

Constance Creek Wildlife Refuge provides safe haven

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EMC Lifestyle - A group of dedicated volunteers is doing all it can to help local wildlife.

The Constance Creek Wildlife Refuge (CCWR) is the result of their combined efforts. Located at 2494 Dunrobin Rd., the centre is the brainchild of Lynne Rowe who has been devoting much of her life to helping animals since moving west of the city five years ago.

"For the past few years, I'd drive along March Road and see more and more natural spaces being clear cut for new housing developments," she said. "I was concerned about how quickly animals were being displaced and worried about their ability to move and adapt. Then people started bringing wildlife to my farm saying that there was nowhere else to take them. I found out there was a real need for wildlife resources in the Ottawa region."

Her commitment to help nature's creatures was supported by a small network of determined volunteers.

"We're fortunate that we've grown to be a group of about 10 core volunteers who are organizing everything and another 25 dedicated volunteers who put in lots of hours working with the animals on the farm. A lot of the farm animals are rescues and having volunteers care for them frees up my time to apply for funding, keep the books in order, and keep the whole project moving forward."

Creating a wildlife refuge has been a daunting task for Lynne and her volunteers.

"I figure if humans are displacing wildlife and destroying their habitat, the least we can do is provide a rehabilitation centre to take some responsibility for orphans and injured animals. So I wanted to be part of a solution and I saw this as a way that I could do something about the situation."

Unfortunately, there are no sources for funding to operate a refuge for wild animals. That means the centre has to run entirely on the goodwill of those who support it.

"Realistically, this has to be something that the community wants to support in order for it to succeed," said Lynne. "There is no easy funding for wildlife centres, so beyond bottle feeding cute orphans, a lot of hours and energy are spent applying for funding and requesting donations."

She recently took the initiative to submit an application for funding to the Pepsi Refresh Project, and the idea was accepted as one of almost 250 ideas across Canada that aim to move the world forward in a positive way.

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Submitted Photo by Terry Pedwell

Refresh Everything is the buzz word at Constance Creek Wildlife Refuge as the volunteer organization hopes to acquire a \$25,000 grant to offset costs. Volunteers pictured are Kasia Stalinski, Lynne Rowe, Dylan Kome, Jennie Owens, Valerie Bruyere, Ashley Chabot, Andrew Meek.

Now it's up to supporters to vote for the centre to win funding.

"If the idea gets enough votes, Constance Creek Wildlife Refuge could receive a \$25,000 grant to bring the idea to reality."

"CCWR is a registered charity, entirely run by volunteers. We do not receive any government funding but rely on community support. All you have to do is go to www.refresheverything.ca, find the Constance Creek Wildlife Refuge idea under the \$25,000 category, 'Open a centre to rehabilitate fawns and other wildlife for release,' and vote for it. You can vote once a day up until Dec. 31. Please tell your friends about us too. We need to be in first or second place to win in this category."

Grant money will be used to complete fences around wildlife enclosures, build a fence to isolate fawns in remote pastures for over wintering, install a well to supply water to fawns in remote pasture, and install electrical hookup to the intake clinic trailer.

The Pepsi Refresh Project accepts 300 new ideas for positive change every other month and will reward over \$1 million in grants to the ideas that are voted the best by the people of Canada.

Though devoted to her Galloping Goat Farm and the Constance Creek Wildlife Refuge, Lynne has a degree in Physics and a Bachelor of Education. She works as a Data Management Coordinator at Sandy Hill Community Health Centre. She says she moved from the Westboro neighbourhood in Ottawa to Dunrobin with her daughter Maeve, now 12, because "I wanted a piece of land to call my own and we both wanted some farm animals. We bought our 10-acre farm and started out with a horse, four goats and four cats. Now we've grown to have eight horses, 22 goats, three alpacas, three potbellied pigs, 12 rabbits, a dog, seven cats plus chickens and guinea pigs. About half of these are rescued or adopted and are considered sanctuary animals."

Petting zoo

The first move after acquiring all the animals was to open a petting zoo, aptly named The Galloping Goat Farm.

"When we first started increasing our animal population we knew we would need some way to earn the money needed to support them. So we decided to start a mobile petting zoo business called Galloping Goat Farm. This business has grown so that we are kept heavily booked from May through August each year. This past year, much of this income was used to support the Constance Creek Wildlife Refuge project."

As her petting zoo becomes more popular, she said the focus is on education and therapeutic events for smaller groups "where we can teach people to appreciate the animals and see them as interesting creatures with unique personalities and feelings. We also hope to open up the farm for tours."

"I truly believe Ottawa needs more resources for wildlife issues. Ottawa has problems with moose, coyotes, deer on roads and yet has not proper way of dealing with these issues. I would like to see CCWR become a strong voice for humane and compassionate solutions, in discussions at the table with city planners, city council, developers and community members.

Taking on this wildlife refuge project is the most difficult thing I've done. I'm good with animals, but there are so many things needed to make it succeed that aren't in my established skill set that I

sometimes feel way out of my league! But whenever I feel defeated, I think about remember that it isn't about me, that lots of people have invested in this projects through donations and volunteering. I look out my window and see the trailer that R.W. Tomlinson donated for our clinic, or I'll see a volunteer out in the freezing rain taking hay out to the farm animals."

Lynne says she would never have gotten this far without all the volunteers who have helped, especially Melissa Kerr, Janice Sutton, Anita Utas, Edna Viherjoki, Hanny & Willy Ernst, Terry Pedwell, Kasia Stal, Valerie Bruyere and Valerie Maier.

"We could really use a big chunk of funding to complete the fences and clinic that we need to become an authorized rehabilitation site. Lack of funding slows us down, but as long as we get enough in donations to keep moving forward that's what we'll do! It is a challenge when you are starting to get funders to take a chance in a project like ours - they tend to fund concrete projects for established organizations with a proven track record.

In the immediate future, Lynne hopes to gather enough funds to complete the fences and the trailer clinic so that the centre could be authorized to take in wildlife next spring.

"Buying a tractor with an auger would allow us to get a lot of work done installing fence posts and moving gravel and sand. We expect to create a lot of foster sites so will need to create new enclosures on an ongoing basis as we expand to meet the growing need."

"Education and Advocacy are very important part of our mission," said Lynne. "Public education can do a lot to prevent or minimize conflicts with wildlife and reduce the incidence of creating wildlife orphans. If we advocate for wildlife in city planning and urban development, the city can accommodate wildlife by providing safe ways for animals to pass through green spaces in the city. We can play a role in making sure a responsible solution is provided whenever there is a wildlife issue in the city."

The refuge website, ccwr.ca, has suggestions on how people can help. As well as voting for us daily on refresheverything.ca/constancecreekwildlife (under the \$25k category), the group is raffling off a limited edition Robert Bateman print called "Awesome Land - American Elk" and a set of opal and diamond jewellery.

"We need stairs and a ramp built to the trailer doors. We can use donations of feed such as hay, rabbit pellets, dry dog & cat food. Lumber is always useful, patio stones for under raccoon enclosures, straw for bedding, pallets/skids, used towels and linens. And bring us your Christmas trees. The goats love them!"

David Johnston is a freelance writer currently on assignment with the EMC.