



# Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre

SERVING THE COMMUNITY FOR OVER 25 YEARS

## Changing Attitudes and New Research - Putting Old Biases to Rest



Photo Credit: Brett Foster

"I would feel more optimistic about a bright future for man if he spent less time proving that he can outwit Nature and more time tasting her sweetness and respecting her seniority"  
E.B. White, author

The Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre has long held that the remaining vestiges of natural areas within our City play a crucial role not only for the wild species that reside there but also for the well-being of local residents.

The Centre has fought alongside residents to protect these natural areas, often to no avail, as City planners have dismissed these lands in the past, stating *"they do not appear to have any function as a significant natural linkage and any vegetation or wildlife in the area are common, urban species"*. (editor's note: we wonder what species you'd expect to find in an urban area).

Fortunately, these biases are being challenged.

Our disconnect from nature has resulted, in no small measure, from the extensive

development that has occurred in our urban and suburban communities in the last two to three decades. Whole meadows, ravines and woodlands have been swallowed up by shopping centres, roads and housing developments, leaving an entire generation to have to discover themselves in mall arcades and school gymnasiums.

The high cost of this, not only to individuals but to society, is slowly being recognized by governments, prompted by public pressure. A Provincial Policy Statement approved in 2014 requires municipalities to use new criteria for the identification and protection of significant woodlands.

The policy acknowledges the current research showing that urban trees and woodlands have measurable and significant benefit to residents in terms of air quality,

physical and mental health, neighbourhood identity and property values.

### Even Small Patches are Important

Professor Lenore Fahrig of the Department of Biology at Carleton University and co-director of the Geomatics and Landscape Ecology Research Laboratory at Carleton presented a paper "Ecological Responses to Habitat Fragmentation per se" that challenges the conventional belief that fragmentation of natural areas is bad for their preservation.

Her conclusion, based on a rigorous analysis of 118 studies, is not that fragmentation is good for the environment but rather that small patches should be valued as important. And, that there is no justification for assigning lower conservation value to a small patch than to an equivalent area within a large patch – just the opposite.

According to Professor Fahrig, the Fragmentation Zombie refers to ideas that should be dead but are not. The results of her review suggest that the idea that habitat fragmentation, independent of habitat loss, has widespread negative effects on ecological responses qualifies as a zombie idea.

All of this reaffirms the Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre's important role in taking wildlife education programs into local schools, in its community outreach programs that provide people with the tools to live in greater harmony with the natural world and its work with other organizations to protect and preserve precious greenspace.

# Celebrating Worth a Dam's 10th Anniversary

## Editorial

### Change Takes Time



As you will see from the articles in this newsletter, change takes time, particularly when you are dealing with government.

What is encouraging, however, is the involvement of an increasing number of people working to ensure that the environment and the protection of greenspace and wildlife within their community becomes a priority.

Whether it's a group of determined residents working to prevent the draining of an important wetland in Goulbourn, an individual (see page 6) that spearheaded a campaign exposing the devastating impact of winter clear-cutting on wildlife or organizations like Greenspace Alliance and Ecology Ottawa that have taken on broader initiatives.

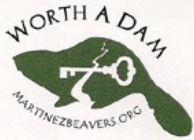
And, of course, to see the remarkable headway being made by organizations like Worth A Dam, whose achievements are highlighted on this page.

It has been particularly inspiring to see individuals, not only in this region, but from other areas of the country provide financial assistance for the Centre's work and, as well, encourage us to stay the course, letting us know of the relevance of our programs to all communities.

We'd like to pay our respects to the family of someone who was an important member of the Centre. Tony Graham died, after a long illness, on February 3, 2017. He and his wife, Elizabeth, have been generous supporters of the Centre since its inception in 1987. Having built one of the most successful Toyota dealerships in Canada, Tony and Elizabeth were well-known and visionary philanthropists in the community. We extend our sympathy to Elizabeth and family.

Donna DuBreuil  
President, OCWC

Martinez CA 2007-2017



## ANOTHER DAM NEWSLETTER



A Decade for Beavers

HEIDI PERRYMAN

### Testimonial

"The Martinez beavers have become a beacon for communities interested in living in harmony with their wild neighbours.

