

## It's all about living with nature

Mark Pavilons

The most important thing is to preserve the world we live in. Unless people understand and learn about our world, habitats, and animals, they won't understand that if we don't protect those habitats, we'll eventually destroy ourselves.

Jack Hanna



It's really funny, when we humans assert ourselves as the top of the food chain.

Funny because we were not only late to the table, but likely got here by accident.

We weren't the first life form to crawl out of the primordial ooze so long ago. No, my friends, we were predated by plants, amoebas, bugs, fishies and all sorts of things that swam, crawled, slimed and flew. We arrived on the scene many millions of years later, much to the planet's chagrin.

Given our larger brain, we adapted and became leaders of the pack. We dominated our landscape, to the point where our concrete jungles, highrises, automobiles and aircraft stand as examples of our prowess.

If you watched TV commercials during the Super Bowl, you will now realize we are now the proud creators of the 'puppy monkey baby.' My faith in my fellow human beings is on shaky ground.

As developed as the GTA is, Ontario is still one, vast province, with plenty of amazing natural, wide open spaces and features. It's equivalent in size to some European countries and we're admired for our attention to nature and the environment.

King is the largest municipality, geographically speaking, in York Region. At a little over 333 square kilometres, King is definitely a nice chunk of Heaven on Earth. More than 90% of King's landscape is protected under various green legislation. Areas like Happy Valley Forest are home to some amazing creatures, some of which are not found anywhere else.

A lot of residents came were drawn to King for its natural beauty and marvelous vistas. They relocated here seeking solace, comfort and peace. They continue to live here because it offers the best of all worlds ??modern amenities and conveniences and that intoxicating rural charm. It's comfort food for the soul to be sure.

In any rural area, co-existing with our fellow creatures is a given. We are fascinated by creatures big and small, who travel on two feet or more; who soar above the trees and live deep under water.

King is home to canids such as the Eastern Coyote. Some people have become frightened by their presence and fear for the safety of their pets and livestock.

The stereotypical depictions of these animals are largely false. Yes, these opportunistic predators will kill small dogs and cats, but that's rare. I agree that's little consolation to the residents who've lost their beloved family members.

But are the coyotes to blame?

Growing concern led King Township officials to hold a public information session last week. Experts from MNR, Coyote Watch Canada and the Toronto Wildlife Centre presented facts and helpful hints on how to deal with these animals.

The full house was a clear indication of public interest in the matter. With that level of attendance, I was expecting an emotionally

charged session, complete with pitchforks. But this is King. I?am constantly amazed at how well our residents gather, discuss and deal with problems. We should share our secret with the rest of the world.

Most residents left the session well informed and likely more comfortable with sharing our world with coyotes.

Not unlike our own pet dogs, coyotes are devoted parents and mates. They're curious and highly intelligent. They are generally weary of humans and driven by their survival instincts. They've been roaming southern Ontario for more than 100 years.

Again, we are relative newcomers to their world.

Why are they more prevalent and seemingly less fearful of humans?

Well, they merely follow the food trail. Their main sources of food are rodents, along with berries and other things. But they're happy to take free food ??human trash and food offered by two-legged creatures. While our intentions may be good, the worst thing to do is feed wild animals. That just conditions them to hang around, waiting for hand-outs.

We also feed them unintentionally. How many of us have bird feeders??They don't just feed the birds, but the discarded seeds attract rodents ??mice, rats, squirrels, etc. These are not just cute furry animals ??they are food for predatory birds and canids. Animals follow food.

I have had my share of contact with wild animals, too.

I?grew up in rural Caledon and currently back on to a large forest. In my youth, my family had many encounters with deer, raccoons, beavers, groundhogs, skunks, cows, you name it. In the last two years, I?have seen coyotes stroll past our home in the forest. A fence hinders easy access to our property, so my only concern is whether my two yellow labs decide to leap into action. But the few times I witnessed these creatures, I?couldn't help but be taken by their majesty. A little on the scrawny side, they were, nonetheless, quite a site. This is nature. This is how it has been for millennia.?They are not the intruders, we are.

Previous methods of dealing with such predators have proven ineffective. Nature has a way of correcting things, especially where man is concerned.

The food chain can't be dismantled. It merely changes shape, reacts and fills in the voids.

One day we too may be filled in as nature reclaims what man has taken.

Residents can live with our four-legged friends. We need to be cautious, use those big brains of ours to protect ourselves and our loved ones. We can stake our own territory and show them who's boss, without resorting to violent means.

I?think the world is more than big enough for all of us to share.