

# TO THE RESCUE

COYOTE WITH CONTAINER STUCK ON HEAD JUST ONE OF THE THOUSANDS OF ANIMALS RESCUED EACH YEAR BY HUMANE SOCIETY'S PROTECTION SERVICES TEAM

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Frightened, freezing and famished - the coyote shows initial distrust when approached and contained.

But eventually - as if sensing the harrowing ordeal has finally come to an end - she gently rests her head in her protector's arms.

Lauren West accepts the gesture with an all-consuming mix of joy and relief while carrying the creature to safety.

"Yeah, honestly it was amazing," said the three-year member of the Oakville Milton Humane Society's (OMHS) Animal Protection Services team, who - along with colleague Andre Isaxell - was at the forefront of the high-profile Remembrance Day rescue of a coyote with a container stuck on its head in a wooded area of west Oakville. "When I got back to my car I cried. After getting reports for several days and not being able to catch her I wasn't sleeping. I was worried she might not make it.

"She tried (to get free), but she was so weak that with my body weight I was able to contain her."

Turns out, the Nov. 11 snowstorm that caused headaches for commuters across southern Ontario was the very same thing that allowed the coyote to be rescued.

"The fresh tracks in the snow

**"I was worried she might not make it."**

OMHS animal protection officer  
Lauren West

helped lead us to her and the wind muffled our approach," explained Isaxell, also part of the protection services team for the last three years. "We have protective sleeves and a catch pole, but with the container on her head we weren't too worried about our own safety.

"No matter how many rescues you do there's definitely still that adrenalin ... your heart starts pumping. But auto pilot kicks in and you just do the best you can for the benefit of the animal."

The widespread media spotlight of the recent coyote rescue was certainly a new experience for both Isaxell and West.

But then new experiences are pretty much the norm for the dozen or so members of the OMHS protection services crew - who provide a lifeline to thousands of injured, sick or in distress animals each year.

Those beneficiaries can include everything from typical pets (dogs and cats) to raccoons and skunks, to mice, turtles and all types of birds.

Factor in the weather and ter-



Above: OMHS animal protection officer Lauren West offers comfort to the rescued coyote. Right: Animal protection officers Andre Isaxell and Lauren West carry the rescued coyote to safety.



OMHS photos

rain, and no two rescues are ever quite the same.

"The journey (of experiences) never ends," said Isaxell, whose team has rescued many coyotes over the years, though - to his best recollection - never one with a container stuck on its head. That perilous predicament is usually reserved for skunks and raccoons.

Having volunteered at a number of animal shelters during high school before gaining fur-

ther insight into animal cruelty during her time studying criminal justice at the University of Guelph, West said the extent of

training involved for the OMHS protection services team depends on each member's background.

"We do a lot of in-class work and work with vet technicians to better identify injuries and illness, but typically a lot of it is on the job training," she said.

Added Isaxell, "You're constantly brainstorming."

One such case of that involved last summer's rescue of an orphaned fawn trapped in a wrought iron fence.

With the help of a police officer who happened to be in the area on the sweltering morning, Isaxell managed to free the animal with some nudging and a little slippery assistance from Dawn soap.

"There are just a few minor abrasions," said Isaxell, who studied police foundations at Humber College and noted that his passion for animal welfare and adventurous nature made the OMHS's protection services team an ideal fit.

Along with regular rescues, his team offers education on a myriad of animal-related scenarios. "Fawns are delicate and have a high stress rate, so you have to go slow and be as calm as possible. Generally you try to cover their eyes; that makes them easier to handle."

West and Isaxell are quick to credit the regular assistance their team receives from firefighters and police, as well as members of the public who - like with the trapped coyote - call in with reports of animals in distress.

Those who spot such a situation should never hesitate to pick up the phone. No matter what type of animal or circumstance.

Said West, "We literally speak for those (animals) that can't speak for themselves."

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