



KIDS GO WILD

Helping and protecting urban wildlife



A guide for educators with activities and resources for students in grades 1 to 8

LEARN ABOUT:

Wildlife rehabilitation | How to assist sick, injured and orphaned wild animals | Wild species that live in cities and suburbs | Top threats facing our wild neighbours | What people can do to help

KIDS GO WILD!

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A GUIDE FOR EDUCATORS WITH ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES
FOR STUDENTS IN GRADES 1 TO 8



AWFC

THE ANIMAL WELFARE FOUNDATION OF CANADA
FONDATION DU BIEN-ÊTRE ANIMAL DU CANADA

Toronto Wildlife Centre would like to thank the Animal Welfare Foundation of Canada for their generous grant making this project possible.

ONTARIOPOWER
GENERATION

We also wish to recognize Ontario Power Generation for their ongoing sponsorship of TWC's Wildlife Education Program through which thousands of people have learned about promoting and preserving biodiversity.

Special thanks to Ann Brokelman for providing select photos throughout this guide.
Developed by Victoria Badham and Designed by Jessica Hearn.



TWC
EST. 1993

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These sample activities
and many more are
available to download at
www.torontowildlifecentre.com/kids-go-wild/

ABOUT KIDS GO WILD!

Hundreds of species live in or pass through the Greater Toronto Area. But surviving in close proximity to humans presents unique challenges for our wild neighbours. Urban and suburban areas have developed in ways that make everyday life a threat – from a family of Canada geese attempting to cross a busy highway, to a migratory bird colliding with a window, to a striped skunk getting their head stuck in a peanut butter jar. More and more, human activities and infrastructure are negatively impacting wildlife.

Kids Go Wild! contains resources and activities to guide educators and students in learning about issues affecting wildlife. This guide outlines some common threats and provides meaningful ways to make our neighbourhoods safer for all species.

The guide has been developed for use by a variety of groups and organizations including elementary schools, eco-clubs, scouting and guiding groups or children learning from home. We encourage participants to share what they learn with family, friends and the community at large to increase awareness and create change on a greater scale.

Intended outcomes of using this guide include:

- ▶ increased awareness of common wildlife situations and actions to take to resolve them;
- ▶ engagement in activities that will make local environments safer for wildlife; and
- ▶ fostering positive, healthy and appropriate relationships with wildlife



How to use this guide

Kids Go Wild! offers wildlife-focused resources and activities that can supplement and enhance teachings related to common subjects, including environmental science, ecology, geography and arts. We suggest target grades for each activity, ranging from grade 1 to grade 8. Educators may select individual activities as they relate to the curriculum and relevant lesson plans. Or they may challenge themselves to carry out a set number of activities to help students gain a thorough understanding of the vast issues that wildlife cope with in urban and suburban settings. We have included background information at the beginning of each section along with supplemental resources where available.



Visit www.torontowildlifecentre.com/kids-go-wild/ to download an electronic version of this guide. Additional resources and activities not covered in this guide are also available online.

ABOUT TORONTO WILDLIFE CENTRE

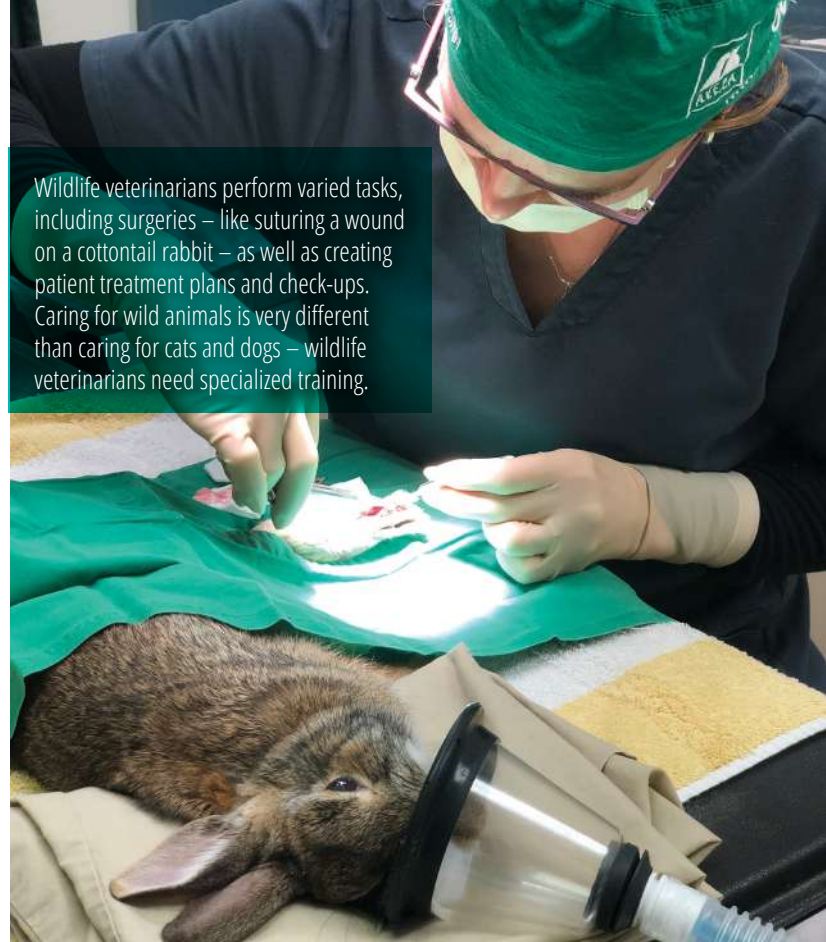
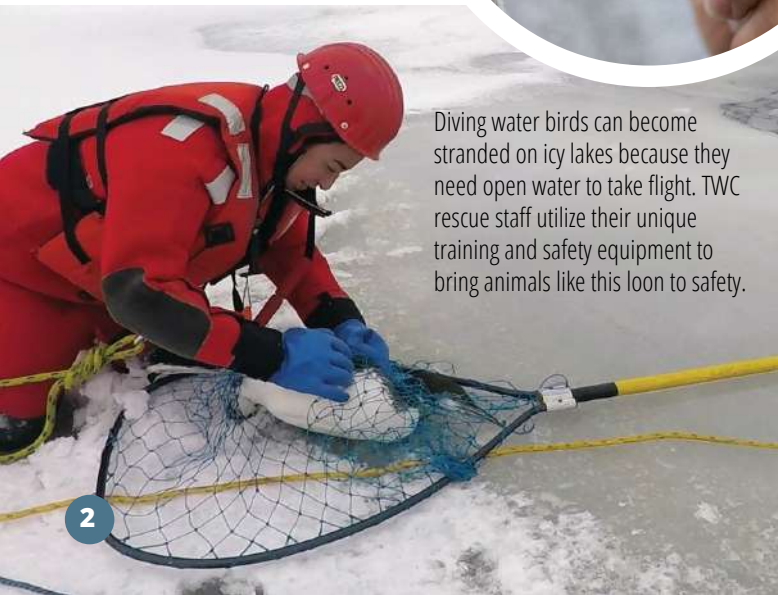
An Introduction

In 1992, wildlife biologist Nathalie Karvonen was working at a humane society in Toronto when she noticed a pressing need for wildlife rehabilitation services. Not only were there few options for sick, injured and orphaned wildlife, there was a lack of information and support for the people who wanted to help. In response, she founded the non-profit organization Toronto Wildlife Centre (TWC) in 1992 with a handful of dedicated volunteers. What started as a basic wildlife information hotline run from a single phone is now a full-service wildlife hospital and rehabilitation centre with a dedicated rescue team. Today, TWC is the busiest wildlife centre in Canada, handling tens of thousands of calls from members of the public. These calls range from emergencies, to questions about handling conflicts between people and wild animals, to general interest questions. Since opening, more than 100,000 wild animals from close to 300 species have been admitted for care - approximately 5,000 wild patients every year!

This American goldfinch is given medicine to help ease the pain of a broken collarbone – an injury sustained from flying into a window. Wildlife rehabilitators have many responsibilities, including giving daily medications, setting up and cleaning housing, preparing and delivering meals, and monitoring the health and progress of up to 800 patients in care at one time!



Diving water birds can become stranded on icy lakes because they need open water to take flight. TWC rescue staff utilize their unique training and safety equipment to bring animals like this loon to safety.



