



# Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre

SERVING THE COMMUNITY FOR OVER 30 YEARS

## Making a Difference for Wildlife



From the Centre's inception, over 30 years ago, education has been a central goal in helping wildlife.

This has been particularly important this year as the Pandemic coincided with the spring and summer birthing seasons for wildlife. It resulted in numerous challenging calls where we had to guide people, often over several months, on what actions to take.

Even in our earliest days when caring for hundreds of orphaned wild mammals, the Centre developed and operated a wildlife conflict hotline that received upwards of 70 calls a day. By helping people resolve a wildlife conflict, we were able to reduce the number of "created" orphans that would have otherwise overwhelmed our resources to provide quality care.

Since then, our education and outreach efforts have expanded in ways that are quite

remarkable for a small volunteer organization.

It is built on the belief that education and community outreach is critical to bringing about change for wildlife, particularly in tackling misinformation, irrational fear and outdated government policies that harm wildlife and the environment.

The Centre's school program has given hundreds of presentations to thousands of students. Group sizes are kept small to maximize engagement and get children excited about local wildlife, building appreciation and respect for animals.

Nature Discovery Workshops held at the Centre offer special presentations and activities on different topics and species, along with field trips to the wooded trails and wetlands on Campus.

Our overarching goal is to help people gain the many health and social benefits that come from a connection to nature.

### Community Outreach

But education is not limited to youth – far from it – with presentations and workshops given to community associations, professional groups, seniors' organizations and new Canadians.

In addition, the Centre serves as a resource and support for residents and groups working to protect wildlife and habitat within their neighbourhood.

We also work with animal protection and environmental organizations, locally and across North America, to promote best practices and encourage progressive wildlife policies at all levels of government.

### Starting at 'Home'

The Centre is located on a Campus that is part of the National Capital Greenbelt. We believe it's important to be able to showcase the Campus, given its amazing biodiversity, as a model for positive environmental and wildlife practices.

To this end, we've established a Natural Environment Stewardship Committee, bringing together community groups, Public Services and Procurement Canada, the Department of National Defence and the Centre. We are proud of the leadership shown, in the restoration of the Campus wetland, the rehabilitation of its storm-water ponds, the wildlife-sensitive planning undertaken and the commitment to providing safe passage for wildlife across busy adjacent roads.

All told, the Centre's evolution and the important community partnerships it has formed over the past 30 years make it well equipped to continue to provide a strong, growing voice for wildlife.



Photo: S. Hansen

# TD Friends of the Environment Foundation helps families explore nature



Justin Manuel, Branch Manager, TD Canada Trust presents Leah Travis, Donna DuBreuil and Kate MacNeil with a cheque on behalf of the TD Friends of the Environment Foundation.

Ottawa families were able to snowshoe and meet local wildlife thanks to the new Nature Lending Library at the Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre (OCWC). Thanks to a generous \$8,000 grant from the TD Friends of the Environment Foundation (TD FEF), the OCWC was able to purchase snowshoes, binoculars and field materials to allow community groups and families to explore and enjoy nature.

Founded by TD Bank Group in 1990, the TD Friends of the Environment Foundation is a national charity that funds environmental projects across Canada. The Foundation supports a wide range of environmental initiatives, with a primary funding focus on revitalizing, animating and stewarding public green spaces.

As one of the earliest supporters of the environment, TD FEF has provided \$90,000,000 to over 26,000 environmental projects in Canada.

By connecting with their local environment on the trails around the Centre, participants in the Nature Lending Library became stewards for protecting Ontario's beautiful greenspace while meeting many local species

like White-tailed deer, Black-capped chickadees, Northern cardinals and North American porcupines.

The OCWC is located in a Core Natural Area (CNA) within the NCC Greenbelt, a permanently protected area of greenspace, farmland, forests, wetlands, and watersheds. Core Natural Areas are vital to protect the natural environment and the significant biodiversity living there. And, like many areas in the Greenbelt, it is close to high levels of human development, so offers excellent opportunities to connect people to nature.

