



Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre

SERVING THE COMMUNITY FOR OVER 30 YEARS

Public Concern for Wildlife



Worth A Dam

Whether it's due to more people turning to nature during the COVID-19 lockdown or the cumulative impact of education programs such as our Centre's, there has been a significant increase in the public's interest and concern for wildlife.

This past year, we've had a record number of individuals and community groups come to us seeking more progressive alternatives to the controversial practice of killing beavers in the City of Ottawa.

The Friends of the Carp Hills was formed by a group of knowledgeable naturalists to protect the area, including its significant wetland complex consisting of swamps, marshes and bogs. Anne Wong, a member of the group said "it's critical to recognize the key role that beavers play in maintaining the fragile wetland ecosystem in the Carp Hills. Providing education about beavers and finding effective

solutions to potential conflicts will allow us to continue to benefit from the considerable environmental services beavers provide."

Also, in spite of the challenges presented by the lockdown, there are a large number of teachers, home school parents, community groups and seniors' organizations requesting wildlife presentations. Fortunately, the Centre has been able to quickly adapt its programs to virtual learning, receiving a very favourable response from the public.

Kate MacNeil, the Centre's Executive Director said "I am so pleased with not only the interest in our virtual programming but also with the positive feedback. It is hard to express how great it is to receive an email from a nine-year-old after a video presentation to her class telling me that she also loves animals and when she grows up, she wants to help them just

like us, or from a senior who has been housebound for months, that our Zoom presentation was the highlight of his week. It really makes me proud of the work we do and grateful for people's appreciation for wildlife and nature."

Greater Tolerance

Somewhat surprising, but very encouraging, with more people working from home, there has been a greater level of tolerance shown for wildlife on or around homeowners' properties. This even extended to animals that typically seek out temporary shelter in attics and under steps during the wildlife birthing season.

One family, worried about baby raccoons in their attic during a prolonged heat-wave actually turned up their air conditioning to provide the animals some relief.

Perhaps being forced to slow down from a hyperactive lifestyle has given us all a new perspective – one that shows more concern and kindness for our neighbours. Happily, that seems to include our wild neighbours as well.



Photo: S. Hansen

Living with Coyotes



A 'coyote invasion' was the media headline describing coyotes seen this winter in Riverside South neighbourhoods. However, given the extensive development taking place in what were formerly farmers' fields or natural habitat throughout Ottawa, it would not be too far-fetched for coyotes to be commenting on the 'human invasion'.

But, humour aside, we humans need to adapt to living with coyotes as well as they have adapted to living with us. Coyotes are present in cities across North America and are here to stay. Understanding more about their biology and behaviour is key to coexisting with them.

During winter, for example, without foliage on trees and shrubs, they are more easily seen and they also have to extend their foraging times and territory. But the biggest reason that they are frequently seen in our neighbourhoods is that their primary diet is mice and, as you know, mice move closer to our heated homes during the winter.

Also, during late winter and early spring, coyotes are protecting a den site as their pups are born in April and May. With more people walking dogs during the day, particularly dogs off leash, coyotes will give chase, seeing

them as a threat to their newborn pups.

Coyotes often mate for life and are devoted parents and highly communicative using barks, yips and howls, making them known as North America's native 'Song Dog'. Rather than being fearful of their yips and howls, we should learn to enjoy one of these last vestiges of a connection to the natural world and use the few basic tips needed to coexist with them.

Fortunately, Ottawa City Councillor Carol Anne Meehan understands that education is key to giving residents of Riverside South the tools needed to safely coexist with coyotes.

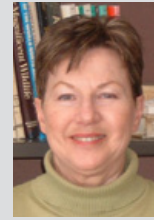
For more information on coyotes and advice on how to safely live with them, visit www.wildlifeinfo.ca



Photo: M. Davies

Editorial

Education Remains Key



The Centre's role has evolved and grown over the last thirty plus years into a very diverse one.

It includes giving wildlife presentations to a wide variety of audiences, ages 4 to 84, to inform and entertain people about the remarkable species with whom we share the planet.

We give people the practical tools to resolve wildlife conflicts humanely. We work with residents and community associations to protect wildlife and habitat in their neighbourhoods. We engage governments on progressive policies that better value natural assets and we work with similar initiatives across the county to promote best practices.

What has remained central to all of these activities is the Centre's commitment to education.