Wildlife veterinarians perform varied tasks, including surgeries – like suturing a wound on a cottontail rabbit – as well as creating patient treatment plans and check-ups. Caring for wild animals is very different than caring for cats and dogs – wildlife veterinarians need specialized training.

For dangerous or complicated situations, hotline staff send out the rescue team. These highly trained staff save about 1,000 wild animals every year from the direst of circumstances – such as a red-tailed hawk caught in kite string high up a tree or a white-tailed deer trapped in a deep pit struggling to escape.

Animals arrive at TWC in a variety of ways. Some are brought in following a hotline call; others are transported after a rescue. Once admitted, their first stop is the assessment room where they receive an examination to determine the type of care they need. For each patient, rehabilitation and veterinary staff must decide on the best food, enclosure, enrichment and exercise, medicine and procedures to give the animal the best chance to become healthy enough for release back to the wild.

Some wild patients stay at TWC for a day or two, while others need several months of care, or even longer! Whether their rehabilitation journey is short or long, the ultimate goal is to return each animal back to their home in the wild, healthy and free once again.

WILDLIFE EDUCATION PROGRAM

TWC provides engaging curriculum-linked presentations for all ages—perfect for classrooms, scouting and guiding groups, or other clubs or community organizations. Programming is available in various formats, including in-class, outdoors or virtually, and supports the learning objectives outlined in this guide.

Our Education Program helps build a healthy community for people and wildlife. Using real-life stories, thought-provoking activities and our live wild animal ambassadors, our presentations will inspire students to learn more about the animals they see every day, raise awareness of the urban ecosystem, and promote understanding and compassion towards the wild animals we call our neighbours.

For complimentary resources to enhance learning about wildlife rehabilitation and the threats faced by our wild neighbours we recommend:

Animal Hospital:

Rescuing Urban Wildlife
by Julia Coey **Book**
(available at TWC or through
online book retailers)



Toronto Wildlife Centre

www.torontowildlifecentre.com

Humane Society of the United States

www.humanesociety.org/resource/wildlife-management-solutions

FLAP Canada

www.flap.org

Coyote Watch Canada

www.coyotewatchcanada.com

Nature Canada - Cats and Birds

www.catsandbirds.ca

The Cornell Lab - All About Birds

www.allaboutbirds.org

Species at Risk in Ontario

www.ontario.ca/page/species-risk-ontario

Wildlife in the City

www.toronto.ca/community-people/animals-pets/wildlife-in-the-city/

National Wildlife Rehabilitators Association

www.nwrawildlife.org

TIP!

Follow **#BackyardBiodiversity** – an education campaign in partnership with LEAF (Local Enhancement and Appreciation of Forests) and Ontario Power Generation to raise awareness of our wild neighbours!

f (@torontowildlifecentre)

ig (@torontowildlifecentre)

tw (@TWC_Wildlife)



Wild animal ambassadors Hotdog – the big and friendly snapping turtle – and Ziggy the garter snake, help students appreciate reptiles and raise awareness of the threats they face!



To book a presentation, discuss topics or inquire about prices, please visit our website at torontowildlifecentre.com or contact us at 416-631-0662 or education@torontowildlifecentre.com.

WHO LIVES IN A CITY?



Remarkable Residents

Historically, peregrine falcons built nests on towering cliffs; now in urban areas, they use high-rise buildings as a substitute! Since they are a species of special concern, volunteers from the [Canadian Peregrine Foundation](#) patrol the skies every spring for fledglings taking their first flight in busy downtown Toronto. They rescue them if they collide with one of the many dangerous windows, or if they face other dangers.

When people think about “nature”, they often imagine forests, meadows and lakes – vast spaces that exist outside of urban areas. But nature is all around us! From ravines to hydro and rail corridors, to backyards, to parks – wild animals live in a wide variety of places – even around busy city streets or on the top of high-rise buildings!

According to the [Toronto Biodiversity Strategy](#), the Greater Toronto Area is home (seasonally or year-round) to over 1200 species, including:

- 404 SPECIES OF BIRDS**
- 38 SPECIES OF MAMMALS**
- 24 SPECIES OF REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS**
- 110 SPECIES OF BUTTERFLIES**
- 92 SPECIES OF FISH**
- 364 SPECIES OF BEES**
- 200 SPECIES OF SPIDERS**

This guide focuses on the mammal, avian and reptile species that are often admitted to TWC for care as a result of human activities.



It's not uncommon to see (or hear!) foxes and coyotes passing through parks, hydro corridors, backyards and neighbourhood streets. These timid and elusive species are vital to a healthy urban ecosystem and play a big role in rodent control. However, when humans leave food out, store trash improperly, or hand-feed these animals, problems can arise.

Red-necked grebes carry their babies on their backs for heat and protection! Grebes and other water birds are at risk of fishing line and hooks improperly discarded in bodies of water that can entangle them and become embedded.



Outside of cities, big brown bats roost in deciduous forests. But urban and suburban areas offer suitable living spaces too – such as under bridges, inside building walls and man-made bat houses. Often feared, these animals are fascinating and beneficial – a single bat can eat thousands of insects, including mosquitoes, in one night!



Blanding's turtles, a threatened species in Ontario, can be found in wetlands and shallow lakes. The biggest threats faced by turtles are loss of habitat, crossing busy roads, and illegal collection for the pet trade; in fact, all 8 species of turtles in Ontario are listed as species at risk!

These wild species, and many others, live in and around urban and suburban areas. But considering the dangers – why do they stay? It is important to remember that wild animals have always been here – cities have built up around them and they will continue to use available resources.

Some species have adapted more quickly to our way of life (think about raccoons and squirrels!), while others have a more difficult time due to particular habitat or dietary needs. Even species whose populations are stable face threats due to human activity and infrastructure. Learning what is dangerous for wildlife and making life safer for them is vital for conservation and protecting biodiversity!

Student Activities:

Grades 1 to 3

- ▶ **Making Observations:**
Who Lives in my Neighbourhood?
- ▶ **Making Connections:**
Where is my Home?

Grades 4 to 6

- ▶ **Adapting to City Life***

Grades 7 to 8

- ▶ **Wildlife Town Hall**



*This activity and many more can be found on our website at www.torontowildlifecentre.com/kids-go-wild/



MAKING OBSERVATIONS: WHO LIVES IN MY NEIGHBOURHOOD?

Grades 1 to 3 - Individual, small group

Wildlife live all around us! In cities, wild animals are an important part of our urban ecosystem! Look out your window or take a walk to observe the wild animals that make their home in your neighbourhood! Write down or draw what you see or hear.

NAME: _____ **SEASON AND WEATHER:** _____

DATE: _____ **TIME:** _____

| Type of animal or species | Did you see it? Hear it? Find evidence that it was there? | Where was it? | What was it doing? Why do you think it was there? |
|---|---|--|--|
|  | <p>I saw it.</p> |  | <p>Eating a worm. It is safer in the tree.</p> |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |

Why do you think these animals live in or visit your neighbourhood?

Did you find few or no animals at all? Are there any reasons why wild animals might not come here?

How would it be different if you did this activity during a different season, or time of day?

Imagine you are a wild animal – can you think of something in your neighbourhood that could be dangerous for you?

MAKING CONNECTIONS: WHERE IS MY HOME?

Grades 1 to 2 - Individual

Wild animals live in many different places - even in cities! Draw or colour the habitat (the area where an animal lives) around each of these wild animals. Can you think of some reasons why they live there?

MALLARD



RACCOON



RED FOX



BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE



PAINTED TURTLE



EASTERN GRAY SQUIRREL



WILDLIFE TOWN HALL

Grades 7 to 8 - Large group/class

Who belongs in a city? That question will be addressed as students debate the various viewpoints humans have of living close to wildlife in urban and suburban areas.

OBJECTIVES:

- ▶ Understand the value of a variety of species within the urban ecosystem and the implications of removing any given species
- ▶ Address prejudices, myths and misconceptions about wildlife, especially maligned species (e.g. coyotes, snakes, bats)
- ▶ Identify reliable sources to learn about wildlife and the natural behaviour of wild species
- ▶ Find solutions to help people peacefully coexist with neighbourhood wildlife

INTRODUCTION TO ACTIVITY

The teacher will lead a conversation about the diversity of wild species that live in urban and suburban areas. They can ask students which wild animals they have seen or heard in their neighbourhood and their views on those species – this can be based on personal beliefs, or what they have seen in the media. It may be of benefit to introduce participants to the community meeting process.

