



Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre Newsletter



Changing Attitudes About Wildlife

by Kate MacNeil
Education Coordinator

September marks the start of the fourth year for our new program direction. In three years we have built a unique and relevant program with a strong foundation.

When we launched our Education Program we knew there was a need to educate people about wildlife and how critical the natural world is to our survival. What we did not know was how great the need was, particularly among children.

There has been a dramatic shift in our society in just one generation. Unlike their parents, who spent time outside exploring, children today spend much of their time indoors focused on a variety of electronic gadgets. The days of children spending endless hours climbing trees or catching bugs and exploring even a small patch of natural area where they are free to let their imaginations run wild are quickly becoming a thing of the past.

Our School Program is helping reconnect children to nature and get them excited

about the wildlife in their backyards. To date we have presented courses to close to 3,000 students in the Ottawa area from grades JK-8.

We remain committed to delivering our Education Programs to the broadest possible demographic. Our philosophy is that it is everyone's right to enjoy and understand the natural world and that all children should be exposed to the wonders of nature.

A large part of the program's success is a result of the special perspective that we take into classrooms. Not only are we passionate about wildlife but we also have firsthand experience gained during years of doing wildlife rehabilitation. Our personal accounts of amazing animal stories intrigue students and help them relate to wildlife.

Often, children have very little positive information about local wildlife. Many fall into two categories, they either don't know or know something bad, like raccoons make a mess of garbage or mice get into houses. One child kept asking if I was ever attacked by an animal, when I answered no, she wanted to

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The Importance of the United Way Campaign

Sincere thanks to those who have supported the work of the Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre through a gift to the United Way Campaign.

Your help has allowed us to meet the increased need for humane solutions to wildlife conflicts, to respond to the encouraging interest for wildlife education from area schools and the community and to design special courses so that all children, regardless of their level of ability, can enjoy the wonder of nature.

The United Way Campaign has become an important source of help for the work of our volunteer organization. We hope you will continue your support or, if you haven't already done so, allocate a gift through the 2008-09 United Way Campaign. Just ensure the Centre's full name and charitable number 13224-0284-RR0001 is noted on the donation form.

OCWC INFO

Make sure you use our latest contact information:

Mail: OCWC, P.O. Box 11051, Station H, Ottawa, Ontario, K2H 7T8; **Email:** ocwc@ncf.ca; **Web:** www.wildlifeproblems.ncf.ca

OCWC gratefully acknowledges:



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



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Editorial

Stop and Smell the Roses

The Centre's education program which is the focus of this issue is both unique in providing a presence in area classrooms and exceptionally timely in its mission to reconnect children to the natural world.



There has never been a greater need. Our classroom experience is confirming what a growing number of health officials, educators and authors are saying: children are suffering from "nature deficit disorder". Preoccupied with electronic gadgets and games, they no longer go outdoors alone and what activities they participate in are adult-directed and supervised.

If you are over 30, you'll know this dramatic shift has occurred in just one generation. It's not only producing overweight and unfit kids, but it is robbing them of the sense of independence, adventure and creativity they need to develop and grow as individuals and we need for a productive and healthy society.

Child rights activists Craig and Marc Kielburger in their book "Me to We: Finding Meaning in a Material World" relay that "kids who learn to appreciate nature also gain an understanding of the environment, and how their choices affect the greater world, leading them to become more active in social and community activities".

And, it is not just children that need nature. There have been a host of recent studies like that of Dr. John Zelenski of Carleton University that show a strong correlation between people's happiness and a relationship with nature.

In fact, the distracted and unhappy faces seen at local shopping malls confirms that acquiring more 'stuff' is not making us any happier. In taking stock of our lives, a long walk in the woods with our children might prove to be a fresh new starting point. And, an inexpensive one at that.

Donna DuBreuil
President, OCWC

Community Foundation of Ottawa Supports Centre's Education Program

A grant of \$6,500 from the Community Foundation of Ottawa will help to ensure the Centre's popular Wildlife Education School Program can meet the increased need and interest within the community.



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

The program which provides a presence in the classroom is built on the Centre's many years of direct hands-on experience with wildlife and the insight gained and documented in resolving more than 100,000 human-wildlife conflict calls.

The Community Foundation of Ottawa has been an integral player in the development and delivery of this unique education program since its inception three years ago and has been a key supporter of the Centre since its founding more than twenty years ago.

The Foundation represents "an important mosaic of caring through its many donors and the wide variety of projects it supports, substantially strengthening the fabric of the Ottawa community", says Donna DuBreuil, President of the Centre.