Worth a Dam has become an effective non-profit organization that shares with other municipalities the road map to living with beaver, benefiting from the important environmental services they provide, and stimulating learning and engagement in the natural world, especially of young people."

John Hadidian, PhD Senior Scientist and former Director Urban Wildlife HSUS Ret'd

A group of citizens in Martinez, California has not only been able to get their city to move beyond the outdated practice of trapping and killing beavers but they've gone on to develop a unique resource for other cities that has earned the respect of environmentalists around the world.

The spark plug for this remarkable initiative is Heidi Perryman who we first told you about in our spring 2012 newsletter. When beavers moved into a creek in the middle of Martinez, the city's response was typical – the beavers would have to be eliminated. However, over 200 people showed up for a meeting, with the majority demanding the city solve the flooding risk in a more progressive way.

So, Dr. Perryman enlisted the support of an expert to install a flow device that manages water levels, allowing the bea-

vers to stay. She then went on to set up a website "Worth a Dam" that has, on its 10th anniversary, received accolades from scientists, wildlife experts, land trust organizations and filmmakers from across North America and as far afield as Scotland. The website, with daily updates and close to 10,000 hits a week, allows readers to learn about distant experts and particular regional blind spots.

Its annual Beaver Festival attracts children and adults from across the state that come to celebrate the Martinez beavers through an explosion of colourful art, storytelling and educational tours that demonstrate firsthand the biodiversity that beavers bring.

California Member of Congress, Mike Thompson, read into the Congressional Record of the House of Representatives a lengthy tribute in honoring the Martinez Beaver Festival and Worth a Dam. Here are a few excerpts: *"This annual festival not only emphasizes the importance that beavers hold for our creeks and wildlife, but also is a celebration of our community and local government working together. Thanks to Worth a Dam's website dedicated to beaver information, people across our nation have access to data and resources needed to solve wild beaver issues and to develop a stronger appreciation of the importance of beavers to their local ecosystems."*



# Urban Wildlife and Biodiversity Now Under Environment Committee



For a number of years, the Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre has urged that urban wildlife concerns come under the City's Environment Committee terms of reference.

Given the examples of a number of other leading cities in Canada and the strong public support of the Ottawa community, this was finally accomplished this past November when Council approved

adding urban wildlife and biodiversity responsibilities to the Environment Committee terms of reference.

The motion was put forward by Councillor David Chernushenko, Chair of the Environment Committee and unanimously supported.

It followed a public campaign by the Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre, the

Ottawa Valley Wild Bird Care Centre and Safe Wings Ottawa.

It is hoped that the Environment Committee will provide an effective voice for urban wildlife, championing initiatives seen in other Canadian cities and providing leadership for a comprehensive and integrated approach to wildlife concerns promised in the City's Wildlife Strategy, approved by Council in 2013.

## Little Skunks Get a Second Chance



Although we no longer do rehab for orphaned and injured wildlife, a situation occurred last summer where we could offer some help to an animal in need. A friend

called worried about two small skunks that had fallen in a window well of a neighbour's house.

She had checked it out and saw that the window well was not very deep so she placed a board on an angle hoping they

would be able to climb out. She also left some fruit for them to eat.

This is normally a good way to get animals out if they are stuck in a window well. It is also helpful to secure a towel or piece of rug to the wood to give the animal something to hold on to.

Unfortunately, the babies sounded too small to make the climb on their own. I offered to stop by to check on the situation. I dug out the old scrubs that we used to wear during our animal care days, but now are reserved for cleaning and painting projects. I also took some gloves, towels and a small butterfly net.

The babies were very small, but seemed in good shape. I was successful in scooping them out, one at a time, being ever so

careful to keep their tiny tails between their legs. Even at this young age they can let out a potent squirt. I would not be a fan at the dinner table if I got sprayed!

I did a quick assessment to make sure they were in good shape. They were well hydrated, likely thanks to the fruit my friend had placed in for them. With the exception of a couple of ticks, that I removed, they looked good.

The home owner felt Mom was still in the area, so we left these two little guys in a shallow box in the shade with some fruit. My friend kept a close eye and it was not long until Mom came and retrieved them.