OVERVIEW OF ACTIVITY

This activity should be undertaken in the style of a town hall meeting where members of the public provide a deputation (verbal presentation) to the decision-makers of a community (e.g. city councillors). In this activity, the “wild animals” will argue their case regarding why they are an integral part of the community. The “decision-makers” will discuss any concerns that the human community may have regarding that species.

PROCESS OF ACTIVITY

Students select whether they would like to be a “wild animal” or a “decision-maker”. The class should be evenly split between the two roles.

Wild animals: At least 2 species from Column A and at least 2 species from Column B should be selected with as many species as possible represented. One person or a small group (depending on class size) will research on behalf of one species (e.g. 2-3 students may represent coyote, while 2-3 other students may represent pigeon, etc.). Their research should focus on any complaints from people against their species, the benefits of their species (particularly within an urban environment) and their natural history (e.g. are they active during the day or at night? What do they eat? etc.). They can also investigate the problems humans are causing for their species. During their preparation, they should be able to outline why their species belongs in the city/suburbs and defend any misconceptions about their species brought up by the community/decision-makers.

Decision-makers: These are the people who will listen to the points brought forward by the wild animals and determine if they should live in a city or live elsewhere. These students should research common complaints from people against the selected species (e.g. pigeons poop on everything, coyotes might attack people, etc.) to debate with each species.

| Wild Species A | Wild Species B |
|---|--|
| Eastern coyote Red fox Raccoon Striped skunk Norway rat Rock pigeon Garter snake Big brown bat | Songbirds (e.g. robin, sparrow, goldfinch, etc.) Eastern gray squirrel Mallard Eastern cottontail Saw-whet owl Mute swan Peregrine falcon White-tailed deer |

To gain a deeper understanding of commonly held beliefs (true or untrue) about a species, they may opt to provide a poll or questionnaire to their peers asking for their views and compile answers as feedback from their community, or research news coverage of their species.

During the community meeting, the wild animals should debunk any common myths and

misconceptions that are brought up about their species. After each species argues their case, the decision-makers convene and decide if that species should stay in the city or if they should live elsewhere. When researching, it may be of benefit to split the decision-makers up into species teams to focus on one species.

POST ACTIVITY

Once it has been determined which species will stay and which should go, the class will reconvene for a discussion. Questions may include (depending on the outcome):

- ▶ Why did the decision-makers determine that certain species should leave the city? Was it a good decision? Were they missing any details to make a more informed decision? What may have changed their mind? Was their decision based on feelings or facts?
- ▶ What are the negative consequences of removing a particular species from the city?
- ▶ Were more animals from Column B allowed to stay? Why?
- ▶ Where do our ideas and attitudes toward wildlife come from? Are they correct? Did you learn anything new from your research?
- ▶ If all wild animals were permitted to stay in the city, why was that the case? If they belong in cities, what can people do to help them?

TIP!

Visit www.torontowildlifecentre.com/kids-go-wild/ to find supporting materials for educators for this activity including species fact sheets and information on common myths and misconceptions about wild animals.

RECOMMENDED LINKS FOR STUDENT RESEARCH:

- ▶ www.torontowildlifecentre.com/wildlife-emergency-rescue-hotline/conflicts-with-wildlife/
- ▶ www.humanesociety.org/resource/wildlife-management-solutions
- ▶ www.coyotewatchcanada.com/site/coexisting-with-coyotes
- ▶ www.toronto.ca/ext/digital_comm/mls/coyotes-in-the-urban-landscape/story_html5.html
- ▶ www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/
- ▶ www.batcon.org/about-bats/bat-profiles/
- ▶ www.torontozoo.com/adoptapond/speciesguides

THREATS FACING URBAN WILDLIFE

Habitat loss and climate change are having a negative impact on wild species globally. However, wildlife face additional challenges just from living in close proximity to people. Wild animals must contend with dangerous human activities and infrastructure, especially in busy cities and suburbs where more people – and dangers – are present.



This guide provides an overview of a few of the most common threats. For those not covered here, visit www.torontowildlifecentre.com/kids-go-wild/ for additional resources and activities.

Windows and glass

Between 16 and 42 million birds die every year in Canada because of window strikes. Although high-rise buildings pose a big problem for birds during migration, the vast majority of window strikes occur on residential houses and low-rise buildings – like houses, workplaces and schools. See more on page 16.



Garbage

From a red-necked grebe entangled in fishing line and hooks, to a raccoon with a peanut butter jar stuck on their head, to a barred owl hanging from a tree branch snared by kite string, these are just a few of the many wild animals that pay the price when people dispose of garbage irresponsibly. See more on page 26.

Free-roaming outdoor cats

It is estimated that cats kill between 100 million and 350 million birds per year in Canada – 38% of those by pet cats, and the rest by feral cats. Many other animals are also injured or killed, including field mice, baby cottontails, baby squirrels and chipmunks. Free-roaming cats are at risk too – from car strikes, disease,

fighting with other cats and wild animals, and even human cruelty. Keeping cats indoors, in an enclosure outdoors, or on leash, makes life safer for both birds and cats. See more on page 22.

Fear and stigma

Some species tend to raise fear in people – from snakes, to foxes and coyotes, to bats – myths and misconceptions are abundant and can lead to the persecution of these animals and others. Through learning their natural behaviours and addressing inaccurate views about them, peaceful coexistence can be achieved.

Building design

In cities, wild species will make use of what is available to them for denning and nesting. Buildings are designed to meet the needs and desires of humans, but little thought goes into the impact they have on wildlife. From a nesting duck that becomes trapped with her babies on a 10th floor apartment terrace, to migratory birds colliding with windows, to raccoons denning in a residential chimney – finding solutions to common problems keeps wildlife safe and reduces conflicts with people.

Habituating wildlife

It can be fascinating to see wildlife up close, but too often human actions cause wildlife to lose their “wild”.

Activities like feeding wild animals, raising wild babies, and keeping wildlife as pets causes our wild neighbours to habituate to humans, with serious consequences. See more on page 30.

Trapping and relocating

Every spring, wild animals look for appropriate den and nest sites to raise their young – attics, garages, decks and sheds are very appealing to wildlife looking for shelter. Trapping and relocating animals found in these locations is common, and sadly, they are often mothers with young nearby. As a result, thousands of wild babies are left orphaned each spring and summer. Moving wild animals to a different area at any time of year is life-threatening, as they struggle to survive in a new territory with established animals, and search for new sources of food and shelter.

Roads

In Canada, vehicles kill approximately 14 million birds every year, along with over 30,000 large mammals and unquantifiable millions of small mammals (the vast majority of which are unreported). It is estimated that reptiles and amphibians make up 94% of total wildlife road mortalities – a dire statistic given that all 8 of Ontario’s turtle species are listed as at risk.



Oil

Most people are aware of the ecological effects of large crude oil spills that gain media attention. However, even small amounts of these oils or others (e.g. mineral, cooking, etc.) in waterways, or even puddles, can negatively affect wildlife. Oiled wild animals will groom or preen in an attempt to remove the substance, potentially poisoning themselves. Oil also damages feathers critical for waterproofing to keep birds dry and warm. Birds admitted to TWC require multiple baths to remove oily substances.



Poison

Cities attract mice and rats that naturally take advantage of the shelter and food available. Poison has long been utilized to reduce rodent populations, which can also affect predatory species - like hawks - that rely on rodents for food. Poisoned prey are much easier to catch, however, the poison is still active in the rodent after it is eaten, exposing non-target wildlife to serious illness, or even a fatal end. Removing attractants and wildlife-proofing buildings are a better approach to dealing with unwanted rodents. Other materials used by people (e.g. lead shot and sinkers, oil) that are left in the environment also have the potential to poison a wide variety of wildlife.

WHY SHOULD WE PROTECT AND PRESERVE LOCAL WILDLIFE?

- ▶ Wildlife populations are in decline - as of 2021, 41 bird, 16 mammal, and 23 reptile species are on the Species at Risk Ontario list. Across species, population numbers are going down.
- ▶ Humans are part of nature, but our activities and development have made it difficult for many wild animals to survive - without our help, many species will not make it.
- ▶ It is normal to see wildlife in cities and suburbs - wild animals are part of our communities!
- ▶ Wildlife sightings and interactions are beneficial for our mental health (how we think, feel, and act) and help us relate to other living things.
- ▶ Biodiversity is fundamental to a healthy urban ecosystem - every species has a role to play, even in cities!
- ▶ Like humans, wild animals need natural sources of food and water; they need shelter, protection from predators and a safe place to raise their young. Just like people, they experience pain and fear. Through building empathy and knowledge, we can learn to peacefully coexist with our wild neighbours - for their benefit as well as ours!

