that percentage should be, is becoming crucial, before the concrete, like some relentless glacier, washes over everything"*.

Like many cities, Ottawa has no difficulty in justifying substantial tax dollars for grey infrastructure, with its high overhead and short life expectancy. The city now needs to better understand and recognize the value of green infrastructure and the crucial services it provides residents with little overhead.

Beyond habitat

It was not that many years ago, that some thought just providing habitat was enough to protect wildlife. And, that concerns about wildlife were animal welfare not environmental ones.

While habitat is crucial for wildlife, it is not their only need. When development prompts closer human-wildlife interface there is a need for education and awareness programs to provide a better understanding and appreciation for co-existence. Fortunately, this is not difficult as the majority of people enjoy wildlife, although they may need a refresher now and then on how best to get on together.

Coalitions Being Formed

It is encouraging that citizens are joining together in a united front to ensure a strong voice for the protection of green space and wildlife. Through coalitions like the Ontario Wildlife Coalition, the



Photo courtesy of Sally Hansen

Greenbelt Coalition, the South March Highlands Coalition along with a growing number of individuals across the province that are speaking out against the relentless loss of habitat and the mindless persecution of wildlife.

Rallies led by the Algonquins and the community on behalf of the Beaver Pond Forest were particularly touching in that picket signs had drawings of each of the forest creatures that stood to lose their homes. The respectful relationship that the Algonquin peoples have with wildlife seemed to give permission to others to also show their feelings for these animals. A healthy thing.

Moving Forward

It is too easy and, frankly, too late to blame developers when green space is threatened.

Instead, leadership must come from the City in bringing community stakeholders and builders together to proactively plan for new development rather than the reactive process that currently exists.

It's time to put Ottawa's Public Participation Policy into real practice on behalf of constructive collaborations.

The best outcome for residents, builders and the city will, we believe, also be the best outcome for wildlife.

Editorial

Conserving Urban Nature



In spite of the ever-expanding number of electronic diversions and an affluent life style, we increasing hear about society's unhappiness. Despite a standard of living that is well beyond what our

parents enjoyed, more people are feeling powerless, stressed and dissatisfied.

Maybe we are following the wrong dream.

Of course, we are somewhat biased at the Wildlife Centre given that our philosophy and programs are passionate about reconnecting people to the simple pleasures of the natural world.

We know that "nature deficit disorder" is having a serious impact on our children by denying them the independence, adventure and creativity they need to develop and grow as individuals and that we need for a healthy and productive society.

In fact, we all need nature. Studies like Dr. John Zelenski's at Carleton University show a strong correlation between people's happiness and a relationship with nature.

Now, we are finding that our connection to nature might just be the only answer to protecting the world's ecosystems. According to scientists, conservation may increasingly depend on the ability of people in cities to maintain a connection to nature.

The Centre has long expressed the view that the battle for biodiversity would be won or lost in our cities. After all, that is where the majority of us live and vote and what you don't experience, you are much less likely to support.

It's nice to have our view confirmed, if only because planners might now start to place higher value on remnant habitat and smaller patches of biodiversity within our cities.

Donna DuBreuil
President, OCWC

Environmental Champions

We would like you to meet, from time to time, some of the key partners that have been of great assistance to the Centre's wildlife mission.



Liz White, Director, Animal Alliance and Environment Voters of Canada

Liz's contribution to animal welfare

in Canada over the past 25 years is legendary. A report of what she and a small group of Animal Alliance staff and volunteers accomplished in 2010 covers two full pages of single-line entries and yet only serves to highlight some of her organization's work.

Her efforts on behalf of wildlife has found her on a boat filming the slaughter of cormorants, giving an interview challenging the hunting of "endangered" elk or assisting a community fighting for progressive solutions to deer conflicts. Liz has a well-earned reputation for honesty and fairness, always looking to find the

necessary compromise to move forward, but never deserting her principles.

Liz has worked tirelessly to reinstate humane help for wildlife in Ontario, agreeing to serve as Vice-Chair of a recently-appointed Wildlife Rehabilitation Advisory Committee to the Minister of Natural Resources. She is also a member of the MNR Human-Wildlife Conflict Advisory Group and sits on the City of Ottawa Wildlife Strategy Working Group. Liz is the spokesperson for the Ontario Wildlife Coalition and the Leader of the Environment Voters Party of Canada, which serves as an important voice for issues affecting animals.



