

Living with Wildlife - Large Mammals

Posted Jul 1, 2010 BY DONNA DUBREUIL

EMC Lifestyle - The controversial killing of several young moose recently in the Ottawa area raises a number of issues.

While there has been plenty of discussion around the need for the city to develop a more progressive and humane response, there has been a lack of information about why these animals are sometimes turning up in developed areas.

Like most things, knowing why something happens provides us with the insight we need to respond in a more informed way. Large mammals such as moose, bear and coyotes require large territories along with the necessary corridors that allow them to move between these habitats.

The greenbelt offers wildlife corridors, although they need to be enhanced in many areas, while hydro right-of-ways, transit corridors and rivers provide other connectors. So, it is not surprising that large animals move through our city more frequently than we might suspect.

The adult female moose, or cow, gives birth in late May or early June and it is then that yearlings are forced out to find a territory of their own.

And, like teenagers of our species, their inexperience sometimes gets them into difficulty. This was the case of the two young moose that found themselves in a neighbourhood park in Orléans. These moose may have come from Larose Forest to the east or Mer Bleue to the south. With patience and non-threatening guidance they could have been encouraged to find their way back.

With more and more development encroaching on natural areas like Mer Bleue, Larose Forest and the South March Highlands in the west, we should not be surprised, on occasion, to see animals like moose and bears. For many of us it is a special privilege, not one fraught with irrational fear.

There needs to be a response in place that is based on understanding the behaviour and biology of these species, rather than over-reacting to public safety concerns that can be managed. The lead should involve someone with wildlife training whose concern focuses on the best outcome for the animal while police should concentrate on crowd control and public safety.

Too often, because it is an animal, the incident is allowed to become an entertainment spectacle for people, automatically escalating the risk to the public and always, sadly, sealing the fate of the animal.

Ottawa is blessed with amazing natural areas and wildlife. We must do a better job in understanding and protecting both.

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