We learned very early on that a lack of understanding most often leads to fear and what we humans fear, we destroy. In contrast, education leads to a better understanding and increases the prospect for tolerance and co-existence.

Not only does this benefit wildlife but it helps to empower people, giving them greater control over their environment. Perhaps of even greater importance, it allows us to find comfort and serenity in nature. Something that has proven to be one of the few antidotes to the difficult and stressful times we live in.

Donna DuBreuil
President, OCWC

CARLING CAMPUS

A SHOWCASE FOR GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE



The Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre has worked for more than three decades in promoting the value of wetlands. Wetlands are not only critical in supporting biodiversity but they provide essential Green Infrastructure services for our communities.

The Stillwater Creek and Wetland Rehabilitation Project, finalized in December 2020, completes the restoration of an important but debilitated Urban Wetland.

The Wetland is part of a Wetland Complex on the Carling Campus within the Core Natural Area of the NCC Greenbelt in Ottawa's west end. Along with the Wetland, the complex includes three large Naturalized Stormwater Ponds.

"This revitalized Wetland Complex will now play a key role in flood control for nearby communities, replenish groundwater, mitigate drought, store carbon, filter toxins and pollutants before entering the Ottawa River as well as prevent erosion, a real downstream concern along Stillwater Creek, while providing habitat for countless species", said Jennifer Lamoureux the Aquatic and Fish Habitat Biologist with the Rideau Valley Conservation Authority.

"We are proud of the environmental restoration work done on the Carling Campus. Not only will it contribute to a healthier environment for people and wildlife but protecting and utilizing natural assets will result in substantial economic savings going forward", said Mario Hubert, Senior Director, Real Property Services, Public Services and Procurement Canada.

The first phase of this extensive project was carried out in 2018. It involved cleaning, relining and/or replacing a large number of culverts and the creation of 3 wetland cells to increase capacity along with the rehabilitation of an adjacent Naturalized Stormwater Pond.

In 2019, the 2 remaining Naturalized Stormwater Ponds were dewatered and dredged. In that these ponds had been used to treat stormwater from roads and parking lots over many years, there was a large amount of sediment, including contaminated soil removed.

The most recent phase brought in the City of Ottawa as a partner with the decision to enhance the Wetland for the stormwater retention required for the construction of the LRT Station on Moodie Drive. It involved elevating a pathway to provide for greater stormwater capacity, realigning and slowing Stillwater Creek as well as creating a large pond within the Wetland.

Partnerships

As in earlier phases, adding to the uniqueness of the project are the government and community stakeholders that came together in support of it.

Under the lead of the NCC, Octavian Danes, Project Manager, said *"the collaboration and cooperation between*

the City of Ottawa, Public Services and Procurement Canada, Rideau Valley Conservation Authority and community organizations like the Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre, the Crystal Beach Lakeview Community Association and the Belltown Neighbours Association have contributed to the success of this important project".

Wildlife-Sensitive Planning

"We are particularly encouraged to have been involved in decisions that ensured progressive wildlife measures were taken in rehabilitating and restoring the natural features on Campus", said Donna DuBreuil, President of the Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre.

The installation of flow devices to prevent flooding and the planting of 'beaver food' trees around the Stormwater Ponds, recognizing that beavers will both occasionally inhabit as well as benefit these ponds, the planting of nesting materials for bird species and the plans for educational signage will help to make the Carling Campus an environmental model.

"The local community is delighted with the positive environmental work done on the Carling Campus. We look forward to seeing the final piece undertaken to ensure safe wildlife passage under Moodie Drive and Corkstown Road so that the exceptional biodiversity relying on this corridor is preserved", said Ian McConnachie, Chair, Transportation, Transit and Infrastructure Committee, Crystal Beach Lakeview Community Association.



Stillwater Creek Enhancement Project near completion Credit NCC

We can all take steps to help keep wildlife safe...



Spring has finally arrived! After a long winter, 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 helpful information.

We remember well the animals we cared for when doing wildlife rehabilitation, particularly the ones that had a run in with one of our human contraptions and lived to tell the 'tale'.

In this case it was an 'ear'. The three little Eastern Cottontail rabbits that arrived at the Centre were very traumatized as was the homeowner who brought them to us. Unknown to him, the baby rabbits had been in a nest in tall grass at the back of his property. In cutting the grass with a whipper snipper, he was shocked to hear a piercing cry. Realizing they were injured, he quickly gathered up the babies and nesting material and brought them to the Centre.