Sol Shuster, Chair, Greenbelt Coalition of Canada's Capital Region

Sol and his wife, Shayna, have had a

long-standing commitment to protecting Ottawa's Greenbelt. Sol has provided leadership to a number of community and environmental organizations over the years. The Greenbelt Coalition was started in 2008 to ensure that there would be a strong community-based voice for the NCC's Greenbelt Master Plan Review.

As chair of the Greenbelt Coalition, Sol has done what many would have considered impossible. He has kept 15 or more environmental and community organizations working together in spite of divergent interests, differences of opinion and, on occasion, hefty egos. Sol's hard

work, skilled diplomacy (coupled with the tenacity of a pit bull), his respect for others, his willingness to learn along with his ability to find and build consensus have been key factors in the success of the Coalition.

Sol's vision, which includes the protection of all species as part of a vibrant and healthy ecosystem, has been of great value not only in the Coalition's work and the production of its major Position Paper (see www.greenbeltcoalition.ca) that includes a number of recommendations regarding wildlife, but on the City of Ottawa Wildlife Strategy Working Group, of which he is a member.

Taking a lesson from Raccoons



During our planning session for this issue we realized we had not done a story about raccoons in a long time. How could this be? Raccoons were always a favourite of staff and volunteers alike.

How could you not find endearing a little masked face with soft feet that would grab onto a baby bottle and eat like it was their last meal? Add to that the purring, the trilling and never ending curiosity. They almost seem to have a thirst for learning and investigating, as if they want to figure out how everything works.

Truth be told I think their motivation was often nefarious, “hmm, if I can just figure out how to open the cage I can escape”, or “how can I open that can of cat food myself?” or “that would be a fun thing to play with”. If we were not careful they would sneak things out of the pocket of our lab coats with a lightness that even the most accomplished pickpocket would envy.

Unfortunately, the strong response raccoons bring out in some people is not always positive. They seem to be in the category with beavers, geese and coyotes. Those animals that adapt very well to human encroachment, and manage to outsmart us. How dare they respond so well to our constant destruction of habitat?

I think people could learn something from raccoons and this amazing ability to adapt. This brings me to a group of raccoons that resided in Cage 4 one season. They were a diverse group that is for sure. Cain, a baby raccoon, had been found during a time when we were full, so his finder was doing temporary care, until we had a spot for him.

Then there was Jay who had been raised all summer with siblings, all of whom unfortunately died due to an infection. When this happened, Jay appeared very distressed and spent the days pacing.

In September, two 4-week old orphans arrived at the Centre. These little guys were very late, they would normally be this size

in May. We were worried they would not be big enough to spend the winter in an outdoor cage, let alone be mixed with raccoons that would be three times their size.

The final arrival was Grease coon, a juvenile who had fallen in a vat of cold cooking grease outside a restaurant and almost drowned. Having only experienced the wild, he was understandably very wary and hid almost 24 hrs a day.

When everyone was healthy it was time to move them to an outdoor cage, and do some introductions. The problem was that we only had one cage left, we really had no options if there was a personality clash so we began to mix this hodgepodge together. We first introduced Cain and Jay and although they tolerated each other, both still seemed unhappy. We then mixed the two late born raccoons and Grease raccoon. We watched closely, very unsure about this mixing. But it was love at first sight, Jay stopped pacing, Grease coon no longer hid and was wrestling playfully with his new buddies, Cain finally stopped eating non-stop. And the two smaller guys would curl up and snuggle with their new cage mates in their nesting box, which would be a blessing during the cold winter days to come.