For over 30 years, the OCWC has been committed to educating people about wildlife and helping to foster an appreciation for the natural world and the important role all species play in a healthy ecosystem. The new Nature Lending Library, launched in winter 2020, will be used for years to come by visiting families, individuals, and community groups like the Girl Guides and Boy Scouts. Thank you, TD Friends of the Environment Foundation!



**TD Friends of the Environment Foundation**

## Editorial

### A Wake-up Call



In spite of the extremely high health, social and economic costs of the COVID-19 pandemic, there are some important take-away lessons.

And, they come at a time that couldn't be more critical.

Our fast-paced world is pushing us humans beyond healthy limits – like automated mannequins with a malfunctioning switch, we are increasingly falling off the assembly line.

According to author, David Gessner, *"it's like we have an alarm clock going off in our brains every 30 seconds, sapping our ability to concentrate for longer periods of time. The demands include a constant need to filter information, dodge distractions and make decisions. We give our brains little time to recover"*.

So, how do we slow things down? Research shows even brief interactions with nature can soothe our brains. A thirty-minute walk in a natural area can help. Even city dwellers can find nearby nature – a garden, local park or trail – to give our overworked brains a break.

### We're in this together – humans and animals

The pandemic also reminds us that human health directly depends on our relationship with animals. Like SARS, the COVID-19 virus originated in a wildlife market in China, where thousands of wild animals are sold, dead or alive, for food and other purposes.

But, a new virus could just have easily emerged from a crowded factory farm in North America. Industrial farming and wildlife markets, given extreme stress and unsanitary conditions, create the perfect breeding grounds for deadly new viruses and bacteria that can jump from animals to humans – with devastating effects.

It's time to reassess and rebalance our lives, putting more emphasis and value on nature and our relationship with other species.

Donna DuBreuil  
President, OCWC



# Responding to Changing and Challenging Times



Anita picking up her binoculars and field guide, that she won for sharing her best nature moment from Andrew Haydon Park, she "just loves her regular walks through that park with its variety of wildlife and beautiful scenery!"

One of our volunteers raised an interesting question about how kids today will look back and remember these challenging and stressful times.

It got me thinking about when I experienced difficult times both as an adult and as a child. I was fortunate to be given the gift of nature at a very young age. It seemed that being surrounded by nature would help restore a feeling of peace and calm in me. It was almost like a reset button.

I hope that people, of all ages, will find comfort in our natural world during these difficult times. My neighbourhood and local walking trails have never been busier, perhaps partly because it is one of the few things left for us to do, but everyone seems to be enjoying their time outdoors.

Although I don't have an answer of how this time will be remembered, especially by kids, I hope this renewed connec-

tion with nature and the discovering or rediscovering of the benefits it has on our minds, bodies and soul will not be forgotten when things start to get back to 'normal'.

There are not many certainties in life but, unfortunately, the fact that there will be challenges and difficult times, for individuals and for society is a guarantee. I think it is important to learn from these situations as well as to find the positive. I hope this will be just one of the positive things we can look back on, like how communities came together to support each other or how we got back to the basics and learned how to enjoy the simple pleasures like doing a puzzle with our kids.

The pandemic has meant a lot of adapting for everyone, individuals, families, schools, organizations, and businesses. Although change can certainly be difficult, especially when it is a result of something negative, we have tried, as an organization, to treat it as an opportunity as much as we can.