Student Activities:

Grades 2 to 6

- ▶ Wildlife in the City Diorama

Grades 3 to 8

- ▶ Spring Migration - A Difficult Journey for Birds!*



*This activity and many more can be found on our website at www.torontowildlifecentre.com/kids-go-wild/

WILDLIFE IN THE CITY DIORAMA

Grades 2 to 6 - Individual, small group

In this activity, students create a diorama that displays wild animals in a location where people live, work or play. Examples include a busy downtown area, a school, a park or a neighbourhood. It should demonstrate the challenges faced by urban wild animals and present ways to mitigate harm.

WHAT YOU NEED:

- ▶ Box (shoebox size or larger), or other empty container with space to fill (get creative!)
- ▶ Glue and scissors
- ▶ Nature/wildlife magazines, clip art or pictures of wild animals (or DIY)
- ▶ Craft supplies (optional – e.g. wildlife stickers, toys like lego animals, felt, bobbles, etc.)
- ▶ Upcycled materials (optional – e.g. toilet paper rolls, lids, bottle caps, packaging, etc.)
- ▶ Construction paper
- ▶ Paint, markers or crayons

INSTRUCTIONS:

- ▶ Using this guide, educators should facilitate a conversation with students about the most common threats faced by wildlife. It may be necessary to discuss the natural behaviours and basic needs of wildlife for younger students – e.g. water, food, shelter, nesting/denning sites.
- ▶ Students should choose a wild animal(s) to focus on and consider:
 - What does the animal eat? Where can the animal find food and water?
 - What kind of shelter does it need? Where can it find this in a city?
 - What are the dangers in their selected setting (e.g. downtown, house, park) and what difficulties will the animal have getting to necessities?
 - Older students can do further research into the natural behaviours of the wild animal (e.g. When are they active? Where do they nest/den? How do they care for babies?) – How does this affect the diorama?
 - Is there anything people can do to make the situation safer for wildlife?



This diorama was made with a delivery food box and features components of a city safe for wildlife including:

- High-rise buildings with lights out at night to avoid bird strikes
- Bird-friendly visual markers on windows
- Pet cats indoors to avoid predation on wildlife
- Slowing down on roads to avoid car strikes on wildlife
- Picking up garbage to keep habitats clean and safe for wildlife
- Planting native trees, shrubs and native plants

TIP!

Youtube has many videos on how to make both simple and complex dioramas!

- ▶ It is recommended to pose at least one threat and solution. Older students may incorporate a number of threats and solutions. Some examples include:
 - **A pet cat outside** (threat) near an American robin (wild animal), but on a leash with its owner beside it (solution)
 - **A blue jay** (wild animal) flying past a big window of a house (threat) that has bird-safe markers on the outside of the window to break up the reflection (solution)
 - **A snapping turtle** (wild animal) near a highway (threat) that has “slow down for turtles” signs posted and a culvert under the road for turtles to crawl through (solution)



HELPING SICK, INJURED AND ORPHANED WILDLIFE

Children regularly find wild animals that are sick, injured or potentially orphaned. The following provides some basic instruction for adults, teachers and education facilitators regarding what to do when you, or a student or child participant, comes across a wild animal that needs help.

Please note that species and situation-specific information and guidance can be found on our website at www.torontowildlifecentre.com. It is very important that the animal(s) stay with a contact person that is familiar with the situation and knows where the animal was originally found. Often the animal has already been interfered with somehow (e.g. removed from a nest, passed to several friends, etc.). However, the more interventions that occur and the more people the animal is passed along to, the more difficult it can be for wildlife rehabilitators to get accurate information to best help the animal.

Wild Babies

- ▶ **If the baby or babies are still in the nest/den and appear healthy,** leave them there. If you are concerned that something may be wrong, check our website or contact your local wildlife rehabilitator for advice before taking any action.
- ▶ **If the baby or babies are out of the nest/den and do not have a parent nearby, or if they are clearly injured (e.g. bleeding):**

- Contain them in a box with a heat source (a bottle of hot water wrapped in a tea towel, an electric heating pad set to low under half of the box, or a sock filled with rice and microwaved for 1 minute) – direct heat is critical for keeping wild babies alive, even on a warm day.
 - Put them in a dark and quiet place away from people, and do not provide food or water (serious health issues can arise if wild babies are given the wrong type of food or if the food is administered incorrectly).
 - If the baby appears healthy, check our website to assess if reuniting with a parent is an option. If reuniting is not an option, or is unsuccessful, contact your local wildlife rehabilitator.
- ▶ **If the animal(s) have been moved from their original location, contain them in a box and follow the instructions above; do your best to find out:**
- The exact location where the animal was found
 - What was happening when it was found (e.g. was the baby found out in the open or in a nest? Did the child see an adult animal of the

same species nearby? How was the animal behaving?)

- If the baby appears healthy, check our website for reuniting instructions
- If the baby appears sick, injured, or lethargic, or you don't know where they were originally found, contact your local wildlife rehabilitator

Adult Wildlife

- ▶ **Children should be advised** not to pick up or handle wildlife of any age as it causes stress to the animal; older babies and adult wildlife may bite to protect themselves.
- ▶ **If the animal appears healthy**, in most cases, tolerance is recommended – for advice on dealing with animals that are perceived as a nuisance or a threat, please visit our website for more information.
- ▶ **If the animal appears sick or injured**, it will need help from a wildlife rehabilitator. As all wildlife rehabilitation centres are charities working with limited resources, they may not provide pick-up services. It is likely that you will have to contain and transport the animal. Containment

DID YOU KNOW?

Most wild species will continue to care for their babies even if they have been touched by a human. Reuniting wild babies with parents when possible is always the best option!



Every year, thousands of wild babies become separated from their parent. Attempting to reunite them (if they are healthy) is recommended for most species, like these Eastern gray squirrels, as a first step. For some species, like Canada geese, it is unlikely that a mother will come back for them and they must be taken to a wildlife rehabilitator immediately. Check TWC's website for species-specific information.

instructions for different species can be found on TWC's website. For situations that are too difficult or dangerous for members of the public to handle, contact your local wildlife rehabilitator for advice. TWC may be able to provide wildlife rescue depending on the species, situation and location.



INSTRUCTIONS on how to help a wide range of species can be found on TWC's website!

Did you know? Eastern cottontail rabbits make their nests in shallow divets in the ground covered only by fur and grass. The mother leaves the babies alone inside and only comes back to feed them, typically around dawn and dusk, to avoid attracting predators to her young. People often remove babies from these nests mistakenly believing that the babies are orphaned. A "string test" can help determine if babies really do need help – directions are available on TWC's website.



Contact Toronto Wildlife Centre:

(416) 631-0662 | www.torontowildlifecentre.com

Find another wildlife rehabilitator in Ontario:

www.ontario.ca/page/find-wildlife-rehabilitator

WINDOWS AND WILDLIFE

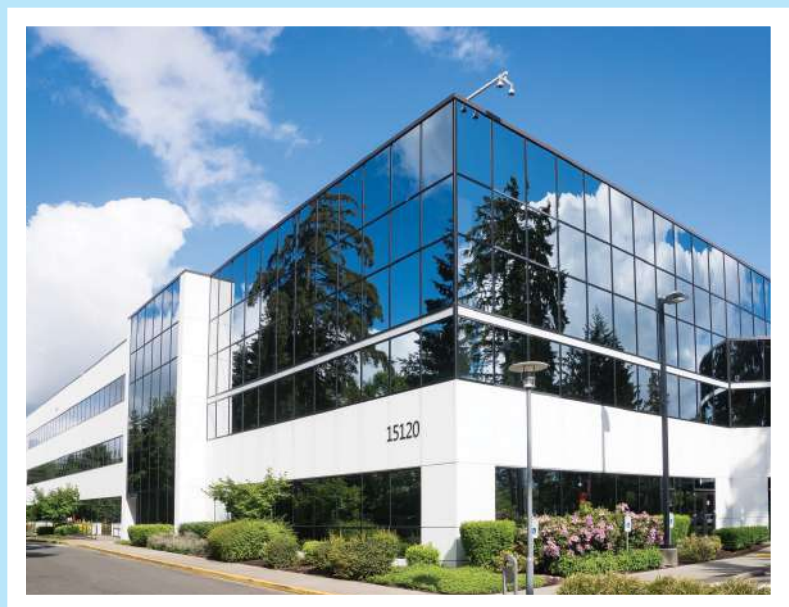


Birds are in trouble. Recent research has shown that bird populations have dropped by nearly 3 billion across North America since 1970 – a 29% decline, and these are conservative estimates. Aside from their inherent right to exist, birds are important in controlling insect populations, and for seed dispersal and pollination; if their populations continue to fall, it would have far-reaching implications on the health of ecosystems.