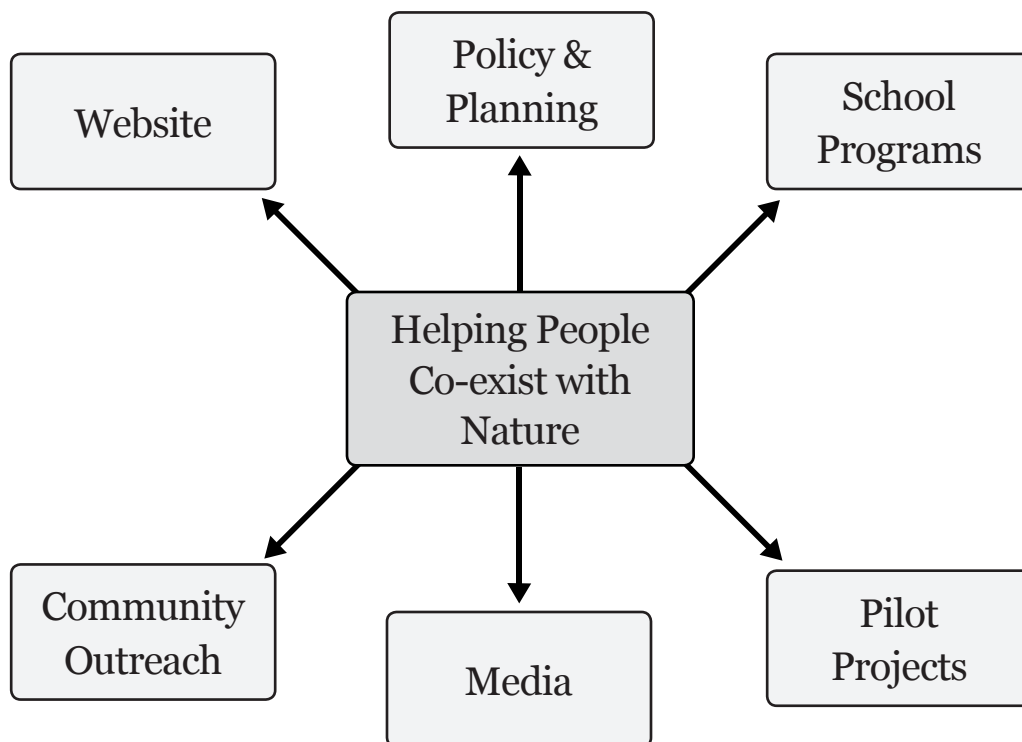
If only more people could be as open and accepting as these raccoons we would all be better off.

I think much of people's dislike of raccoons is based on ignorance and misinformation. Countless people have told me about how vicious these animals are. What I have witnessed, during years of rehabilitating as well as just observing them is just the opposite. They would settle disagreements with each other by growling, screaming and snarling. The vocalizations they make may sound scary, and most people are surprised that raccoons are the sources of the racket, but in our experience this would usually be the extent of the altercation. When you think about it, this makes sense, as it would be very counterproductive for a wild animal to risk an injury.

The same was true with respect to people and pets. In the cases we would hear about, a dog would start the fight and if the raccoon had no other escape option, it would fight back, but by no means were they out there looking for trouble, more likely they were looking for a snack.

I remember watching a raccoon slowly amble towards a skunk that was eating some pet food left outside for a stray cat. The raccoon coolly slid one paw into the bowl, then another, next thing he was sitting in the dish like a little Buddha taking time to pick up the food from between his legs. The raccoon moved in so innocently and quietly the skunk just let him have the food. This action, in my mind, perfectly sums up raccoons, especially when there is food involved!

Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre Programs



Although the Centre is a small organization, it provides a wide variety of services. Its many years of experience, along with its dedicated volunteers and extensive involvement with other organizations, contributes to a synergy that significantly expands the benefits for wildlife. Its school program is taken to over 1,000 students a year and its community awareness events, website and media contributions reach many thousands more. Innovative pilot projects assist area residents find effective ways to coexist with wildlife and its work with other stakeholder groups helps to establish progressive practices and policies on behalf of wildlife.

City of Ottawa Wildlife Strategy

The motion to develop a Wildlife Strategy was approved by Ottawa city council in February 2010. While it was prompted by public controversy around the coyote issue, there has been long-standing concern about the city's response to wildlife matters generally. The gassing of groundhogs in a public park, the kill-trapping of beavers and the lack of a humane response for large mammals wandering into developed areas.

Council approved a Wildlife Strategy and directed staff to work with other agencies and the public to develop a strategy for reducing and managing the deleterious effects of human-wildlife interactions on animals and their habitats. A working group of government and community stakeholder organizations was established soon after the motion passed and has been meeting regularly since then.

We had hoped in this newsletter to be able to tell you about the success we had in obtaining council's support for an interim report and about some of the pilot projects that were underway. However, change takes time and often doesn't come easily. Particularly when it means that previous decision-making about wildlife has to be opened up to wider public participation.

However, the good news is that detailed terms of reference have been approved and provide the framework for moving forward.

The Goal of the Wildlife Strategy

To contribute to the protection of biodiversity, ecosystem health, and the welfare of wildlife in Ottawa through better land use planning, public education and public outreach

A broad number of deliverables have been identified to meet the objective for a comprehensive and integrated strategy. Examples include a review and summary of current practices; the development of recommendations for wildlife-sensitive planning; identifying best practices with respect to public education and awareness; developing a set of construction protocols for wildlife protection; and the development of a number of pilot projects for implementation.