A happy ending for sure. Over the years we have had many calls about animals falling or sometimes taking up temporary residence in a window well. This is an easy problem to prevent by placing a screen over the window well.

# A Convenience for Us – A Death Sentence for Wildlife



Photo Credit: Ottawa Humane Society

Most of us don't realize when we are enjoying a beverage from our favourite fast food or coffee shop that the cup's dome-style lid presents a deadly trap for wild animals.

When these cups are discarded carelessly or, even placed in a garbage or recycling bin, hungry wildlife will be attracted by the sweet smell of any residue in the cup. Pushing their heads through the small opening is easy enough but getting it back out is nearly impossible.

It was during her early morning walk that one Ottawa resident found a beautiful young female skunk lying on her back with her head stuck inside a plastic cup with a dome-lid. She removed the cup but the skunk was already dead – it had suffocated. And, because the skunk was a nursing mother, it meant her dependent young would also be left to suffer and die.

We know these unfortunate situations are becoming more common because,

increasingly, we see television and YouTube videos of someone attempting to catch a squirrel or skunk with a container on its head. It might present an amusing video, particularly if it's a skunk, but it's no laughing matter for the animal or for the caring person attempting to help.



Of course, it's not just plastic cups with dome-lids that present a problem but this is one area that we all can do something about.

## Educating Fast Food Outlets

We are writing to the Canadian head office of companies like McDonalds, Harvey's, Starbucks, etc. to request that they encourage their outlets to let the public know why it's important that they remove the lid before discarding the cup. It should become one of the key messages within their anti-litter campaigns.

An effective way to reinforce this message at the local level is as a customer. So, when using a fast food outlet, let the manager and staff know the deadly consequences of dome-lids to local wildlife and the positive public relations gained by urging that lids always be removed before discarding the cup.

## Other Risks to Wildlife

This situation occurred very close to home last summer. As we were preparing to leave the Centre for the day, we just happened to notice a baby raccoon – likely ten or eleven weeks old – in our fenced-in compound with a jar on its head.

The poor wee thing was trying to eat sunflower seeds but, of course, it was futile given the jar covering its head. We were able to grab a large net and towels but when he heard us approaching, he tried to get under the fence. Fortunately, the jar made it too awkward for him to do so. We caught him in the net and as one of us held him down, we were able to get the jar off even though it took several mighty tugs because it was on so tight.





While holding the little raccoon down, we could feel how thin he was so he likely had been entrapped by this jar for several days at least. It was also very hot so he was no doubt dehydrated as well but he reacted with great energy once the jar was removed, scampering under the fence and up a tree. We left him a bowl of water and some food in the hope that his hunger would overcome his fear once we left.

It's very upsetting to think of the horrible death this animal would have experienced if not for the chance that we happened to see him and were able to help.

### **Ottawa Humane Society**

The OHS reports that it sees a number of wild animals in this predicament each year. Thanks to its rescue efforts, many are helped. It was one such incident, as seen in the photo on the opposite page, that made us realize we had to modify our instructions about what to do with discarded peanut butter jars.

When the Ottawa Humane Society officer arrived after a call from a Good Samaritan, she found the squirrel with

his hind-end stuck in the opening of a plastic peanut butter jar. The squirrel had been so hungry that it chewed a hole through the top or heavy plastic lid of the jar. Unable to wiggle his way out, the squirrel chewed a hole through the bottom of the jar but remained entrapped with sharp plastic edges digging into his neck.

Back at the OHS, a veterinary technician sedated the squirrel and the officer was able to cut him free from the plastic container. After the sedation wore off and, with no injuries evident, the squirrel was released back into the wild.



## **An Ounce of Prevention**

But what about the hundreds of wild animals that are entrapped in this way that no one ever gets to see or is able to rescue?

There is something that each of us can do to reduce the chance of these needless deaths and horrible suffering. None will take more than a few seconds of our time but will make an immeasurably positive impact on wildlife:

- Never leave a lid on a can by bending it inside the can as animals can get seriously cut and/or trapped this way
- Rinse out the can and pinch the opening closed so that animals are unable to stick either their head or paws inside
- Rinse out glass jars and screw the lid on very tightly before discarding
- Plastic Peanut Butter Jars need special attention as the Ottawa Humane Society story attests. Rinse in hot water before removing any bits of remaining peanut butter with paper towels. Rinse again to remove any smell before screwing plastic lid on very tightly
- The plastic six-pack can holders are lethal for animals and birds. Cut before discarding so that animals can't get caught in them
- Always separate the dome-lids from plastic cups before discarding. Let fast food outlets you use know about why they should have this information prominently displayed.