Getting Ready for Winter

The pleasure of observing animals along with the increased emphasis on the value of protecting biodiversity has encouraged a growing number of people to create habitat for wildlife in their backyards. Here are some tips as you prepare for winter:

- Wash and refill your birdbath right up until the snow comes as all wildlife rely on a clean drinking source.
- Drain shallow ponds and pools early though so that frogs seek shelter before water freezes.
- Leave a brush or rock pile on your property as shelter for small mammals and birds.
- Dried berries on shrubs and coneheads on plants and flowers left over the winter will provide food and cover for wildlife and prevent soil erosion.
- As for conflicts, virtually everyone has tiny field mice enter their homes in the Fall. You won't prevent them from gaining access to your attic but you can stop them getting into your living quarters by applying metal lath around plumbing fixtures under your kitchen sink.
- Wildlife problems and their solutions, including detailed photographs and sketches, can be found on the Centre's website www.wildlifeproblems.ncf.ca. The website assists thousands of people each year. Living with while enjoying wildlife is easy with the right information.



photo courtesy Wendy Booth

Caring for Bear Cubs

Even though we no longer do wildlife rehabilitation, the animals we have helped over the years are never far from our minds. In fact, having had the privilege of caring for a wide variety of species, all with special personalities, has reinforced our commitment to reconnecting people to nature.

As was too often the case, these orphaned bear cubs resulted from the actions of wildlife officers who should have known better. A particularly dry summer with few acorns and berries meant a severe food shortage for species such as bears that have only a short summer to gain enough weight to see them through a period of winter dormancy. Adults had to extend their range into semi-developed areas to take advantage of backyard crab apple trees and bird feeders.

Instead of providing helpful educational tips to homeowners, bears were trapped and relocated, leaving behind dozens of orphaned cubs that particular year. Female bears are cautious and protective of their cubs, sending them scrambling for the nearest tree when there is any threat. And, of course, that is where the cubs stayed as their mothers were trapped and carted away.

When manpower resources were depleted, calls from anxious residents were, thankfully, forwarded to the Centre. Handling over 60 such calls, calming fears and providing information on what people should and should not do, we were happy to report that no further bears had to be relocated and no women or children were eaten!

Unfortunately, it was too late to prevent these cubs from being orphaned so the Centre undertook the long and difficult job of caring for them.

The first cub to arrive weighed just 23 pounds. He was found on a nearby golf course, living on cat food put out by concerned staff. The second, an unrelated cub, came in just a few days later, having been rescued from a tree at an apple orchard. He was a bit larger at 35 pounds but neither would have survived winter given that their metabolism requires a weight of at least 60 pounds to trigger a dormancy response.

The cubs couldn't have been more different in personality. The smaller, whom we named

Pokey, was very assertive and wary, quickly becoming the dominant cub, while the other little fellow reminded us of Marty Feldman, the British comedian with prominent eyes and a goofy laid-back personality.

Already mid-November, volunteers worked frantically to reinforce an existing outdoor cage and build an insulated 'den' big enough to shelter the two cubs. However, Pokey claimed the den and let out fierce growls whenever 'Marty' tried to enter.

Well into December now, with the weather getting much colder, we were concerned that we'd have to build a separate den for Marty. Not that he wasn't trying. Each day, Marty delicately moved his backside a few inches further into the den, a silly expression on his face that said "maybe he won't notice". Pokey continued to growl his displeasure. Finally, one morning, after a bitterly cold night, we were relieved to find that Marty had finally been accepted as a roommate, the two snoring peacefully inside the warm den.

They ate voraciously – large bowls filled with dog kibble, meat, fruits and nuts – until they had put on sufficient weight to go into dormancy in late January and did not come back out of their den until mid-March. Again, they



After more than seven months in captivity and having tripled their weight, Pokey (left) and Marty get ready for freedom.

were ravenous, consuming up to eight large bowls of food a day. Although bears are often depicted as large threatening carnivores, their food preferences were decidedly vegetarian – romaine lettuce being a favourite, followed by fruits and nuts with meat way down on the list.

Pokey loved to bluff by sitting on top of his nest box, waiting for someone to step into the cage with bowls of food when he would let out a loud 'woof' and watch with satisfaction as the person nearly fell over backwards getting out of the cage. Marty, on the other hand, would amble over to the side of the cage to enjoy a drink from the water hose.