One of the rabbits had lost most of its ear and was bleeding profusely, another had a deep cut on its neck and the third had abrasions on its back. Fortunately, after stabilizing them, all three responded to treatment. The veterinarian was able to suture the remaining portion of the one rabbit's ear and stem the bleeding while the other rabbits' cuts were cleaned and closed.

We wondered whether a rabbit with one ear would be at greater risk in terms of not hearing a predator approach but that

concern was soon put to rest. Once the group were housed in a large cage, they all adopted the wariness that rabbits possess. In fact, it seemed to us that the one-eared rabbit was the sentry, keeping a watch over the others.

When they were old enough, they were released back at the original site, at the homeowner's request.

Because rabbits, like many wild animals, seek safe spots close to our homes and away from predators when their babies are most vulnerable, it is not at all uncommon to have them around our property. They build their nests by digging a shallow indentation in a garden, under a hedge or in tall grass. The female lines the burrow with her fur for insulation for the newborn babies and covers the area with grass or other vegetation.



This young raccoon was rescued by Elizabeth Murray, one of the original wildlife rehabilitators in the area.

As the female only visits a few times a day, mostly at night, to nurse the babies so as to not attract predators to the nest, there is little indication of activity.

So, when digging in your garden or mowing your lawn, please keep an eye out for a possible nest. If you find one with babies, replace the nesting materials if you have disturbed them and leave it alone. Keep dogs and cats away for the short period of time it takes for the babies to mature and leave the area.

Hazards Facing Wildlife

This raccoon had sustained a serious cut when its paw got stuck in a discarded tin can where the lid had been bent inward rather than removed.

It opened our eyes to the many hazards that wildlife face due to our unwitting human actions. It also made us realize that we have an important role to play in making the public aware of the hazards so that we can all be part of the solution.

An Ounce of Prevention

- Completely remove can lids, never bend or leave lid inside as animals can get seriously cut and/or trapped, clean and rinse well and pinch closed
- Clean glass jars well
- Peanut butter jars need special attention. Remove any remaining peanut butter and wash with soap to remove any smell before screwing plastic lid on very tightly
- Always separate the dome-lids from plastic cups before discarding. Let fast food outlets know why they should have this information prominently displayed
- Cut all plastic can or bottle holders before discarding as they can be lethal for wildlife.

The Fox Pups – A New Year's Celebration



Great to see the fur growing back on a juvenile fox pup after being treated for mange.

Last fall, a fellow wildlife lover got in touch with us because she was worried about 2 fox pups that were visiting her property. She called them Vincenze Vulpes #1 and #2. They were missing fur, especially from their tail, and she thought they might have mange.

It is heartbreaking to watch an animal suffering with mange. Animals experience itching, scabbing and hair loss caused by tiny mites that live on the skin. If left untreated, animals can develop secondary infections and will also have difficulty foraging for food and keeping warm. To die is hard enough but to suffer and be cold and hungry is simply awful, especially when there is an easy treatment.

Although we receive a number of requests every year for help with animals with mange, this last year has been a particularly bad one.

We responded to dozens of calls from residents from Smiths Falls to Carp to Westboro, even as far away as Limoges. For the most part the animals suffering were squirrels and foxes.

The good news is that there is a medication that is highly effective at treating mange and it can be given in food. The

great news is that there are so many caring and compassionate people who are willing to set up feeding regimes to get the debilitated animal used to coming and eating. They then monitor to ensure the correct animal gets the food and then give them a dose weekly, ideally for four weeks.

Of course, we are talking about wild animals not pets, and those of us who have had a sick pet know the stress and worry as well as the challenge of getting them to take their medicine. With a wild animal there are extra challenges, they don't live in our house and there is often no predictability of when they will come around. Sometimes there is more than a week between doses and sometimes they may miss a dose. But we always feel any help is better than nothing.

The person who had the two fox pups in the fall did a great job at providing food for the pups. This got them into the routine but also provided much needed nourishment while they were debilitated. Shortly after I dropped off the medication, she was able to get a dose into each pup. The shyer one returned the next day, but really seemed to be struggling. After curling up in the yard for a bit, it ate some

of the food but then left. Sadly, it did not return the next day, or the day after, and days turned into weeks with no signs. The sibling did continue to visit, and the homeowner was successful at giving it all 4 doses.