It is estimated that between 16 and 42 million birds die every year in Canada because of window strikes. While high-rise buildings pose a big problem during migration, the vast majority of window strikes occur on residential and low-rise buildings – like homes, work places, and schools. Taking action to mitigate the dangers windows and other glass structures pose to birds is a critical step in protecting wild bird populations. Even more, everyone can take part in making small changes that will lead to big results!

Daytime Threats

Reflections of clouds, trees and shrubs can be confusing to birds because they are attracted to the reflection of a landscape that is actually behind them. Indoor plants situated near windows can also be deceiving. These illusions cause birds to fly straight into windows, often striking hard. Windows that adjoin in a corner or windows on two parallel walls are also dangerous as birds will try to fly through them to the other side. Birds can see through glass and what is reflected on glass, but they cannot see the glass itself.



Nighttime Threats

At night, artificial light from buildings and cityscapes put birds at risk. Many birds migrate at night, using light from the moon, the stars, and the setting sun to navigate. The bright lights of urban areas confuse birds and lead them off-course.

Foggy or rainy nights are perilous because birds fly at lower altitudes when cloud cover is low and can become disoriented by city lights. The lights lead them into downtown mazes, where they often collide with buildings.

Glass and Wildlife Don't Mix



Glass buildings and railings can be confusing for birds like this red-tailed hawk (left) that get trapped on glass balconies, unable to figure out how to escape. An Eastern screech owl (right) receives treatment for head trauma at TWC after colliding with a high-rise building in a downtown area.



Each spring and fall, millions of migratory birds have their journey cut short when they collide with a window or glass structure. An American woodcock receives eye drops to treat eye damage (top). A black-and-white warbler (bottom) is given medicine to treat head trauma - one of many injuries suffered by window strike victims.

DID YOU KNOW?

Toronto Wildlife Centre admits up to 1,000 birds or more every year because of window strikes! Our goal is to provide medical and rehabilitative care and return them to the wild as soon as possible. But even with treatment, many do not survive. Making windows and glass surfaces safer for birds is the best way to keep them healthy and flying free.



Windows are also a threat to other species – like this migratory hoary bat that received treatment at TWC. Studies have shown that bats can mistake smooth, vertical surfaces (like glass) as clear flight paths and collide with them.

Top Tips to Make Windows Bird-Safe

- ▶ **Place visual markers on the outside of glass and windows** – birds will see a barrier and avoid flying into it. Visual markers should fill the entire surface and be placed closely together, ideally no more than 5 cm (2 inches) apart.
- ▶ **Place bird feeders less than 1 metre (3 feet) from windows** – the closer the better, as birds will not build up enough speed to hurt themselves.
- ▶ **Place house plants away from windows**, rather than directly beside them.
- ▶ **Leave window screens in** – they break up the reflection from the glass.
- ▶ **Clean your windows less often** – shiny windows are more reflective and therefore more dangerous to birds.

There are many products available to help make your windows safer for birds. Visit www.birdsafe.ca to see available options. Or Do-It-Yourself by designing your own pattern on your windows using paint, soap or beads!



To learn more, visit our friends at Fatal Light Awareness Program: www.flap.org

Student Activities:

Grades 1 to 6

- ▶ Windows Safe for Birds

Grades 2 to 6

- ▶ Migration Dice Game*

Grades 3 to 8

- ▶ Audit - Is my School Bird-Safe?



*This activity and many more can be found on our website at www.torontowildlifecentre.com/kids-go-wild/

AUDIT – IS MY SCHOOL BIRD-SAFE?

Grades 3 to 8 – Individual, small group or class

Begin this activity by drawing an overhead view of your school and labelling each side as side #1, side #2, etc. (**TIP:** Google maps can provide an overhead view of your school to help with this!). Next, take a walk and visit each side of the school where windows are located. Find a good spot where you can see the entire outside wall at one time. Answer all questions for **Side #1** before moving to **Side #2** and so on.

1 Have you, or someone else, ever found a bird or heard a bird that hit a window at your school?

Side #1 Side #2 Side #3 Side #4 Side #5 Side #6

YES NO YES NO YES NO YES NO YES NO YES NO

2 Can you see a reflection (e.g. trees, clouds, gardens) in the windows (even a little bit)?

Side #1 Side #2 Side #3 Side #4 Side #5 Side #6

YES NO YES NO YES NO YES NO YES NO YES NO

3 Is there a birdfeeder or birdbath more than 50 cm from any of the windows?

Side #1 Side #2 Side #3 Side #4 Side #5 Side #6

YES NO YES NO YES NO YES NO YES NO YES NO

4 Can you see indoor plants inside the school through any of the windows?

Side #1 Side #2 Side #3 Side #4 Side #5 Side #6

YES NO YES NO YES NO YES NO YES NO YES NO

5 Can you see through any windows to another side of your school (e.g. from a window on one wall to a window on another wall)?

Side #1 Side #2 Side #3 Side #4 Side #5 Side #6

YES NO YES NO YES NO YES NO YES NO YES NO

6 Are there any other glass structures that pose a danger? (E.g. glass railings, balconies, bus stops)

Side #1 Side #2 Side #3 Side #4 Side #5 Side #6

YES NO YES NO YES NO YES NO YES NO YES NO

Total YES answers:

Side #1 Side #2 Side #3 Side #4 Side #5 Side #6

If any side has 1 or more YES answers, there are windows present that could be a danger to birds.
Next, organize the sides of your school from most dangerous to least dangerous:

MOST DANGEROUS

LEAST DANGEROUS

Side # _____ Side # _____ Side # _____ Side _____ Side # _____ Side # _____

Starting with the most dangerous sides, using the planning sheet below to take action!

PLANNING SHEET - BIRD-SAFE WINDOWS

Remember to begin with the most dangerous side and work your way toward solving problems on all sides of your school! To help find solutions, visit **www.flap.org**

Side # _____

Main Problem(s): _____

Solution: _____

Side # _____

Main Problem(s): _____

Solution: _____

Side # _____

Main Problem(s): _____

Solution: _____

HELP BIRDS EVERYWHERE!

Use this sheet to determine if your house, apartment, condominium, or community centre is safe for birds too!

WINDOWS SAFE FOR BIRDS

Grades 1 to grade 6 – Individual, small group

Birds cannot see glass. Placing visual markers on the outside of windows helps to break up the reflection of the surrounding sky, clouds, trees and plants, reducing the chance that a bird will fly into the window and become injured!

Make Your Own Window Decals

What you will need (per student):

- ▶ Small cup (egg carton sections work well)
- ▶ 2 tbsp white/school glue
- ▶ Dish soap
- ▶ Paintbrush
- ▶ Plastic sheet (paper protector, sandwich bag)
- ▶ Stencils (available at www.torontowildlifecentre.com/kids-go-wild/) or pictures from magazines
- ▶ Water-based or permanent marker

Directions

- ▶ Add about 2 tablespoons of glue to the cup
- ▶ Add 2-3 drops of dish soap
- ▶ Use paint brush to mix well
- ▶ Place stencil/picture underneath plastic surface
- ▶ Use paint brush to apply glue to the edges of images; don't leave holes or streaky spots
- ▶ Glue should not be too thick but solid (a second coat may be required)
- ▶ Dry for at least 2 hours (preferably overnight)
- ▶ When dry, decals should not be sticky at all
- ▶ Using markers, colour decals in whatever design you choose (don't colour too hard or you will rip the surface)
- ▶ Gently peel off decals and keep them flat in your hand so that they don't curl
- ▶ Place on the outside of your window
- ▶ The more decals the better to keep birds safe – covering as much open space on the window as possible is best!



How to video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ayeGJQfmPgQ>

TIP!

If clings are not sticking, dampen the window slightly before applying the decal.