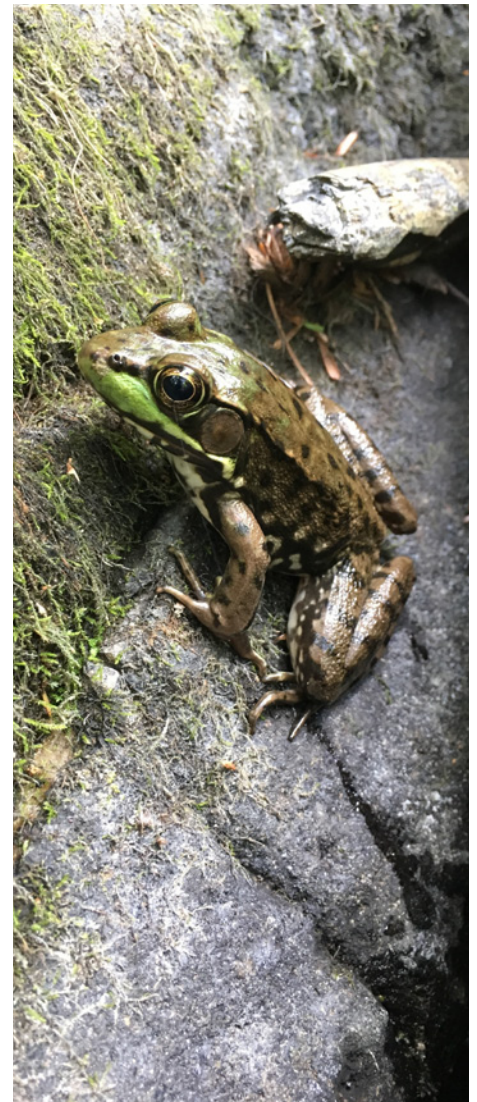
All of our pre-COVID-19 program delivery was done in person. Through in school presentations, workshops at the Centre, meeting with communities, everything was face to face. The very thing we could no longer do.

We took this obstacle and turned it into an opportunity. We got to work developing on-line resources and virtual events, such as the 'Explore Nature Near You' event organized this summer that provided free nature resources and activity booklets for the public to explore Andrew Haydon Park. We have also been delivering our presentations on-line, to both children as well as seniors. One recent presentation was part of a neat program that we likely would not have connected with if it were not for the current circumstances. It was a multicultural Seniors Program that involved Russian and Arabic interpreters for our presentation.

We are so pleased that our Education and Outreach Programs are still helping to connect people to nature and help them develop a relationship with the natural world. We can't think of a time that this would be more valuable.



Photo: S. Hansen

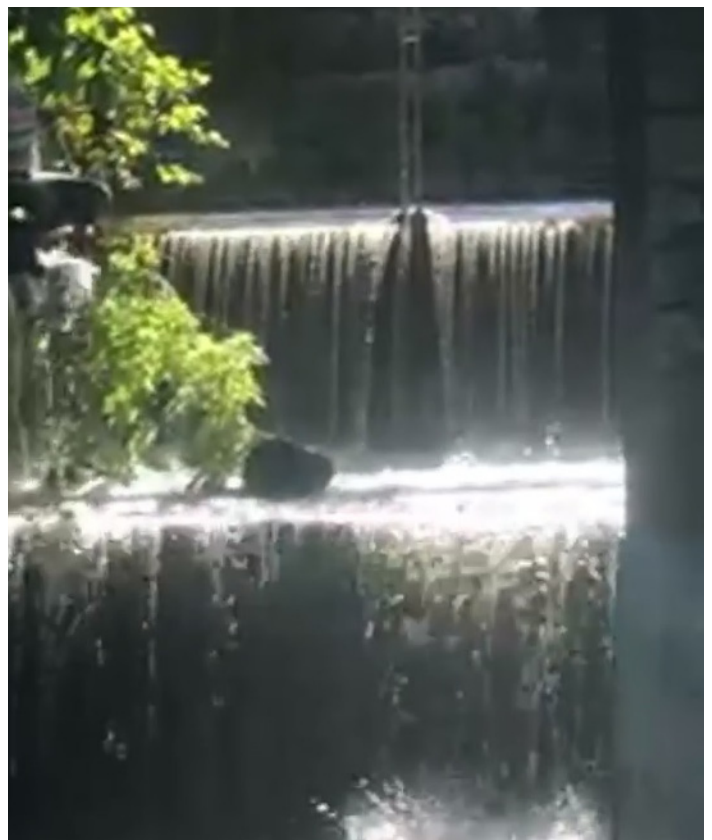


# Wildlife Rescues

## When There is No One Else to Help

The Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre has worn many different hats over its more than 30 years of service. Rehabilitating thousands of orphaned and injured wild mammals ranging from baby squirrels to river otters and black bears; educating the public on the importance of all species and providing people with the tools to resolve wildlife conflicts in a humane manner; working with governments to alter policies and practices that harm wildlife while providing progressive alternatives.