We appreciate that many of you have inquired about the progress of the Wildlife Strategy. While it is taking longer than some had hoped, particularly in the face of the controversial coyote-killing contests, we are still confident in Project Manager, Nick Stow's belief *"that we will succeed in writing a progressive, effective Wildlife Strategy that the future Committees and Council will be eager to support"*.

Controversial Coyote Killing Contests



Photo: Alberta Institute for Wildlife Conservation

Many were shocked to learn that the Minister of Natural Resources is considering supporting contests to kill coyotes in Ontario. It's bad enough that the government has turned a blind eye to these illegal contests the past few years, but it now seems the Minister is actually talking about sanctioning the contests.

The coyote killing contests being held in eastern Ontario advertise shotguns, digital cameras and clothing to hunters who bring in the most coyote carcasses, making them a violation of Section 11 of the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act which states *"a person shall not hunt for hire, gain or the expectation of gain"*.

These contests *"are wrong on so many levels, that we cannot understand why Premier McGuinty will not act on behalf of the majority of Ontarians who are repulsed and angered by these primitive throw backs to another era"*, says Donna DuBreuil of the OCWC.

It's bad enough that coyotes can be hunted year round, one of the only species that can be killed when they have dependent young, but how can 'contests' be justified when the main objective is to provide *'bragging rights'* for sport hunters?

At least one organization, the Ontario Wildlife Coalition has launched a campaign to direct the large number of public complaints to the Premier's attention. Liz White, spokes-

person for the Coalition said *"there have been hundreds of letters from across Ontario, from rural, suburban and urban residents, demanding that these contests be ended"*.

Where's the Justification?

The justification given for killing coyotes is that they are taking a lot of livestock. The facts show otherwise.

Livestock losses due to coyote predation in Ontario represent only 1% in numbers of sheep produced and 0.08% in cattle produced. This is insignificant considering small businesses experience up to 3% in lost profits annually due to theft and get no compensation from government.

Predation is cyclical. In Ottawa, livestock predation claims were down by 25% in 2010. In North Glengarry, the livestock evaluator reports he received only 8 calls in 2010 compared to 40 in 2008. This shows the majority of farmers, like most small business owners, realize they have to protect their assets and are doing so.

So much for Ontario's Protection of Biodiversity

It is ironic that the Ontario government has produced a Provincial Policy Statement that stresses the protection of biodiversity, priding itself on a science-based approach, and yet is considering approving the mindless slaughter of a species.

Coyotes, as an apex species, have a top down impact on many other species. Removing them from a habitat creates a huge imbalance that threatens ecological stability, allowing the number of other species to get out of control, causing a far greater risk to agricultural crops.

Besides, science has proven that the consequence of culling a coyote population is only to strengthen its numbers through accelerated reproduction and migration. The Minister herself agrees with this, recently stating that she objected to culls and bounties because *"we haven't found them to work in the past"*.

No one owns nature. We all share in the responsibility for protecting it. We need to follow the lead of the majority of North American cities, like Vancouver and Calgary, that have 'Living with Coyotes' programs that are based on progressive prevention measures and education.

Putting Pets and People at Risk

The coyote contests are taking their toll. As reported in a number of area newspapers, they have been a very divisive force in communities across the region, with residents saying they are afraid to go out, even on their own property, any longer.

A number of dogs have been killed in traps or shot by hunters. Stacey Cassell's 11-year old Lab, Mishka, died in his arms, with the steel jaws of a trap set for coyotes clenching around the dog's neck. He said, *"you simply cannot imagine the pain this has caused my family"*. He wants to see the removal of all traps, saying that *"pets and other animals rely on humans to keep them safe in a world where there is no more wilderness or refuge"*.

Time for Change

Why is it that the Agriculture Minister has not proposed a contest or cull of coyotes and, yet, the Minister of Natural Resources whose responsibility it should be to protect wildlife, is considering a cull of coyotes?

Many believe that the Minister of Natural Resources is acting on behalf of hunting interests. With over 76% of the Wildlife Department's operating budget coming from licence revenue from 'harvesting' activities, it has become reliant on these interests. This creates a significant conflict of interest in fulfilling the broader conservation mandate expected of this Ministry by the Ontario public.

Modernizing the role and responsibilities of the Ministry of Natural Resources is long overdue.