You can make a real contribution to wildlife by practicing and sharing these tips with others. Remember, with busy lives, most of us don't take the time to think about the consequences of our actions to wildlife. However, no one wants to see an animal suffer and almost everyone will be thankful for the information.

# Mayor Jim Watson Petitioned Over Winter Construction's Deadly Impact on Wildlife



An Ottawa resident set up an on-line petition to let Mayor Jim Watson know that people will not accept the deadly consequences for wildlife due to a lack of humane consideration for animals on the part of the City.

In less than 10 days, the site garnered several thousand supporters, many expressing shock that the nation's capital would show such disregard and disrespect for wild species. There have also been numerous letters and comments in the media, challenging the lack of wildlife sensitivity on the part of the City.

There has been particular anger given that the planning for the site in question, Kanata North Lands Development Inc. (KNL), had been in the works for decades. Thus, there was plenty of time to schedule the initial clearing for a time of the year less lethal to wildlife. Site clearing is generally accomplished in a matter of weeks and once done, construction can carry on throughout the year, so it is hardly a major imposition to the development industry.

## A Deadly Impact on Wildlife

As one letter writer stated *"you cannot clear-cut almost 200 acres of prime forest, habitat that is home to hundreds of species of animals and birds, in the middle of winter without a deadly impact on wildlife, no matter what type*

*of PR spin the city attempts to put on this travesty"*.

Clear-cutting requires heavy equipment that will crush hibernating animals and others in underground burrows and dens. Some species that are less active during cold weather risk being killed when their tree is felled.

But the real mortality comes when animals are displaced during winter. The idea that animals are able to just move on to other habitat in the middle of winter is ridiculous. How can wildlife construct new nests or dreys when there are no leaves on the trees to make these nests? Finding a cavity in another tree will be equally impossible as the limited number of cavity trees will be already occupied. And, how can burrowing animals dig new dens when the ground is frozen?

## So much for the City's Protocol for Wildlife Protection during Construction

It has been particularly offensive to many people that the City has stated the Protocol has been applied to the project when, in fact, it didn't put in place the most critical measures.

For example, the Protocol states *"The timing of site clearing should be carefully considered, because the impacts to wildlife will be greater during sensitive times of the year. During the winter, overwintering and hibernating wildlife may be physically unable to escape from the site, or may freeze or starve to death if forced to leave their dens and food caches."*

The Protocol further states that if clearing is to be done during sensitive times such as winter, then, at the very least, *"mitigation measures such as the installation of appropriate nesting boxes around the periphery of the site should be installed to compensate for nesting sites (e.g. cavity trees, squirrel dreys)*

*that will be removed. And, that where winter food caches are lost and where resources are scarce, supplemental food may need to be temporarily provided."*

Shamefully, these very basic mitigation measures were totally ignored in this project.



## Nearby Residents Will Now Also Pay a Price

The Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre first took forward a proposal for a Wildlife Construction Protocol almost twenty years ago. We did so, not only because of the direct consequences of construction to wildlife but because of the complaints from nearby homeowners when displaced wildlife were forced onto their property, given the lack of wildlife-sensitive planning in a new development.

The female animals that were fortunate enough to survive winter given the loss of their habitat in the KNL project, will now be desperately seeking out alternatives to the tree nests, denning sites and burrows they need to safely raise their babies this spring. Had the City and developer installed a few dozen nesting boxes, some of the angst and expense that nearby homeowners will now likely face would have been greatly reduced.



## Board News



Debbie Lawes has retired from the Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre Board after a very lengthy term of exceptional service. She was presented with a print of a raccoon with an inscription recognizing her contribution to wild mammals at the Centre's Annual General Meeting last Fall. Members extended their thanks to Debbie for her many years of dedicated support.

Debbie joined the Wild Bird Care Centre Board in 2015 where we know she will continue to advocate for wild species.



