



The Owl Foundation

NOCTURNAL NEWS

R.R. #1, Vineland Station, Ontario, Canada L0R 2E0

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Welcome to the first second edition Owl Foundation newsletter! Thank you to all for your kind words, best wishes and feedback regarding the new format. We did get a few glares from our Snowy Owls though. It seems they weren't at all happy at being left out of our new newsletter title. Joking aside, most people (right or wrong) associate owls as being creatures of the night when in fact that isn't always the case. As this isn't a scientific paper, but a fun account of the goings on at The Owl Foundation, we thought it would be a cute, catchy title. Don't worry; we recognize that not all owls are nocturnal. For the record, owls fall into 3 categories: *Nocturnal* (night): Boreal Owls, Long-eared Owls, Northern Saw-whet Owls, and Flammulated Owls; *Crepuscular* (dusk and dawn): Short-eared Owls, Barred Owls, Spotted Owls, Great Grey Owls, Screech Owls and Great Horned Owls; and *Diurnal* (day): Burrowing Owls, Snowy Owls, Hawk Owls and Pygmy Owls. If you've ever been on a tour, our leaders have likely mentioned this in person.



Brent unloading fresh greenery for enclosure camouflage



Stacy and tour guests in the "Information Tent"

This fall, our sponsors' tours were a great success. We had all the enclosures looking their best, with fresh greenery for the owls to hide in...perfect for tours (from the owls' perspectives). It rained on only one of our twelve tours, but when it rains it pours and boy did it ever! Twenty-two brave souls still arrived at their appointed hour for a sopping wet tour.

New this year we had an "Information Tent" where we had a display of some day-to-day activities at the foundation. Everything was under the "big top", from food preparation in the mouse house, to admittance sheets and how we record information, to banding owls with the different types of bands, and finally to all the pesky steps involved in getting birds on an aircraft.

As part of our new semi-annual format, we will be publishing all the yearly statistics, Friends of the Owls, and memorial donations in our June 1 edition. This will allow us to present a total overview of the previous year. In this edition, the zoologists will share an owl story, and our facilities manager will give a brief report on facility happenings. Also, be sure to check out "Pellets from Kay".

I'm sure you've already started your seasonal shopping, but if you still can't find something for that person who is impossible to buy for, visit page 7 for our sponsorship form to give our unique "owl gift certificate" for Christmas. There is still time for Christmas delivery...if you hurry! Happy Holidays!

Cathy Foxcroft, Business Administrator

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Kay hits the streets...look out!

As you may recall, Kay lost her driver's license after a stroke a few years ago. Still young at heart, that sly Kay decided to hop up on Tony's (TOF volunteer) motorcycle and was preparing to go to the local grocery store while all the staff and volunteers were busy with Tuesday mice delivery. I don't think she planned ahead as to where she was going to PUT the groceries though and she'd conveniently forgotten that loss of license applies to driving ANY vehicle! All Kay could think of was..."milk, bread, green beans, mozzarella cheese, what else is on my list"?

Pellets from Kay

Season's greetings from the 'Old Girl' at The Owl Foundation to my long-time friends, and our loyal supporters over so many years. Larry McKeever and I used to compose the annual report, from the 1970's to his death in 2002. The newsletters then became my responsibility, wherein I recorded my favourite observations which were on the behavior of the owls themselves, forgetting perhaps that my passion might not be everyone's consuming interest! I remember feeling obliged to lighten the text with such entertainments as digging the owls out of snow storms, watching collapsing tall trees and the wrecks of splintered cages, even the antics of bizarre cats.

By last year, the weary staff, tired of my always late delivery of the newsletter, proposed that we update the format, issue it twice a year, and focus on activities at the foundation as experienced by everyone. The days of mailing out 12 pages to all our members, prohibitive in cost, have been obviated by so many now requesting theirs by email. I hope you approve the new look, as I resume my role of 'Peeping Tom", via the video cameras, on our current crop of private lives, an ongoing education.



2009 Newsletter Update

For those who received our 2009 newsletter, you may recall the story of the deer fawn that had the misfortune of getting caught inside our perimeter fence. During her attempts at escape, she sustained some minor cuts and abrasions. We sent her off to Windrush Veterinary Services in Brantford. Dr. Crombie treated her wounds and after three weeks, she was allowed to socialize with a local group of wild deer that feeds from the apple trees near her paddock. She mingled well through the fencing and the gates were soon opened for her to join the group. Prior to her release, she was ear tagged and given vaccinations for common deer diseases. Dr. Crombie reports she was seen this past summer with a deer fawn of her own!