*Activity adapted from Audobon New York

CATS AND WILDLIFE



Many of us share our lives with cat companions and view them as a member of the family. But allowing them to roam free outdoors can put them in danger – and wild animals too.

Domestication of cats began in the Near East approximately 12,000 years ago. Humans brought cats to North America only a few hundred years ago – they are not part of our natural ecosystem. Native wildlife has not adapted alongside them and has little defence against them; the introduction of domestic cats has been devastating to native bird populations.

Environment Canada research estimates that humans are responsible for the deaths of 130 to 433 million birds each year (this number does not include the impacts of climate change or habitat loss). Feral and free-roaming pet cats cause approximately 75% of those deaths. Many other small species are frequently injured or killed by cats too, including field mice, snakes, baby cottontail rabbits, baby squirrels, and chipmunks.

Outdoor cats face many threats too! They are at risk of being hit by cars, catching diseases, injury from fights with wildlife and other cats, and even cruelty from humans. To keep cats and wildlife safe, it is best to keep them indoors, unless supervised on a leash or in an enclosure.

Wildlife rehabilitators regularly admit wild animals that have been attacked by a cat (hundreds per year



An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure! There are many ways to keep a pet cat happy (and birds safe!) without letting them roam free outdoors. Leash training and outdoor cat enclosures can provide them with fresh air; indoors, plenty of toys and climbing/scratching stations provide good enrichment.



at TWC), but that is only a small percentage of the animals that need help. Some victims of cat attacks are never found (studies show that cats only bring home 1 out of every 4 of their victims), and most have injuries that are so severe that they cannot be saved, even with medical treatment.

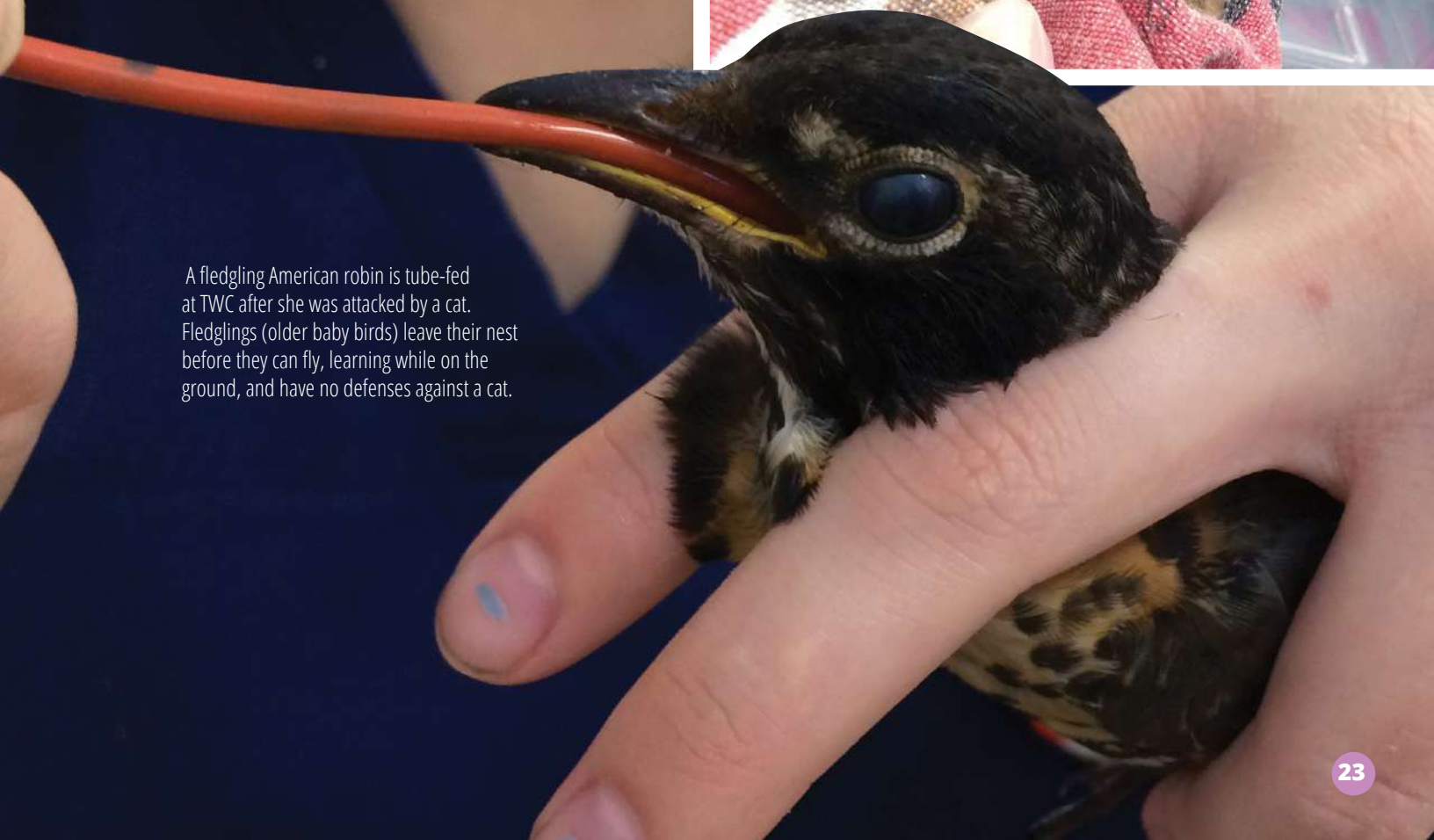
A scarlet tanager attacked by a cat receives a bandage change at TWC. Wild animals that have been in contact with a cat always need medical attention; bites and scratches require immediate antibiotics due to the high amount of bacteria in the mouth of a cat. Even with treatment, most will not survive.



Bats occasionally roost on outdoor walls – this one was found on a balcony, cornered by a cat, suffering from puncture wounds to the wing. Even in enclosed spaces, it is best to check for wild animals prior to letting a cat enter.



A fledgling American robin is tube-fed at TWC after she was attacked by a cat. Fledglings (older baby birds) leave their nest before they can fly, learning while on the ground, and have no defenses against a cat.





A deer mouse receives stitches at TWC – surgeries are life-saving procedures for many wild patients attacked by a cat.



This baby cottontail rabbit underwent surgery at TWC to amputate a toe badly damaged after a cat attack. Cottontail nests are shallow holes in the ground and babies are not very mobile until about 3 weeks of age. They are unable to escape predation by a cat.

Student Activities:

Grades 1 to 2

- ▶ Making Comparisons: The Lives of Cats and Birds*

Grades 2 to 6

- ▶ Who Let the Cats Out?*

Grades 4 to 8

- ▶ Paws for Wildlife Campaign



KEEP CATS SAFE AND SAVE BIRD LIVES is a coalition of individuals and organizations concerned about the well-being of cats and birds. Research and resources on the issue as well as in-depth curriculum-linked lesson plans can be found at www.catsandbirds.ca.

Grades 4 to 6: <https://catsandbirds.ca/educators-grades-4-to-6/>

Grades 7 to 9: <https://catsandbirds.ca/educators-grades-7-to-9/>



*This activity and many more can be found on our website at www.torontowildlifecentre.com/kids-go-wild/

PAWS FOR WILDLIFE CAMPAIGN

Grades 1 to 8 – Large group, class, school

This activity is an education campaign meant to raise awareness at schools, community centres, day camps, places of worship, and so on, to help people learn about keeping cats and birds (and other wildlife) safe.

How the campaign works:

- ▶ Teachers/educators/facilitators can use the information provided in this guide, as well as resources available on www.catsandbirds.ca to help students understand the impact of free-roaming cats on wildlife, as well as the dangers to cats themselves.
- ▶ Print and cut out paper paws (template available at www.torontowildlifecentre.com/kids-go-wild/).
- ▶ Ask students to think of one or more ways they can take action to help keep cats and wildlife safe. They should write down or draw the action on the paw (one action per paw).