TD Friends of the Environment Foundation celebrates 20 years of helping the environment



The TD Friends of the Environment Foundation (TD FEF) is celebrating its 20th anniversary. It is amazing to think that the TD FEF has provided more than \$53 million in funding to over 19,000 grassroots environment and wildlife projects across Canada.

Thousands of donors give to TD FEF on a monthly basis and TD Bank Financial Group contributes in excess of \$1 million annually. TD also covers the management costs of running TD FEF, which guarantees

100 per cent of every dollar donated goes directly to funding projects in the community where the donation was made.

The Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre is pleased to announce we have received a grant from TD FEF in the amount of \$5,210 to assist in the delivery of our Education and Outreach programs.

We were fortunate to have the opportunity to spend Earth Day 2010 at the TD Canada Trust Wellington Street Branch. Not only did we meet some of the people whose efforts help this amazing initiative but we also got to showcase some of the projects the TD FEF is helping make happen.



Donna DuBreuil with Krista Moulds, Manager of Customer Service at TD Canada Trust.

Harnessing Community Action



The OCWC has established a strong foundation through its Education and Outreach Programs but it is critical to continue to build on these elements and expand the linkages between them. Getting people within the community to take appropriate actions is an important

first step, but these initiatives will only be successful in the long term if they are supported by local governments and lead to more progressive policies and practices that impact wildlife. The overall goal is to change attitudes and approaches to be more sustainable and wildlife friendly. It takes a bottom-up approach by encouraging and directly assisting individuals and communities to implement on-the-ground actions as well as a top-down approach in working with the media, businesses, and governments.

It is not enough to simply tell people that they can do more to save habitat and protect wildlife. It is vital to give them the tools, support and confidence to realize they can make a difference. Building awareness and recognition of community initiatives provides encouragement to participants and attracts support of city councillors and the wider community.

Working together, we can make a difference for wildlife and people's enjoyment

of the natural world. The Graham Creek Community Initiative has clearly demonstrated this. As we continue to work with more groups within the community, whether it be environmental coalitions such as the Greenbelt Coalition, residents or organizations such as the Fletcher Wildlife Garden there is, definitely power in numbers when it comes to building a constituency for wildlife.

Working with city departments such as forestry, stormwater, transportation and parks will be a critical next step in developing progressive wildlife policies that are in line with the community's growing interests and expectations.

"It's great to live in a city with abundant wildlife and have the expertise of the OCWC to successfully deliver human-wildlife conflict prevention programs." Kate Partridge, Graham Creek

An adult see a few trees, a child sees a forest and a world of adventure



By Kate MacNeil

I am sure many people have heard of the term nature-deficit disorder. The concept that the bond between children today and the natural world is being broken. There is growing concern about the increasing amount of time children today spend inside occupying their time watching TV, playing on the computer or video games. I have heard the joke many times that kids today have seen and learned so many things but they have not really experienced

anything since they viewed it through a little screen.

As a parent I see first hand all the nifty gadgets available to educate, entertain and yes sometimes even distract our children. I will be the first to admit that we have played a game of Angry Birds with our daughter on my husband's iPhone. I am not saying we should all pack up and move to the deep woods (my husband would not go unless there was high speed internet). But, I think we have to be aware of how quickly things are changing and remember all the gifts nature can give to children and find a balance that works for you.

I remember the things I did as a child and sadly realize that technology is taking the place of many of them. As children we would spend hours exploring the outdoors until our parents beckoned us home. There was a wooded area behind our house that we called Devil's Eye. Not that long ago I checked out these "woods" on Google

Maps (isn't technology great) and they are really just a couple of trees in the backyard easily visible from my old house. But, I can vividly remember viewing this through my childhood eyes as a forest of epic proportions. The games we played and the adventures we had were never ending. It turns out that it was not only a lot of fun, apparently we were learning to take risks, build confidence and gaining a sense of independence - who knew?

I see this same imagination and wonder in my daughter and her friends as they play every day after school at the "trees" by their school. This 30-foot row of cedar trees, with a small patch of grass between parking lots provide this same enjoyment. The only things to play with are those things they can find, so they collect sticks and rocks and excavate into the earth to find "secret worlds". It is quite amazing how the group of them occupy their time and never want to go home.

Get Wild About Wildlife



Spring has finally arrived!

Wildlife, much like us are becoming more active. Not only is this the beginning of the birthing season for many species but it is also the peak time for human-wildlife conflicts.