While it was so wonderful to see the fox was feeling better and its fur growing back, it was hard to celebrate the good news as we were all feeling very concerned and sad that the other pup had not returned.

On New Year's Eve, this changed. There was cause to celebrate and not just because 2020 was finally over, but because the little fox came back. The initial dose must have had some impact. After reappearing, the homeowner was able to provide the rest of the treatments for the fox. By February the fur was starting to grow in, even on the tail.

Not only is it rewarding to help an animal in need but also so inspiring to know there are so many caring and compassionate people.

Fox Fun Facts

- Female foxes are called vixens, males are called dogs
- Young are born in the spring in a den in the ground
- Both parents help in the rearing of young
- Foxes are very vocal and can be mistaken for a person screaming
- Their diet includes small rodents such as mice and voles
- When hunting they will pounce like a cat
- They always have a white tip on the end of their tail
- They are quite small and weigh around 8-13 lbs, although their coat and bushy tail makes them appear larger.

The Places We Have Been

By Kate MacNeil



This past year has seen much change for everyone and despite many challenges, we are grateful that we have been able to continue to help connect people to nature. This

is a special gift with many benefits and for a lot of us the calmness and joy nature provides has never been more needed.

In 2020 we launched our Nature Lending Library, which provides free snowshoes and binoculars to families and groups. Prior to COVID, participants were able

to visit the Wildlife Centre and take part in presentations and activities to educate them about wildlife and habitat issues as well as utilize the equipment on the trails adjacent to the Centre. The lockdown meant that this program delivery had to change. So we took the show on the road. We delivered snowshoes across the city for families and groups to use to explore nature near them.

One delivery was a home in the Alta Vista area, next to a school that I visited to do presentations two years ago. This got me thinking of all the places we have been on our mission to help wildlife and to connect people to nature.

The Pizza Hut on St. Laurent Boulevard where we rescued an adult skunk from a window well, without it spraying. For which we were gifted several large pizzas.

The Community Centre in Beaverbrook where we talked to residents about coexisting with wildlife in their neighbourhoods.

Ottawa University where we have given presentations to students about how to mobilize the public and engage government on advancing more progressive wildlife policies.

The 417 exit ramp where we managed to contain a skunk that was entrapped in a plastic 6 pack holder. It must have been quite a sight. Three ladies dressed in skirts chasing a skunk. I am sure the honking of horns of those passing by was a show of support.

It is definitely rewarding to realize that our work has been woven into so many neighbourhoods and people's lives. We really appreciate having these special opportunities and hope people feel the same.

Canada Summer Jobs – A Great Contribution



Jen Cooke who worked at the Centre this past fall and winter

The Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre has been fortunate in past years to receive funding under the Canada Summer Jobs (CSJ) Program to hire youth to help with our program delivery throughout the spring and summer months. As a small

organization, this really has a significant impact and it also provides candidates with valuable work experience.

The application deadline for 2020 was early in the new year, before we had any idea the far-reaching impacts the pandemic would have.

It was evident early last spring that our programming would look very different. We were relieved at how quickly the CSJ Program adapted and at the flexibility they provided. This meant we could fill one position in the summer and move the start date on the second position to later in the year and for it to be on a part-time basis.

Beth Connelly joined the team and as a recent graduate of biochemistry, *"was excited to be pushed out of my comfort zone and learn more about nature and the wildlife living in the Ottawa-Carleton region."* Beth designed and developed a range of self-guided

activities for families and community members to connect to nature in a safe manner.

Jen Cooke started last fall and worked throughout the winter. Jen, a graduate of Queen's University had held various teaching, tutoring, and counselling positions. *"Having always been extremely passionate about education and the outdoors I was pleased the position at the OCWC allowed me to combine these interests"*, said Jen.

Jen created educational trail stations for the area around the Wildlife Centre. They were designed to be fun, quick and informational to engage and educate those using the trails. Jen also created fun wildlife and nature related activities for seniors who were isolated during the COVID-19 pandemic.

We are thankful to Nepean MP Chandra Arya for his support as well as the Canada Summer Jobs Program.

Development that Respects Nature



Development and growth are inevitable. But can we do it smartly and sustainably? One of the activities we do with high school students who visit the Centre is to have them create Community Design Plans with Nature in Mind. We use the quote “a careful foot can walk anywhere”. We are always amazed with the students’ ideas. They seem to take the approach of what can be done rather than what we can’t do. They are not caught up in doing something because that is how it has always been done.