Examples include:

- Keeping pet cats indoors or on a leash outdoors
 - Building an outdoor enclosure for a pet cat
 - Sharing a social media post about the issue
 - Creating a poster about the issue to put up in their neighbourhood
 - Informing family and neighbours about the dangers posed to outdoor cats
 - Making homemade toys to keep cats entertained indoors
 - And more – get creative!
- ▶ As a class, or small group, create a poster that describes the purpose of the campaign
 - ▶ Pick a location to display the poster and paws, such as school hallways, as a community centre display, at a local pet store, etc. The more paws the better!
 - ▶ **Optional** – For every 10 paws, post a picture of a wild bird kept safe because of these actions!
 - ▶ **Optional** – Use the paws as a fundraising tool! Use the same guidelines as above but also encourage students/participants to purchase the paws (e.g. 50 cents each); funds raised can be donated to a local animal shelter that helps cats or wildlife!



GARBAGE AND WILDLIFE



A Canada goose sits on her nest – made entirely out of garbage. A discarded coffee cup hangs loosely on her neck, highlighting the impact of human trash on wildlife.

People make a lot of garbage – from the food we eat, to the clothes we wear, to building materials, to entertainment products – almost everything we purchase comes wrapped in a package. Items we use eventually break or become obsolete, and become trash too. Many products are even designed for single-use and then disposal. Very few of these materials are biodegradable, remaining in our environment where they can cause problems for years to come.

Apart from being unsightly and damaging to the environment, garbage also takes a big toll on our wild neighbours. TWC admits hundreds of wild animals impacted by trash each year for various reasons including:

- ▶ body parts stuck in food containers like jars and cans – the smell of remnants of food attracts animals who then get their limbs or head caught inside; without help, they can suffocate or starve;
- ▶ entanglement in string, netting, fishing line and hooks, kite string or other similar materials that make them unable to fly, swim, run or eat properly;
- ▶ becoming trapped in foreign objects such as metal or plastic rings, plastic bags, cups, and more, typically around the beak/snout, neck, waist or legs causing impairment, inability to eat, or suffocation;
- ▶ ingesting toxic materials such as cleaning liquids, oils, particles of lead and small pieces of plastic;
- ▶ cuts or other injuries due to coming into contact with sharp glass or metal; and
- ▶ injuries due to indirect impacts of garbage – such as a bird hit by a car as a result of flying too close to a road to eat an improperly discarded piece of fruit.



TWC's Rescue team captured this raccoon after a member of the public reported seeing her for several days with a food jar stuck on her head.



A fishing hook is embedded in the beak of a mute swan (above); fishing line is tightly wrapped around the leg of a mallard (left). Dozens of water birds are admitted to TWC every year affected by improperly discarded fishing gear.



This striped skunk is trapped in a fence with several fast-food plastic dome lids stuck on his neck. When garbage is stuck on wild animals, it can impair their ability to get around safely.

Student Activities:

Grades 1 to 3

- ▶ Don't Trash my Neighbourhood*

Grades 1 to 4

- ▶ Public Awareness Poster

Grades 4 to 8

- ▶ Upcycled Art!

Trash Talk – How to Keep Wildlife Safe

Even though human overconsumption and waste is a big issue, there are simple steps that can be taken to make our part of the world cleaner and greener – and safer for wildlife.

- ▶ **DON'T LITTER – EVER!** Even biodegradable items, such as food, can attract wildlife. If these items are left in dangerous places such as on sidewalks or near roads, it could cause wild animals to become victims of car strikes as they attempt to reach the food. If you see litter, pick it up and dispose of it properly.
- ▶ **WASH OUT FOOD CONTAINERS** and screw lids back on tightly. Even when cans, jars and bottles are deposited in the appropriate garbage/recycling receptacle, there is always the chance that a wild animal seeking a meal will sniff it out if any food is left inside.
- ▶ **CUT UP ANY ITEMS** that form a rigid circle (e.g. pop and juice bottle rings, 6-pack plastic rings, plastic fast-food dome lids) as well as string or netting material. Crush metal beverage cans.
- ▶ **ENSURE COMPOSTING**, recycling and garbage bins have tight fitting lids.
- ▶ **TIE PLASTIC GARBAGE BAGS** up tightly, to reduce chance of overflow or spilling.
- ▶ **ENSURE TOXIC ITEMS** (e.g. medicines, chemical cleaners, batteries, etc.) are disposed of properly; many municipalities hold Community Environment Days where these items are collected.
- ▶ **NEVER CUT OR LEAVE** fishing line or hooks in the water, or kite string in trees. Avoid using string-like materials outdoors (e.g. fake cobweb decorations at Halloween).
- ▶ **NEVER RELEASE BALLOONS** or similar plastic products into the air or water.
- ▶ **RECYCLING** is important but reusing or repurposing products, and reducing our consumption, are critical to decreasing waste in our environment!



*This activity and many more can be found on our website at www.torontowildlifecentre.com/kids-go-wild/

PUBLIC AWARENESS POSTER

Grades 1 to 4 - Individual

Think of a wild animal that lives in your neighbourhood or in a city. Draw a picture of it beside a piece of garbage that could hurt it. Fill out the sentence to help others learn how to keep your animal safe from garbage. Put your poster up in your school or neighbourhood.

PLEASE DON'T TRASH MY NEIGHBOURHOOD!

To keep _____ safe, _____

E.g. To keep ducks safe, never cut fishing lines or leave fishing hooks or line in or near the water.

UPCYCLED ART!

Grades 4 to 8 – Individual, small group

“Upcycling” - or creative reuse - is the process of making an item that is no longer being used into something of value once again (e.g. cutting up an old t-shirt to use as cleaning rags, or decorating a soup bottle to use as a storage container).

Creating art from items that would otherwise go into the garbage is a great way to reduce waste and raise awareness of the negative impacts of trash – on both wild animals and the planet.

How to create upcycled art

1 Collect items that are no longer in use!

Take a walk along the beach and collect colourful glass and plastic waste that has washed ashore; or wash out and save shiny potato chip bags or granola bar wrappers instead of tossing them out; or cut out pictures from magazines before recycling them. There are so many beautiful materials perfect for making art that we throw away every day – take note of what is going into your garbage and recycling bins and save what you can use!

2 Design your art piece!

Art can be anything! Upcycle a takeout container into a decorative snack bowl, or create an upcycled sculpture of a wild animal affected by garbage, or create a piece of wall art entirely made from reused trash – anything goes!

3 Display your work of art!

To help others learn more about how waste is harming wildlife and our world, put your work on display – at your school, at a local community organization, on your front lawn, or share on social media!



PHOTO CREDIT: PLASTIC FREE BEACH TORONTO

TIP!

Find a photo, painting or sculpture that you like and recreate it using waste. Or design your own work of art! It doesn't matter if your creation is big or small – your efforts will make a huge difference for wildlife and the planet!

PEOPLE AND WILDLIFE



Humans affect wildlife indirectly in many ways – through our infrastructure (e.g. buildings with reflective windows, roads, etc.), and through our activities (e.g. letting pet cats roam free, being irresponsible with garbage, etc.). But people also impact wild animals directly – often unknowingly and with the best of intentions! To achieve peaceful coexistence between people and wildlife, it is important to understand the difference between human actions that are beneficial for our wild neighbours, and those that cause harm.

Trapping and Relocating Wildlife

When faced with a raccoon, skunk, squirrel or other wild animal living somewhere inappropriate (e.g. in an attic), people often opt to use a live trap to contain the animal and then relocate it elsewhere. While this may seem like the “humane” option, there are many reasons why this is harmful.

Relocated wildlife rarely survive when they are taken away from their home territory, facing challenges of finding new shelter, food sources, and competing with others from their species already residing in that region. Relocated

TWC’s hotline receives hundreds of calls each year from well-intentioned people who have unknowingly captured a mother and moved her away from her babies, leaving them orphaned. Without help, the babies will not make it – like these striped skunks that were raised at TWC.

mothers are separated from their babies (the person capturing the animal may not even realize babies are present) who will die without a mother to care for them.

In Ontario, it is illegal to relocate any wild animal more than 1km from where they were found; however, this distance still puts most species out of their home range and is too far to reunite separated families.