It has also included rescuing wild animals when there was no one else to help. These past months have definitely strained the Centre's resources but it has really reinforced the fact that the public care deeply about wildlife and are determined to see a humane response when animals are in danger or distress.



By Donna DuBreuil

### Stranded Beaver

This juvenile beaver found itself stranded on a rocky ledge of a Spillway that is part of the Falls in downtown Almonte. Residents were very upset given that calls, over a number of days, to multiple authorities, including the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, had not produced any help.

Kate, the Centre's Executive Director, received on the Friday morning, a frantic email from one of the Almonte residents concerned that the beaver would surely die if not soon rescued.

Anyone who knows Kate, knows she is capable of handling any and all wildlife problems with great skill and determination. Still, I'm only glad that I didn't know of this particular rescue until after it happened as it involved Kate climbing down the steep rock wall of the Spillway to get access to the beaver.

Once gaining a foothold and, with what one Almonte resident described '*as graceful as a ballerina*', Kate reached out with a large net and scooped up the beaver. The net was then carefully hoisted up to her family. The beaver was taken to a nearby river for release and, judging by the slap of its tail as it swam away, quite happy to be in more familiar territory.

Almonte residents captured the rescue with a video and photographs, applauding Kate's good work via glowing facebook accounts.



## Kudos for the Beaver Rescue

### Lynn Melbourne

SO GOOD NEWS!! Kate from Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre (and family) did the rescue. It didn't take her long to get the young one out. You guys are awesome!!

### Nick Pearson

Local heroes in my eyes.

### Dyanne Storie

Job well done folks. I thank you on behalf of all animal lovers.

### Joanne Maclaren

Wow!wow! So very cool, love this! Thank you.

### Patricia Lyons

Poor little beaver must have been scared... thanks for saving it!

## Skunks in Window Well

Skunks are notorious for falling into window wells. Having poor eyesight and with their nose to the ground while rooting out insects, they can easily end up in window wells.

When we received a desperate email from a resident in Barrhaven this summer with not only one but several skunks in her window well, we knew immediately they would be babies.

Our regular advice to place a flat, wide board covered with a towel for traction normally does the trick. In this case, evening came and went and the babies remained. The homeowner watched as the babies tried to climb, but the incline

was too steep. The resident was surprised to see the very dedicated mom climb down, nurse the babies and climb back out.

Knowing the babies were too small to climb out but too big for mom to carry, Kate went to the rescue. Suited up with her goggles, gloves and an old pair of scrubs, with a net in hand she carefully climbed into the window well. The babies looked like a big clump of black and white, impossible to tell where one started and one ended. Once inside, Kate quickly realized that not only the babies were in there, but mom too!

Realizing she had no time to waste she started to gently scoop up skunks, first one small baby, then two babies then mom, then two more babies. Thankfully, the net held them all! There was only a small bit of spray from one baby, and although strong, it was only a fraction of what it could have been. Once out of the net, they all quickly scurried under the fence, back to their burrow.

Based on Kate's advice, the homeowner hurried out to buy a small fence to put around the window well as a barrier to prevent further accidents.

We don't know who was more surprised, us or the homeowner when mom and one baby were back in the window well the next day. Kate headed back right away, but when she arrived and looked in the window well, there were no skunks. The homeowner came out and they could see claw and bite marks up the wooden wall. They could only assume that mom had somehow managed to get the baby out.

They discussed how to further secure the fence and cleaned out the window well. A few minutes later the baby was back. Knowing there was no way it got past them, they realized that it was hiding inside the window well itself. Upon closer inspection, Kate discovered a small excavated area, under the river rocks, like a little cave, a perfect size for the baby to hide. It must have been there the entire time and got missed during the first rescue. Mom was climbing in and out to care for the one remaining baby that got left behind - what an amazing mom!