By mid-June they had tripled in weight, had luxurious dark coats and were ready for their independence. It was a special day as they were transported deep into the wilderness in what we all hoped would be a safe new home for them.

The Bear Facts:

- Bears are normally dormant from November until March, denning underground, in a cave or rock crevice, beneath the limbs of a fallen tree or in a hollow log.
- The cubs – normally 2, occasionally 1 or 3, are born in the winter den in January or February. They are very tiny, weighing only 7 to 12 ounces or not much bigger than a hamster. Not weaned until August, they stay with mother for 1 year which is why females only have one litter every other year.
- Adult males weigh 370 pounds on average and females 300 pounds. Much of their diet consists of roots, berries, buds, twigs and insects.
- Many juvenile cubs are orphaned when adults are killed during the Fall Bear hunt or if adult females are trapped and relocated.

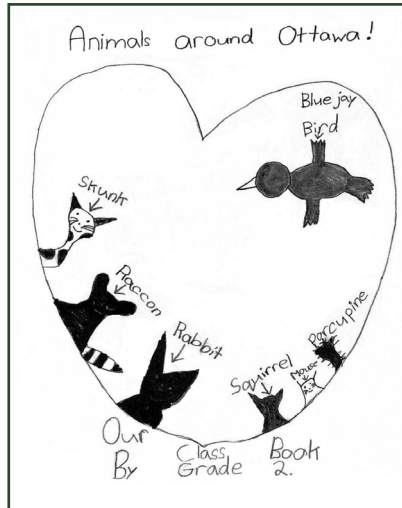
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know if I was ever bitten or which animal I was most afraid of.

Comments like these make me sad. I still remember as a child exploring our campsite hoping, with a child's innocence, that the rabbits off in the distance would come and visit me. To see wildlife was a treat not something to fear.

I explained to the student that we were trained and wore gloves and used caution. And whether it was an adult coyote, a bear cub or a baby squirrel, wildlife almost seemed to have an instinctive knowledge that we were helping them. She was fascinated and surprised and it was almost like a light came on - oh you mean it is ok to like wildlife? I believe that most children have a natural curiosity and empathy for animals, but it is critical to cultivate and encourage this curiosity to foster a connection to the natural world. We are happy to have the opportunity to do this one student at a time!



Cover of students' workbook on local wildlife

It is always nice when we hear positive feedback from parents and teachers, but the best thing is when we know we are getting children interested in local wildlife. This is often evident by the end of the presentation when their little hands are waving with excitement because they want to ask a question. I was fortunate to receive a tangible example from a grade 2 class at General Vanier Public School. After my visit, the students, with the help of their teacher researched and prepared a bound workbook about local wildlife, complete with hand drawn illustrations! Wow - I was so touched and impressed. The book is proudly displayed in our library.

In closing, I want to share something that someone said to describe the Wildlife Centre that not only motivates me but makes me smile: "OCWC was handed lemons when the regulations changed and not only did they make lemonade, they made Margaritas". Cheers to the new programs and our evolution. Together we can help wildlife starting in our own backyards!

Donation Coupon

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

Information is used only by the OCWC. It is not shared.

Why we no longer do rehab

Almost without fail, when I do a presentation someone asks why we are not doing rehab anymore.

The short answer is that it is a result of provincial regulation changes. Most of the animals we cared for came in as babies, most came in alone and most came from busy areas in the city, Denny's parking lot on Bank Street jumps to mind.

Once stabilized, animals were put with other members of their species so they would socialize properly. They would then go to a foster volunteer who would feed and care for them and then do a slow, transitional release on their suitable property, usually on an acre or two in the less developed areas around the city. This slow release worked well and some of our volunteers would still see the animals years later.

The new regulations first required bringing each animal back to within 1 km of where they were found, so this would mean back to Bank Street for the lone squirrel. Now, if mom had raised it in this area it would be fine, but for us to drop it there with no slow release would be a death sentence.

The regulation was later changed to 15 kms. This would still mean that the majority of the over 1000 animals we saw every year would still have no foster volunteer or appropriate slow release site. Doing wildlife rehabilitation is difficult enough without having to find suitable release sites using a compass! For more information you can check out www.wildlifeontario.ca.

We still believe in the need for wildlife rehabilitation and will continue to work to see progressive rehab regulations reinstated in Ontario. However, we know our Education Programs are equally vital. They are allowing us to focus on the bigger picture, changing negative attitudes towards wildlife rather than simply treating the symptoms of the problem.

OCWC Website

www.wildlifeproblems.ncf.ca