

INSIDE AURORA: Wild Kingdom

By **Scott Johnston**

Based on recent news reports,
it seems Aurora's being overrun by wildlife.

To be fair, for the most part
these animals, or at least their ancestors, were living here first. It's not
like they read the Town's press releases and just decided that this was a great
place to move to.

The exception to ?being here
first? may be the opossum, whose numbers have increased as this marsupial's
range has moved north into Aurora in recent years, thanks in part to global
warming.

But paving over large tracts
of green space in Town and our neighbouring communities, and increasing our
population by a few thousand people a year has made not just opossums, but
animals of all sorts more noticeable.

In some cases they're being
encouraged. The new bridge recently opened over the East Holland River in
Sheppard's Bush was designed in part to allow trout to more easily navigate
upstream for spawning.

Over near Bathurst, the Town
spent \$7k adding flashing lights to the existing turtle crossing signs on
Henderson to reduce potential instances of reptile road kill.

Even without human support,
many animals are increasing in numbers.

There seems to have been a
huge spike in rabbit populations this year, and I'm seeing more and more red
squirrels in our neighbourhood. On the less cuddly front, I believe rat
sightings are also on the rise.

But the most obvious example
of an increased wildlife presence is the coyote.

There have always been
sightings of this canine in Town, especially in spring when the pups are
growing and extra hunting is required by the parents to help feed them.

Maybe it's expanded
communication via social media, or perhaps it's the increase in rabbits and
other prey species, but coyotes seem to have a more visible presence these

days. There was even an unnerving video of a young girl being knocked over by a coyote in her backyard.

Most wildlife encounters are not in people's backyards, but this does reinforce the fact that all wild animals are, obviously, wild.

Unfortunately, not all species have the natural 'keep away' reputation of say, a skunk. The cute animals may make one want to get close to feed or pet them, but even the fluffiest of wide-eyed bunnies, racoons, or chipmunks can bite or scratch.

Encouraging wildlife to stick around Town and not get run over is not limited to improving fish habitat and putting up fancy electronic crossing signs on our streets.

Development has been halted on some green spaces, such as the lots on Henderson, which were spared proposed monster home developments after a concerted pushback by neighbouring residents.

On the east side of Town, the Ivy Jay Nature Reserve is receiving millions of dollars in investments in preparation for its opening next year.

But even with an abundance of designated green spaces in Aurora, it's unlikely that all of the Town's undomesticated critters will decide to base themselves within these unfenced reserves. Not when increased numbers of Aurorans are generating so much litter, compost, and other temptations in neighbourhoods all across Town.

If the wild animal populations in Aurora continue their steady rise, and human-animal interactions become more likely, we may need to go beyond just reminding people to be on the lookout for turtles.

Soon, all of our roads, parks, sidewalks and trails may be covered with flashing signs warning folks to watch out for coyotes, groundhogs, foxes, deer, salamanders, ducks and all our Town's other wild residents.

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