Now the million-dollar question, how to get this little guy out of the cave, with only the tip of its tail sticking out. With no other option, Kate gently pulled the baby out by the tail. When more of the baby was showing, she was able to tuck the tail between its legs so it wouldn't spray. Carefully lifting it out of the window well and releasing it, the baby quickly went under the fence to be reunited with the rest of the family.

The homeowner was not only relieved by the happy ending, but also appreciated the opportunity to learn more about skunks, not only how dedicated mom was but also how each of the babies had different personalities.

# Wildlife Tales

## A Second Chance



It was a cold and snowy February day years ago when we got a call about a fox curled up in the snow with a badly injured hind leg. We normally did not have the resources to pick animals up but since it was near the Centre, we decided to check it out. We piled into the van with towels, nets, gloves and a carrier on our animal rescue mission.

We quickly located the fox, it was still curled up, and the amount of blood indicated that it was not a good situation.

We were able to slowly surround the fox, but as we approached, he understand-

We consider it a great privilege to have not only helped thousands of wild animals, but also for the opportunity to know them up close and see their different personalities and individual differences, just like us. We incorporate these experiences into much of our Education Programming as we feel strongly that it helps people have a better understanding and appreciation for wildlife.

ably got wary and made an attempt to run. One of his hind legs was badly mangled. He retreated to a woodpile where we were able to get him into the carrier and to the vet.

As always, Alta Vista Animal Hospital and their dedicated vets quickly squeezed us in for an appointment. After the examination we got some hopeful news. The hind leg was in fact severely injured, but they were confident they could amputate it and once recovered, the fox would be releasable. We had heard of dogs with three legs, but a fox? We would have to be certain he could survive in the wild and successfully forage, so the next step of rehabilitation was critical.

The first couple of days after surgery, the fox was pretty docile, but the antibiotic treatment and wound flushing went well and before we knew it, it was time to get the fox moving on three legs. The vets

were very confident the fox could compensate but he would need to sufficiently strengthen his remaining legs. We constructed a makeshift run that included the inside hallway around the Centre. We would wait until we were closed for the day and then let the fox out of his cage to exercise.

He was very curious and while we worked at our desks, he would stand near by and tilt his head, almost as if he was trying to figure us out. We would stomp our feet and clap our hands and tell him to get moving, it was like being a personal trainer. Within several weeks the fox was moving so fast we could not tell he was missing a leg. The day he jumped on top of his 4 ft high cage and curled up for a nap we knew he was ready to go. When he was released back into the wild, he sniffed around a bit and then casually strolled away.

## The Skunk and the 'Undies'

It was a rainy Saturday afternoon when a family arrived at the Wildlife Centre with an adult skunk in a large knee-high pail.

The skunk was encased in wet clay having fallen into a newly-dug fence post hole. Skunks have poor eyesight, explaining his fall into the hole. Given the rain, the clay was much like cement which is why the family were able to lift the skunk out of the hole and into the pail without incident.

However, we had sufficient enough experience with skunks to know that getting him out of the pail and cleaned up was almost certain to get us sprayed.

Skunk spray is very potent and equally long lasting. Protective clothing can help to an extent but we found that any apparel with elastic in it was pretty much toast. So, each of us women working on the skunk that day made the only sensible decision possible.

With the anxious family standing outside the door to the room, without saying a word, we three women simultaneously opened the door and threw out our brasieres.

While the skunk did spray we managed to bath and dry him to his original self so there was a happy ending. However, goodness only knows what the family told people about the techniques used by the Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre for handling animals!





# A Lifelong Connection to Nature

We've found that seniors in Ottawa have a special relationship with nature. No doubt, because many have lived close to and enjoyed the Greenbelt and other natural areas that we are fortunate to have in this City.

While we have given lots of presentations to seniors over the years, including hosting groups at the Centre, we were receiving, prior to COVID-19, an increasing number of requests from retirement homes.

