

WILD THING



CALL OF THE WILD

story by MATTHEW STRADER

THE NATIONAL
WILDLIFE
CENTRE IS AN
ORGANIZATION
THAT CARES FOR
SICK, INJURED
AND ORPHANED
WILD ANIMALS



« The centre was co-founded in 2014 by Dr. Sherri Cox and Octavio Perez. According to Tracey, Dr. Cox is the backbone of the medical operation. And a believer in continuing to grow the abilities of others and advocate for the very work the centre does.

To date, they have trained 11 vet interns.

"In veterinary medicine there are so few opportunities for students to learn to work with wildlife," Tracey said. "Programs in universities and colleges do not focus on wildlife, so training takes place outside of veterinary programs for the most part."

With climate change, urban sprawl, and the increase in human and animal conflict, there is a need, however.

"I'm sure you've heard of some of the instances in your area," Tracey said. "Last year there was a young black bear that wandered into Georgetown for example. People called the police and the Ministry of National Resources and Forestry (MNRF) to report it and we responded to support the safe capture for relocation. We work with those and many other organizations. The conflict is a function of urban sprawl, restricting habitats, but also people feeding wild animals. Something the centre also tries to advocate and educate regarding, as they sometimes see results of people placing garbage outside where it is accessible to an animal (other than on garbage day) or trying to help by leaving food out for hungry wild animals. This attracts wildlife to the area and often keeps them coming back for more.

"Really, it causes problems for the animal and the people," Tracey said. "People may have animals in their backyards. For example, we've seen a skunk with its head stuck in a plastic container, or while mowing a lawn someone has come across an Eastern Cottontail nest, accidentally injuring an animal. If this happens to you, who do you call? If an animal is injured on the road, who do you call for help? As soon as our new wildlife hospital is up and running, later this summer, people will be able to bring the injured animal to our centre or call us for advice. And since 2014, there have been more and more calls every year.

One of the reasons the centre wants to find a permanent location in Caledon.

"We collaborate with many others, such as police, and government officials, as well as many rehabilitation centres throughout Ontario and Canada. It's very much a team approach."

The NWC home base is Caledon, but the clinic is mobile and often travels, when larger wild animals, such as deer, moose or bears are in need of veterinary care. However, Tracey explained that through what they have coined



Project Evolution, her and the rest of her team are building a permanent wildlife hospital facility. Something that excites them due to the increased ability to not only assess, diagnose and treat, but to educate others. The NWC wants to be known for its leadership, creation and knowledge sharing of the highest quality and standards and excellence in caring for native wildlife.

"We operate a mobile clinic, and drive to a field location or rehab centre and address the sick or injured animal there. Many rehabilitation centres throughout Ontario call us when they know an animal is in need of surgical or urgent medical intervention," Tracey said. "Project Evolution is going to be a

Tips about wild animals from the NWC



- Do not approach or feed wild animals, even if they look hungry, as this puts both you and the animal at risk. Wild animals should be afraid of people.
- Share the land - Appreciate the opportunity to observe wildlife from a distance if you are lucky enough to see them - they were here long before we were.
- Learn about the species you are most likely to see in your community and know what to do if you encounter a wild animal.
- Know what to do if you believe an animal is sick or injured - Stay calm. Stay safe. Call a wildlife custodian, such as NWC or a local rehabilitator and they will guide you through the steps to take, depending on the animal.
- Consider donating to a wildlife cause.



huge initiative. We want a state of the art facility, and really want to be known for our leadership and the creation and transfer of knowledge. Phase two of this hospital is going to be a teaching facility, a training facility, welcoming others from around the province, country and world to come and learn about caring for wildlife."

The need for a facility is driven by the public demand, whether a bird hits the window, or an animal is struck on the road, the centre sees a constant flow of requests from people who want to bring animals to them. A field hospital will give them the ability to treat an increased number of animals, including providing surgeries, recovery areas and more. With a large facility they will also be able to increase the amount of research and education that they do.

And phase one is on the way. The foundation is in, walls are going up in two weeks, and all of the trades are in place to put surgical rooms inside. Now, they continue to fundraise for the remaining bits and pieces.

"The shell for the first phase should be erected in two weeks, and we're hoping to open in June," Tracey said. "It's so exciting to think of the potential when we have that facility. We're going to be moving from providing medical care through the means of the mobile unit to a small field hospital of 2,800 square feet, and eventually to a second phase large facility of approximately 26,000." »

«But the urgent care potential is just the beginning. A unique part of their program is their education program.

“Dr. Cox has been involved in international efforts in oil spills and other disasters,” Tracey said. “The NWC believes that humans, Canadian wildlife and the environment are all interconnected. If our communities are to be healthy, those three components have to be working together. We protect ecosystems when we care for those sick and injured or orphaned wild animals.

We work with all Canadian wildlife species, from mice to moose, turtles to trumpeter swans. The goal of our centre is wildlife education, training, and care. So, education is the biggest component for us, because of the way it can build capacity for others.”

Training wildlife staff, interns and vets is very important to the NWC. Their intern program sees interns work full time for at least a year and build their skills in wildlife. Doctor Cox oversees them on a daily basis, and flies to the different provinces once a month on her own dime to work side by side with interns that are out of the province.

They are training vets that can go into the field and treat a wild animal. The other part of the education component is educating the public.



Do you lose hope when you jump rope?

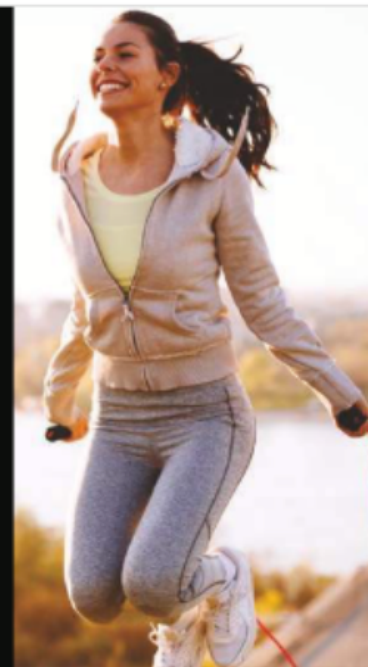
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"It goes back to the concept of one health," Tracey said. "If you don't have a healthy environment, you are not going to have a healthy community. Not only do animals provide enjoyment when you see them, they are a part of nature and nature is a part of the health and well being of all of us. Biodiversity, all the various plants and animals that maintain a balanced ecosystem, is essential for human survival. We depend on a diversity of wildlife species to keep ecosystems healthy. Wildlife helps purify our water, our air, disperse seeds and enrich our soil. Habitat loss, pollution, and climate change are threatening ecosystems and causing a loss of species across Canada and beyond. At the National Wildlife Centre, we believe that an ecosystem is comprised of humans, wildlife and the environment. We look at this through the One Health framework."

By caring for and protecting Canada's wildlife, the National Wildlife Centre is caring for and protecting ecosystems and the health of our communities, Tracey said. There is a great deal of research available related to the mental and physical benefits of nature (both plants and animals).

And they are aware, some may say, "does really helping that one raccoon help wildlife?"

"Yes - it matters to that raccoon," said Dr. Sherri Cox. "We help all sick, injured, and orphaned wildlife. We are stewards of our environment: helping wildlife that has been impacted through direct or indirect human activity is something we should strive to support. We all need to respect and care about wildlife to protect our planet."

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