Congratulations **to our 2010 Raffle Winners**

- Featherstone Winery Tour Ian Darling
- Laura Secord Gift Basket Charlie Hook
- Kim Graham Framed Photograph Anne Ritchie
- Edward Spera Owl Print Shirley Murray

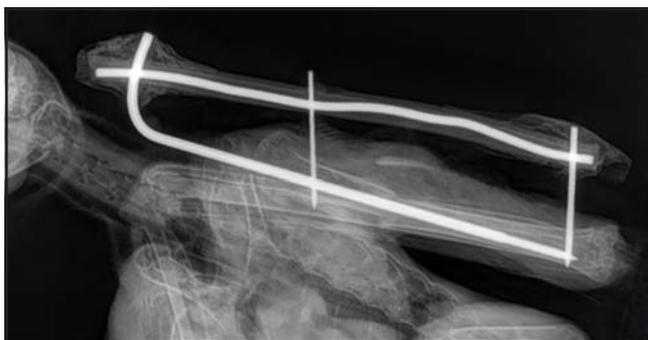
In the Nick of Time

Kara Kristjanson
Annick Gionet Rollick
The Owl Foundation Zoologists

In an instant his world was turned upside down: a loud hum, a blinding light and a sudden, bone-cracking impact that sent him spinning into cover. Such devastation occurs all too often and upwards of 40% of our admissions arrive bruised, battered and dying as a result. Vehicle collisions account for many of our poorest faring cases not simply because they have fractured bones or are bleeding, but because help can take days or weeks to come while wounds age, infection sets in and flies arrive for the feast.

For the lucky ones, help does arrive: The kind soul who pulls over and carefully collects the owl; the person who drives it to the nearest veterinary clinic, rehabilitator or SPCA. Such was the luck of our little Short-eared Owl from Bowmanville. He arrived at Bowmanville Veterinary Clinic (BVC) with a broken humerus (the wing bone extending from the shoulder) and tissue trauma. Humeral fractures need immediate care as the strong muscles of the upper wing can tighten and shrink, inhibiting re-alignment and proper healing of the bone. Well versed in triage cases, the clinic began supportive care for the owl (fluids, pain medication), x-rayed him, stabilized his wing and contacted us to discuss his future.

Two BVC volunteers drove the owl here the following day. A copy of the x-ray was sent to the doctors at The Links Road Animal & Bird Clinic in Toronto that same day. There was no time to spare!



X-ray showing wing pin and fixator

Unbelievably, everything continued to fall into place. Dr. Evan Mavromotis agreed to perform surgery that very Friday and another pair of volunteer drivers whisked the owl up to them. Even the surgery went well: a steel rod, affectionately known in medical circles as a “pin”, was placed through the hollow bone, joining the two sides of the fracture site and an external component was affixed to keep everything in place.

Thankfully, the little owl is even allowed some wing movement while he heals. While this helps

prevent the tendons and joints from tightening, it also serves a crucial and oft overlooked secondary purpose: to keep the bird psychologically healthy. If you’ve ever been incapacitated in hospital, you’ll know what we mean. An owl’s mental health is critical to its continued well-being, as well as its ability to heal and this Short-eared is nothing if not a spitfire. “ArrRRRAAH!!!” he yells defiantly at us.

Now, a full month into post-surgical recovery, everyone’s efforts are paying off. Last week his internal pin was removed. Local anesthetic, a quick snip of the rod and a twisting pull usually do it, but our local vets at West Niagara Animal Hospital were in for a surprise. Neither precision tools, nor brute female strength would cut that rod. Brent to the rescue (lucky only a phone call away)! But alas, even he was unable to compel the rod to snap. Poor Brent was sent wheeling around town and to and from work looking for a bolt cutter that would do the job – strong, but narrow! And “Eureka!” he finally found one. Thank goodness the owl was blissfully unaware of the fuss; his head still in dreamland.

And now we wait. With luck, as you read this, little spitfire’s external fixator will have been removed. He is already enjoying more freedom: a larger unit and freer wing movement – just what the doctor (and rehabbers) ordered. Already his angry guffaws have subsided, though that irate expression remains. “Let me out of here,” he says. “Patience,” we reply. “You’re one of the lucky ones. You have a chance at freedom because you were saved, just in the nick of time.”