Last spring we got to see a real life application of this approach at an infill project in Westboro, and it was certainly refreshing. A Centre supporter, Jean McKibbin, and wonderful advocate for the protection of our urban habitats noticed that a long-

abandoned home in her neighbourhood was slated for redevelopment. With the large lot and the deteriorated condition of the house, she knew that it would be a tear down. “I was immediately concerned about the squirrels and raccoons that have made this home over the years”, said Jean.

She reached out to the property owner, Grant DeSousa, and voiced her concerns. He was receptive and agreed to work with the Wildlife Centre. We talked with him about the importance of avoiding the peak birthing season and also steps that could be taken to ensure animals were not trapped or injured during demolition.

Grant connected us with his builder, Fred Carmosino, a partner at Maple Leaf Custom Homes. We were immediately impressed with Frank’s practical and cooperative approach.

We met to assess the site and came up with a workable plan and timeframe. It really reinforced that wildlife-sensitive planning doesn’t need to be complex. Providing information and practical tools means detrimental results such as creating orphaned or injured animals be avoided. It really can be a win-win situation.



“We were approached by the Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre because residents in the area knew a family of raccoons were living on site. After some consulting with Kate and her team, the property owner and the demolition contractor, it became apparent that we could give nature a chance by simply changing the order of operations on site. Ultimately, the opportunity we created for escape and survival worked well. It felt good to do the right thing.”
Fred Carmosino

“Maple Leaf Custom Homes has demonstrated why it will be increasingly sought after by those who want to lessen their footprint when having a new home built”, said Kate MacNeil, Executive Director of the Centre. And according to Jean McKibbin, “the efforts of Grant and Maple Leaf Custom Homes will go a long way, to establishing good relations in the neighbourhood.”

Cynthia Kasem – Julia Estates

Those working on behalf of the environment are often at odds with developers. However, it’s important to recognize that some in the development and construction business are equally concerned about the environment and are paying more than lip service to building with nature in mind.

We first met Cynthia a number of years ago when, as a mortgage broker, she bought a magnificent piece of property in Dunrobin. The 60 acres overlooking the Gatineau Hills has large mature trees, stone outcroppings and a beaver pond.

Julia Estates, named after her daughter, had a website at the time that told you something about this developer. It invited you to ‘Meet your Neighbours’ showing a cheeky red squirrel, a fawn nestled in the tall grass and a wee bird in a nest.

This was not just a marketing strategy when you see the tangible steps Cynthia has taken to protect the environment. Reducing the number of lots from 25 to 21 to save trees, delaying the project for almost a year to protect nesting birds while a bird study was done, hiring someone to supply poplar branches for the beavers’ winter food supply so they weren’t tempted to try the new plantings.

These were a few of the steps Cynthia took, saying “I didn’t set out to maximize profit with this development, I wanted to put something back”.

With the last of the properties sold, it’s nice to see the new owners also going to great lengths to protect trees and natural features on their property, showing as much respect for the environment as Cynthia.



Turtle Rescue

Caring for wildlife over the years has been a humbling experience. It has taught us a lot about the habits of each species while giving us the ability to frequently laugh at ourselves.



By Donna DuBreuil

Living in a rural area where the busy highway transects a wetland meant

Gary and I were constantly on the lookout for turtles crossing.

Spotting a large Snapping Turtle in the middle of the road on this occasion put us into immediate rescue mode. Gary pulled onto the shoulder, I jumped out, stopping traffic and carefully grasped the turtle's shell far enough way from its lashing tail and long neck with jaws capable of giving a serious bite.

Having come from a meeting and wearing a tight skirt and high heels, not ideal rescue attire, I gingerly made my way back to the trunk of our car where

Gary was attempting to rig up a carrier to transport the turtle to safer ground.

Now, anyone having rescued a turtle knows it gives off a lot of water or pees when it is picked up.

Standing with my back to traffic and with my legs spread apart to avoid getting wet or bitten, I couldn't understand why drivers were honking their horns and people, including Gary, were laughing. Only later did I realize what they thought I was doing.

Be Wildlife Savvy this Spring

- The birthing season is at its peak between April and August
- Females seek shelter in attics, under steps and in chimneys as a safe spot to have young
- This is TEMPORARY, 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 as it can cause a fire
- 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
- Never use a so-called "humane" trap to relocate wildlife as it is responsible for the majority of orphans left behind during the birthing season



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