Jean McKibbin joined the Centre's Board for the 2016-17 term. She is a long time member and supporter of the Centre and has been a strong ambassador

for wildlife, working with the Centre, in dealing with infill developers and neighbourhood concerns involving wildlife. She graduated as a Registered Nurse from the Ottawa Civic Hospital and Dalhousie University, Public Health, and went on to work at the Ottawa Board of Education, R.M.O.C. and the City of Ottawa.

Jean is on the Board of the Westboro Community Association and on the committee Big Trees of Kitchissippi.



## Wild and Wonderful Weasels

By Kate MacNeil

The Mustelidae or weasel family is very diverse, some of the members we have in our area include river otters, fishers, long-tailed weasels, mink and ermines (also known as short-tailed weasels).

During our wildlife rehabilitation days we had occasion to care for these species. The standard weasel traits were quite evident, such as the long slender body and short legs, scent glands that allowed them to emit a strong odour, as well as being highly agile.

We also noticed some similar characteristics whether it was a mink or river otter when it came to behaviour. They were very intelligent with an engaging curiosity. Their sense of "play" had an amazing ability to draw in and captivate even the most indifferent of observer.

We would see this when the mink would knock his stick down on an angle, curl up at the top like a donut and slide down the stick causing the plumber who was here to fix our water softener to stop and stare.

People's fascination with wildlife was also evident when 10 firemen who showed up for an alarm call one day, all ended up huddled around the otter pool watching the animals' spectacular synchronized swim routine.

Since getting to know these species up close during our rehab days I have also had the privilege of viewing them in the wild on occasion. One such time was a few years ago. It was March and there was still some snow on the ground. My daughter and I were walking when a flash of white caught our eye from the large boulders on the shoreline. We stopped and noticed the long-tailed weasel staring at us, with that curiosity I mentioned.

Our visit lasted several minutes, our interest in each other seemed mutual. It would hide in the rocks and then pop out again, showcasing its agility. It even was kind enough to stay still for me to dig out my camera and snap a picture.

I always consider it a great gift to see wildlife in their natural surroundings.

# Flying Squirrels – Pixies of the Forest Night

By Donna DuBreuil

The very first flying squirrel we took in was quite a challenge. He arrived at the Centre with his sister who, sadly, died an hour later. Although he didn't look much like a flying squirrel, we were determined to try and save him so, optimistically, we named him Billy Bishop after the Canadian flying ace.

Billy looked very much like a fetus as he was entirely transparent – you could actually see the workings of his organs, his heart pumping, the formula in his intestines, the bile in his liver.

The veterinarian said he was almost certainly premature and advised that he would not survive overnight. We brought him home and set him up in an incubator which Gary had made. For the next few days, Billy was fed a few drops of formula every hour to an hour and a half, depending on how much formula we could still see in his 'tank'.

Each time I looked in the incubator I was amazed to see he was still alive. He required a very high temperature as his body cooled quickly so that he was often "hot to handle" when removed from the incubator. On one occasion his skin felt almost crisp so we added a wet cloth over the side to provide humidity.

Billy continued to require frequent feedings around the clock – Gary and I often joked about who was going to die first, Billy or me! But survive he did as you can see from the photo.



He was soon joined by another flying squirrel that we named the Red Baron who had been mauled by a cat. We kept them in a large cage in our den where their nightly exercise routine involved using their gliding "wings" (known as a patagium) to glide effortlessly from the top of a high bookcase to their cage and back again.

Unfortunately, as flying squirrels are nocturnal, it meant struggling awake at 3 a.m. every night to enjoy their antics. They were released on our rural property with an abundance of one of their preferred trees, ironwoods, where they no doubt caught up with the other 'flyers' we had seen from time to time.

## 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](mailto:ocwc@ncf.ca)  
Contributions are tax deductible.  
Information is used only by the OCWC.  
It is not shared.

## OUR THANKS

OCWC gratefully acknowledges:

*Ruth and Ray Wesenberg  
Wildlife Fund*



Special thanks to:

Ryan Kelson, Design - [RyanKelson.com](http://RyanKelson.com)

**OCWC Website** [www.wildlifeinfo.ca](http://www.wildlifeinfo.ca)