Wildlife rehabilitators design enclosures to meet the safety and enrichment needs of each species. Avoiding injuries and providing room for exploration, foraging and play is essential to raising wildlife, like this group of orphaned raccoons.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Formula for wild babies must replicate the food they would have received in the wild, and each species has specific dietary needs! Wildlife rehabilitators create specialized formulas to meet these needs (kitten and puppy formula are not good replacements).
- Wild babies should not be raised alone—they need the company of others from their own species to socialize and practice life skills they will use once released back to the wild. Wildlife rehabilitators group babies together according to species and age.
- Most wild species are provincially or federally protected; it is illegal to keep a protected animal without a permit for more than 24 hours. This law exists to ensure that sick, injured or orphaned animals receive the best treatment and care possible. Licensed and trained wildlife rehabilitators and veterinarians understand the unique needs of the hundreds of wild species that live in or pass through the Greater Toronto Area!
- More information on helping wild babies can be found on page 14 of this guide, and by visiting www.torontowildlifecentre.com

Raising Wild Babies

Across the Greater Toronto Area, tens of thousands of wild babies are orphaned each year. Kind members of the public find these helpless and vulnerable animals and want to do all they can to help. Unsure of how to proceed, they bring the animal(s) home and provide food, shelter and attention – for days, or even weeks. The result is a very sick or habituated baby that often cannot be saved, even with proper care from a trained and licensed wildlife rehabilitator. Lacking proper nutrition and socialization opportunities with others from their own species – these babies face serious health problems and are ill-equipped to make it in the wild.

Keeping Wildlife in Captivity or as Pets

Wild animals are fascinating, and it can be exhilarating to catch a glimpse of them in the wild – but this is where human interactions with them should begin and end. Unlike our domestic animal companions, wild animals are meant to live free in the wild. While it can be tempting to keep an orphaned wild baby, there are many good reasons not to.

1 Wild Animals Have Needs

Just like an injured dog needs to see a veterinarian, and a sick person needs to see a

doctor, a wild animal needs the care of a wildlife rehabilitator. Wild animals have specific medical, dietary, social, and environmental requirements. These vary according to age and species and can be difficult to replicate. Even a few days with the wrong care can ruin a wild animal's chances of ever being able to survive in the wild.

2 Wild Animals Have Instincts

Domestication is a process that occurs slowly over many generations. Our pet animals, like dogs and cats, have had their wild instincts bred out of them over centuries of living alongside humans. Wild animals are a very different story.

Baby wild animals can appear cute and friendly, but when they reach sexual maturity, they start to display aggressive, destructive behaviours that can be dangerous to people and themselves. These are the instincts they are born with. Many well-meaning people who have raised a wild baby reach out to wildlife rehabilitators at this stage, but sadly, by this time it is usually too late—the animal has missed its developmental window for learning social behaviours and acquiring survival skills. It will never be able to survive in the wild, but it is still too wild to be happy or safe in captivity.



“Hotdog” the snapping turtle is one of TWC’s wild Education Ambassadors. He was stolen from the wild when he was young and kept in captivity until the person who found him moved away, and left him behind.

Luckily, someone found him but they kept him for several more months before contacting TWC, feeding him only hotdogs. Hotdog cannot be returned to the wild because he is habituated to people, and his point of origin is unknown; by law, all animals must be returned to the area where they were originally found.

Although he’s well cared for at TWC, he has been robbed of a life in the wild and the opportunity to support his species through reproduction.

3 Keeping wild animals as pets is cruel

Wild animals deserve to live a life in the wild. They deserve to raise wild families of their own and contribute to their ecosystem. It may seem exciting and exotic to have a wild animal as a pet, but the animal’s needs should come first. Their freedom and their natural habitat are essential to their quality of life. Remember that wild animals view humans as predators – being in captivity can be terrifying and stressful.

4 Keeping wild animals as pets is illegal

In most cases, it is illegal to keep wild animals as pets. Federal, provincial, and municipal laws may be involved, depending on the species.

5 Domestic animals need loving homes

Thousands of domestic animals are currently in shelters across Ontario that need homes – animals that would love to be a part of a family! In addition to cats and dogs, a variety of domestic species less commonly kept as pets (birds, rabbits, snakes, turtles, rodents, etc.) are available for adoption from local humane societies, rescues and shelters.

Getting up-close and personal with wildlife

The best way to interact with wildlife up close in a responsible manner is to volunteer with your local wildlife rehabilitation centre. Wildlife rehabilitators are charities and typically do not receive government funding; they rely on volunteers to carry out the important work of feeding, cleaning, exercising and medicating sick, injured and orphaned wild animals.

Feeding Wildlife

Feeding wild animals may be rewarding to the person doing the feeding, but there are negative consequences for our wild neighbours. Feeding can habituate wildlife and create conflict.

If wild animals start to associate people with food, they may become more visible, bolder, or more likely to approach humans. Some people may be annoyed or frightened by this behaviour, and act on it in a way that harms the animal—from trapping and relocating the animal, to setting dangerous traps or baits in their yard, to physically injuring or killing the animal themselves. TWC receives many calls about human-wildlife conflicts, and many involve animals that have been fed by people with good intentions.



A mother red fox denned under a boardwalk at Woodbine Beach in Toronto in early spring of 2020.

As her pups began emerging, they attracted attention from beach goers who began feeding them inappropriate human foods. Even more, the pups were at risk of habituating to humans because of it which would create problems for them as adults (they would likely continue to approach people for food).

TWC began an education campaign against feeding the foxes, and enlisted the help of volunteers to provide aversive conditioning (e.g. clapping and stomping feet near them) in the hopes of keeping the pups fearful of humans.



Bird feeders can be ground zero for the spread of disease due to the high number of birds that visit and their close proximity to one another.

Feeding can be unhealthy for wildlife

Feeding wild animals can discourage them from foraging for natural food sources. This can lead to health problems since the foods people feed them are not as diverse or nutritious as what they would find in the wild.

Water birds who are fed bread feel full, so they forage less for the plants and microorganisms that usually make up their diet. For growing babies, nutritional deficiencies can affect their development leading to problems such as “Angel Wing” – a deformity so severe that the bird will never be able to fly. It also causes birds to produce more waste, which ultimately leads to more conflict with people.

Feeding can make wildlife sick

Feeding wild animals encourages larger numbers of animals to group together than would happen naturally. If one of them is sick, the disease can quickly spread through the group. This is most evident at birdfeeders where infections such as coccidiosis, salmonella, and conjunctivitis can be present and prove fatal to birds. Disease spread can be reduced by removing feeders, or dumping old seed weekly, washing feeders with hot soapy water, and refilling with new seed once dry.

A common activity is providing bread, and similar food products, to ducks, geese and swans. Bread is not a part of their natural diet, but it is very filling, resulting in insufficient consumption of natural healthy foods.

A better way to feed wildlife

If you enjoy watching your wild neighbours visit your yard, consider replanting your lawn or garden with native plants, shrubs, and trees. These can be a healthy food source while also providing habitat and shelter, which are equally important. In the fall, avoid cutting dead flowers or seed heads – these offer food throughout the winter, as well as a wintering site for insects that will emerge in late spring and provide another food source for insectivores. A fresh shallow water source can also benefit a number of animals—just make sure to clean it and change the water regularly.

Student Activities:

- ➔ **Grades 1 to 4**
 - Double Take
- ➔ **Grades 4 to 8**
 - Plant a Garden for Wildlife!*
- ➔ **Grades 7 to 8**
 - "Adopt" a Wild Animal!*



*This activity and many more can be found on our website at www.torontowildlifecentre.com/kids-go-wild/

DOUBLE TAKE!

Grades 1* to 4 - Individual (*some assistance may be required for younger students)

These animals may look the same but they have very different needs and behaviours. “Wild” animals live in nature, while “Domestic” animals live with people (e.g. as pets). For each row, draw a circle around the sentence that best represents a domestic animal in red, and a wild animal in blue.

DOMESTIC (In Ontario)

WILD



Checkered Giant Rabbit

I love to eat hay, fresh vegetables and rabbit pellets. My human puts my food in a dish for me to eat.

I eat grasses and plants like clover and dandelion. Sometimes I visit a garden, but I leave fast if I see people because they scare me.



Eastern Cottontail



Zebra Finch

I spend all day collecting items to make my nest, like stems, twigs and feathers. I build my nest in trees or sometimes on buildings.

My human gives me lots of toys to play with to keep me busy all day, like mirrors, plastic chains, and bells.



House Finch



Corn Snake

I live under leaves and piles of branches or rocks. I am not venomous and am completely harmless – but I might bite if you try to pick me up to defend myself.

I like to curl up in the cave in my tank, but I also like when people pick me up. I am usually calm.



Garter Snake



Siberian Husky (Dog)

I love to run outdoors, especially after a ball! After playing, I go home where my human makes my dinner.

I spend most of my day hunting for food and finding shelter. My favourite meals are mice and rats. I like to keep my distance from people, and I don't like when dogs chase me.



Eastern Coyote



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