The Revera Valley Stream Retirement Home, for example, decided to focus on animals in its Healthy Minds series of invited speakers last winter. They did so, according to Jillian Ryan, Director of Recreation, *"because of our residents' strong interest in animals*

*and the environment"*, and asked the Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre to give a presentation. The Healthy Minds series addresses the 'intellectual dimension of wellness', offering activities that promote lifelong learning, the exploration of new ideas and stimulation of the mind.

*"Everyone had such a good time, even those who might not otherwise join in a conversation were engaged, as it seems everyone has an animal story"*, said Kate MacNeil, Executive Director of the Wildlife Centre who gave the presentation.

The reception that the Centre has received from seniors at such sessions has prompted us to try to expand our community outreach program to include more retirement homes in the future, in



spite of the challenge of limited resources and growing demand.

There is overwhelming evidence that everyone's health and social well-being significantly benefits from regular exposure to nature and the many wild species that share our world. At no other time has the demand for access to nature, from all ages, been as strong as during the COVID-19 pandemic, proving what an essential ingredient it is to us all!

## OCWC Appreciates Community Support

The Artists of Stonebridge is a non-profit organization whose vision is to increase awareness, appreciation and promotion of original art to the community and provide artists with the opportunity to interact and learn from other artists as well as exhibit and sell their artwork in the community.

To celebrate their 10-year milestone and to raise awareness of local wildlife and habitat, the group launched a special challenge to their members to capture in their art, birds and animals living in their 'backyard'.

The Wildlife and Habitat Collection was the result and was featured during

the 2019 Art Show. It did justice to the sentiment behind the Collection, *"it is essential that humans live in harmony with the natural world. We know, although we often forget, that proximity to nature is an immense benefit to our mental and physical well-being"*.

The focus of the show was to promote the wildlife and habitat in our communities, a perfect fit for the OCWC that has been operating in the Ottawa region since 1987.

The OCWC is grateful to have the support of the Ottawa community such as this honour from the Artists of Stonebridge.



Kate MacNeil, the OCWC's Executive Director, accepting the 2019 Wildlife & Habitat Painting Collection cards along with a donation from Nicole Parent, The Artists of Stonebridge Chair.

## OCWC Gets a Fresh Look

Last fall saw the finishing exterior touches to the Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre renovation. A new walkway, lighting, signage and landscaping was provided with funding from Public Services and Procurement Canada.

The project was managed by BGIS Global Integrated Solutions (BGIS). Seen here

(centre) from BGIS is Senior Project Manager, Valerie Bergland, Bryan Kipp, Municipal Engineer, Morrison Hershfield, Rebecca Ford, Project Manager, EXEL Contracting Inc

We appreciated the consultative approach and have had much positive feedback about the final result.



# Embrace Winter with Open Arms

During a night snowshoe adventure with some Brownies, one of the girls said, "I will remember this for my whole life".

The outdoors provided a reprieve and an escape for many of us these last months. Being outside was recommended as a safe option in avoiding this awful virus. The seasons certainly cooperated, with a wonderful spring and summer. It seemed everyone was outside walking, gardening, kayaking, bike riding or simply enjoying a meal on a patio.

With the second wave here, many people have expressed concerns that our climate will pose limitations on our escape to the outdoors. We are a hardy bunch and I think it is a great time to embrace fall and winter. One such way is to take advantage of the Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre's free Nature Lending Library. When the snow finally flies, you can sign out snowshoes, binoculars and trail maps to explore the trails around the Wildlife Centre.

Thanks to the TD Friends or the Environment Foundation, we launched this program last winter with great feed back. Perfectly located within the Greenbelt, only a few minutes from downtown Ottawa, this ideal location provides participants the opportunity to



experience a snowshoe hike in the forest, where they can view some of the many species of wildlife found in the area. Parents expressed pleasure that their children could have an experience you would normally have to travel out of town for.

Raccoons may well be the poster child for COVID-19 safety measures: they wear a mask and constantly wash their hands.



## OUR THANKS

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## Donation Coupon

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