

What to do when sick nuisance wildlife ends up in your yard

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Raccoons aren't usually seen during the daytime but this lethargic and shaking animal was likely suffering from distemper when a homeowner on Ontario St. in Georgetown discovered it in his backyard earlier this month. This raccoon was taken away by Halton Hills Animal Control, but the municipality's current policy states that if a critter like this is found on private property, the onus is on the homeowner to have it removed and euthanized. Photo by Eamonn Maher

Two Georgetown residents called the *Independent & Free Press* within the space of a couple of hours recently to share accounts of dying raccoons discovered in their backyards.

In both cases, the residents called a number of government agencies looking to have the apparently distemper-stricken animals removed, only to be told that because those uninvited guests were on private property, the onus was on the homeowner to call a pest-control company at an expense of a few hundred dollars.

Ontario St. resident Frank Borg said he let his German Shepherd out one afternoon to see the large dog sniffing around an ailing raccoon. Borg called the Town of Halton Hills Canine Control and was advised to contact either the Oakville-Milton or Upper Credit Humane Societies, whose representatives said they were unable to respond to the situation, either.

If I had a raccoon in my attic or under my deck, that's my problem, I understand that. But this is a sick animal that's clearly suffering," said Borg, who conducted some online research to try to discover a solution, finding that larger municipalities such as Toronto and Mississauga will dispatch an animal control officer to euthanize an infected animal.

It seems like all the other municipalities will do something about it, but not Halton Hills, and I think they should have something in place.

Distemper is spread through contact with bodily fluids, and though it cannot infect humans, it can spread to cats and dogs quite easily, even without direct contact with an infected raccoon.

The disease is fatal for animals in

most cases, and can seriously ravage a population of raccoons, skunks or barn cats. There is no treatment to cure distemper and pet owners are strongly urged to make sure their furry friends are up to date with their vaccinations.

Petra Kimber of McIntyre Cres. related a similar chain of frustrating inquiries and the only response the mother of two received was from someone at the Ministry of Natural Resources, who told her that the raccoon would in all likelihood die within 24 hours. So Kimber decided to call the Halton Regional Police, who took care of the problem, without explaining to her how the issue was dealt with.

Because we're in Georgetown, the (Oakville) Milton Humane Society or the Upper Credit Humane Society couldn't help us, so what do you do? It

will eventually die is really not a good response, in my opinion. It's spreading disease and next week someone's going to find one in their back garden.

What do they do? That's all I'm hoping for out of this because these (distemper) raccoons or skunks can be highly contagious.

Marina Booton, the Town's supervisor of enforcement services, confirmed that numerous calls about sick raccoons have been received in recent weeks. Animal Control doesn't test the animals to see whether it's distemper or rabies, although she noted that the MNR has recently begun a new testing program in light of 65 reported cases of rabid raccoons discovered in the Hamilton area in recent weeks.

In Borg's situation, it just so happened that the Town's Canine Control manager, Rudy de Jong, was on Ontario St. the next morning to remove a raccoon from public land that also had been apparently suffering from distemper. de Jong also took away with him the raccoon that had been in Borg's backyard as a courtesy, but unlucky local residents who find an sickly looking raccoon, skunk or opossum may not be as fortunate for now.

Exactly what level of service do you want?" said Ward 3 Town of Halton Hills Councillor Dave Kentner.

Some municipalities, for example, plow every sidewalk in their town. We don't. We provide a restricted, limited sidewalk clearing service, mostly on arterial roads and school routes. So that's the difference between a large community and a small, ruralized urban area where we don't have the volume of people and tax dollars and resources to do all of the things that we'd like to have done.

Kentner added that funds are in the process of being set aside for a feasibility study with a neighbouring municipality that would allow for a sharing of the costs involved with providing the service to deal with sick animals.

In the meantime, he said that a better way could be devised to avoid residents having to make several phone calls to find out what can be done with the issue.

I would suggest to any of our citizens if they have a problem like this, they can put a call into Rudy de Jong at Canine Control (905-877-6235) and ask him to come out and look at the issue to determine if he can or cannot deal with it and let him make the decision on what he can do. Every situation is different.

Correction

In the March 24 issue of the *Independent and Free Press*, a couple of points in the article *GTA West, HPBATS corridor protection grows* were incorrect. In the article, it is stated the corridor protection area was expanding by 341 gross hectares, when it is remaining the same as originally adopted through OPA 21.

The expansion is pertaining to the Town's urban employment land which is expanding by 341 gross hectares north of Steeles Ave. in OPA 10. The corridor protection area in OPA 21 is bounded by the back of the lots fronting on Eighth Line on the west, Highway 401 in the south, Winston Churchill Blvd. in the east and 10 Sideroad in the north (except for a small area north of 10 Sideroad bounded by Tenth Line and the Hamlet of Norval).

It also stated in the article the corridor protection would prohibit any construction, when new development is only prohibited within the new employment area, not the remainder of the corridor protection area outside of the Town's urban areas, where the land use permissions have not changed. It is also stated the amendments to the Official Plan came from the region, when they are amendments to the Town's Official Plan, previously adopted by Town Council, which the Region is now in the position to approve.

Steve Burke was incorrectly identified as the manager of planning policy with Halton Region, when he holds that position with the Town of Halton Hills. The *Independent* regrets these errors.

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