Short-eared owl with remaining external wing fixator

Volunteering At The Owl Foundation by Cathy Foxcroft

While ALL VOLUNTEERS are greatly appreciated, there is one at The Owl Foundation who is here so often, he may as well be on staff. When he is not here he is busy at home working on special projects for us. Who is he?

Paul Summerskill.



freezer mouse tray assembly line

Paul has been a volunteer/sponsor/director at The Owl Foundation for close to two decades. He was hooked after helping to release his first owl 18 years ago.

Over all these years Paul (often with his wife Tina) has completed hundreds of tasks, from mundane to owl specific. Sweeping cobwebs from cage fronts, painting white edges onto the many, many steps on the bank (to prevent tripping), and



Annick showing freezer full of mouse trays

running cabling for our numerous video cameras are just a smattering of the simple, but arduous tasks Paul has completed.

One of his more complex undertakings involved our new mouse freezer. A couple of years ago, The Owl Foundation purchased an industrial upright



Making the owl pool mould

freezer. It has been a remarkable addition to the food preparation. Until the new freezer arrived, the freshly deceased mice were placed on trays and hauled to several different chest freezers around the facility; most in the basement of the house. They were heavy and awkward and rotating supplies was an awful task. Have you ever rooted around in your own chest freezer for something at the bottom? The decision was made to streamline the process and Paul did the preliminary footwork to find a local retailer. A freezer was chosen, installed, up and running and ready to go! Yay! But, oh no! Our mouse trays didn't fit, by one inch!! Paul to the rescue. He assembled 50 new mouse trays that are custom fit to the freezer; maximizing space. It is now easy to rotate, monitor and find the daily food requirements of the owls.

Another specialty task that we called upon Paul for was to make owl pools. Can you believe our



Thirteen large owl pools, ready to be bathed in

local garden centre doesn't carry them?! In fact, he has done this twice for us, in two different sizes. Paul fabricated 20 cement pools a few years ago and just recently an additional 13 pools. He also gave us his moulds, should we ever have to make more (and we can't convince Paul to do it for us).

In addition to all of this, Paul does numerous speaking engagements for us; spreading the word about who we are and what we do. He is a tour leader at our sponsors' tours and his wife Tina is our shopkeeper. Paul also serves on our Board of Directors as vice-chair.

Paul and Tina have logged hundreds of hours driving across Ontario retrieving injured owls, transporting owls for surgical care, and hauling kenneled owls to air cargo bound for far-off destinations (often involving ungodly hours of departure). They have also released many, many owls back to the wild. When they have the audacity to go to their cottage in Newfoundland for a few weeks in the summer, or take a vacation overseas...we miss them!!

Paul's dedication to The Owl Foundation has helped us in so many diverse ways. Thank you Paul (and Tina) for your passion, ongoing support and generosity.

We are ALWAYS looking for volunteers

While we certainly don't expect all volunteers to be as industrious as Paul, we can always use help and are recruiting volunteers. Do you have some time to donate? Do you have a special skill?



*Volunteer Paul Summerskill
on "mouse Tuesday"*



Paul assembling custom workbench for mouse house

Generally, all that we ask is that you make a commitment to a schedule - YOUR schedule - be it one day a week, every morning, one afternoon every other week, one time only... whatever works for you. We need the commitment of a day/time to allow us to plan our schedules and be sure the owls' needs are met. With a staff of just four, we're stretched thin.

We are currently looking for volunteers to...

- > clean enclosures (empty ones),
- > perform light yard work, grass mowing, raking
- > enter computer data
- > perform small carpentry tasks,
e.g. walkway/cage repair

Volunteer Voice

My Volunteer Experience...by Paul Summerskill

Being a volunteer allows me to appreciate the work of Mrs. McKeever and the Foundation's dedicated staff. To be aware of research such as that related to West Nile, Dr. Wolfer's documentation of owls eyes, and the re-design by the staff of a harness that allows a Short-eared Owl to carry a solar powered transmitter have been interesting experiences.

A year after a farmer's wife found a badly injured owl I was asked to release the now healthy owl where it was found. The released owl circled overhead and the farmer's wife wiped away a tear as she asked me to thank the Foundation. There are many rewards being a volunteer.