Whether you have an animal in your attic, an animal eating your garden or just want some information on the deer that are visiting your property, check out www.wildlifeinfo.ca for effective information.

Tips to Remember:

- The birthing season is at its peak between April and August
- Females seek shelter in attics, under steps and in chimneys for a safe spot to have young
- This is TEMPORARY, it is best to give a grace period until babies are coming out with mom before doing any animal-proofing
- Do not trap the animal or barricade the entry, this can cause bigger problems
- Do not smoke animals out of a chimney
- Removal companies cannot guarantee they will not create orphans
- If you find a nest in a shed, garage or garden leave it alone
- Check your barbeque before use as red squirrels and mice will sometimes make their nest under the grill

Living with Wildlife – Red Foxes



Photo courtesy of Sally Hansen



The “Living with Wildlife” series was launched in 2010, a partnership between the EMC and the OCWC to celebrate local wildlife. There have been close to 30 columns to date on eighteen different species of mammals, showing the rich biodiversity we have in this region.

The Red Fox (*Vulpes vulpes*) belongs to the same family, the Canidae, as domestic dogs, coyotes, and grey wolves. It appears larger than it actually is due to its bushy tail and long slender body, however, it weighs only between 4–7 kilograms or roughly the same size as the average house cat.

They are most active at night but can be seen at dusk or early morning. Their food consists of mice, voles, rabbits, hares, crickets, grasshoppers, and plant material like acorns, berries and apples. Because of their relatively small stomachs, red foxes cache a lot of their

food under leaves or snow for future requirements.

Red foxes have excellent eyesight, a keen sense of smell and acute hearing. I would sometimes watch a red fox on a snow covered field standing quite motionless, with head cocked to one side before it leaped into the air and pounced on an unsuspecting mouse tunnelling under the snow.

Dog foxes (males) and vixens (females) are usually, but not always, monogamous or have only one mate. They breed between mid-January and mid-March with the young born from March through May. The den is often an abandoned woodchuck burrow, a patch of dense bush or an excavation under a barn or other structure. We found, similar to other wild mammals, foxes often choose to have their young closer to humans to afford them more protection from predators.

Newborn foxes can be easily mistaken for boxer puppies given their square muzzle and brown pelage or coat. When raising orphan foxes at the Wildlife Centre, it was always fascinating to see the stages of development as they ‘grew’ into being a fox, with the muzzle becoming more elongated and the coat increasingly reddish in colour.

Parenting is shared, with the dog fox bringing food for the vixen when the pups are newborn and both adults bringing food for the young once weaned as well as teaching them

to hunt when old enough. The young disperse in the autumn.

Red foxes are highly intelligent and, from our experience at the Wildlife Centre, they also exhibit a highly developed sense of playfulness. Something that golf courses know as foxes were frequently seen stealing golf balls off the course. On one occasion, a fox stole a shoe that had been left on a deck. When the owner tried to retrieve it, the fox would run a few feet and lie down with the shoe in its mouth and a lopsided grin on its face.

Photographer Sally Hansen is wiled by nature. Her studies of animals capture their activities and personalities, and display the wonderful diversity of life.

She exhibits her wildlife photographs in the hope that they will stimulate an interest in the fascinating creatures who share this planet with us. Only through learning and caring about them will we make the choices vital to their survival and our own.

When not pursuing her passion for photography, Hansen is an arts reporter for ‘the Humm’ where her monthly column, “Art and Soul,” profiles regional artists (www.thehum.com).

Feathered and other wild animals are her favourite subjects, but she also photographs flowers and landscapes. She welcomes inquiries at smhansen@magma.ca or by phone at 613-721-6750.

OUR THANKS

OCWC gratefully acknowledges:

*Ruth and Ray Wesenberg
Wildlife Fund*



For good...forever Le bien...toujours



Special thanks to:

Ryan Kelson, Design - kelson.rk@gmail.com
and Debbie Lawes, Editor

Donation Coupon

Yes I want to help wildlife

☐ \$35 ☐ \$50 ☐ \$100 ☐ Other \$ _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ Province: _____ Postal Code: _____

Email: _____ Telephone: _____

Please make cheques payable to:
Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre,
P.O. Box 11051, Station H,
Ottawa, Ontario, K2H 7T8.

email: ocwc@ncf.ca
Contributions are tax deductible.
Information is used only by the OCWC.
It is not shared.

OCWC Website www.wildlifeinfo.ca