A Brief Facilities Update

It's that time of year again at the foundation. Winter preparation work is well underway. Installing food box hot trays, heat lamps, winter paneling and collecting leaves and pine needles for spring nest basket lining are just a few of the things going on as we move into the winter months ahead.

You may think "what's all the fuss?" Well let's use the Short-eared Owl complex as an example. Much of the year the Short-eared Owl enclosures simply require a regular pool-cleaning, odd floor raking, and maybe a little weeding so that the crippled owls can get around. As winter approaches we make a few "modifications" that are very important to their survival.

Keeping in mind that The Owl Foundation only houses damaged owls as permanent residents, many of which are non-flighted, we need to "winterize" many of the outdoor units here every year. In our example of the Short-eared Owl enclosures, a number of measures must be taken before the snow flies. All perching and ramping needs to be cleaned and in top shape. Most of our Short-eared Owls rely on this ramping system to maneuver throughout the unit. Small, raised tables are installed to give a feeding platform that is up off the ground and easily swept of snow. We also put up wind and snow barriers on the walls and roofs. Simple, lightweight coroplast sheets make for perfect wall



Short-eared complex before winter paneling installed

panels (see photo to left) to protect from frigid winds and prevent snowdrifts from forming inside the units. On the roof, we have utilized our fine wire bug mesh in a few locations which creates snow-free areas beneath so the Short-eared Owls do not become hampered by deep snow.

On a cage by cage basis, this process takes place throughout the facility on a seasonal schedule. We certainly appreciate the volunteer hours that are put into helping prepare for the winter months ahead. It's a big undertaking.



Short-eared complex after winter paneling installed

Fledgling Fun



- What do you get if you put a bee in front of an owl? A bowl.
- What does an owl need after a bath? A towel.
- What kind of books do owls like to read? Whoo-dunnits.
- Why did the owl say "Tweet, Tweet"? Because she didn't give a hoot.



Great Gift Idea!

Don't know what to get someone for Christmas?
(or 40th Birthday, 50th Anniversary, Second Marriage)

Give an owl gift certificate!

There is still time for Christmas delivery, provided you reply ASAP

You get an income tax receipt and they get:

- ☞ A certificate with a colour photograph of their owl
- ☞ A short note advising them of your gift
- ☞ A tour for two to our fall sponsors' tours
- ☞ A copy of our latest newsletter



Your Name/Address/Telephone _____

Recipient Name/Address _____

Any special instructions (we will do our best to accommodate them. i.e. To Grandma, Love Pumpkin)

Sponsorship of a juvenile owl \$50⁰⁰

Sponsorship of a resident owl \$100⁰⁰-\$200⁰⁰

Amount Enclosed: _____

\$100 = Pygmy Owl, Saw-whet Owl, Boreal Owl, Burrowing Owl or Screech Owl (please circle choice)

\$150 = Hawk Owl, Long-eared Owl, Short-eared Owl, Barn Owl (please circle choice)

\$200 = Barred Owl, Great Grey Owl, Great Horned Owl, Snowy Owl (please circle choice)

Mail to: The Owl Foundation - "RUSH GIFT", R.R. #1, Vineland Station, Ontario L0R 2E0

The Owl Foundation would like to enjoy the pictures in colour!
(and for you would like to send the newsletter by email to
supporters who are interested in receiving it in this form.
If you would like to receive the newsletter by email,
please send an email to owlmail@sympatico.ca with your request
giving your name and address so that we can update our records.
Thank you.

The Owl Foundation
R.R. 1, VINELAND STATION, ON CANADA L0R 2E0
www.theowlfoundation.ca



Short-eared Owl

The Short-eared Owl is a medium-sized owl with brown and tan plumage and dark breast streaking. It has yellow eyes, a black beak and small ear tufts which are usually only visible when the owl is on the alert. In flight, this owl is easily identified by its moth-like flight and dark wrist “commas”. As with most owl species, the females are larger than the males. However, females are also usually darker in colouration than their male counterparts.

The Short-eared is crepuscular, hunting primarily at dusk and dawn and breeds in rudimentary ground nests called scrapes. This species will form communal winter roosts where prey and habitat are plentiful. There have been sightings of up to 200 owls roosting in the same stand of trees.

The Short-eared Owl enjoys a wide variety of prey, favouring small rodents. It will also take small birds and insects. It prefers wide open spaces and populations suffer from habitat destruction.

The Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) states it is currently “special concern”.