

BY JOAN RANSBERRY
Staff Writer

Is Mother Nature confused? A turkey vulture visits a penthouse terrace of a 15-floor condominium complex on Hwy. 7; a Canada goose hatches her babies in a Richmond Hill parking lot and bears wander subdivisions in Newmarket and Markham.

Sounds like a scene from *Madagascar*.

But many York Region residents will be surprised to learn it's business as usual for nature.

There has always been wildlife in urban areas, said John Almond, fish and wildlife technical specialist with the Ministry of Natural Resources.

"There's urban sprawl across the GTA," Mr. Almond said. "Since people are moving into areas that were inhabited by wildlife, they should have some understanding."

It's not a case of wildlife turning up in towns and cities. "Rather, it's urbanites moving into the wildlife's habitat," Mr. Almond stressed.

When Karen Smith first spotted a large turkey vulture on her 1,500-square-foot terrace overlooking Walden Pond at Hwy. 7 and Bullock Drive, she wondered if the bird was adopting a condominium lifestyle or was simply dropping in for a one-time visit.

"I stayed very still and just looked at it," Mrs. Smith said. "I couldn't believe my eyes."

After watching for a few minutes, the bird took flight. A few days later, the vulture returned. This time, he came with his wife.

"She's smaller and not as colourful," Mrs. Smith said. In the past three weeks, the vultures have visited Mrs. Smith's terrace many times.

The turkey vulture is one of North America's largest birds. Reaching a length of 32 inches with a wing span of six feet, vultures are best known for feeding on dead animal carcasses.

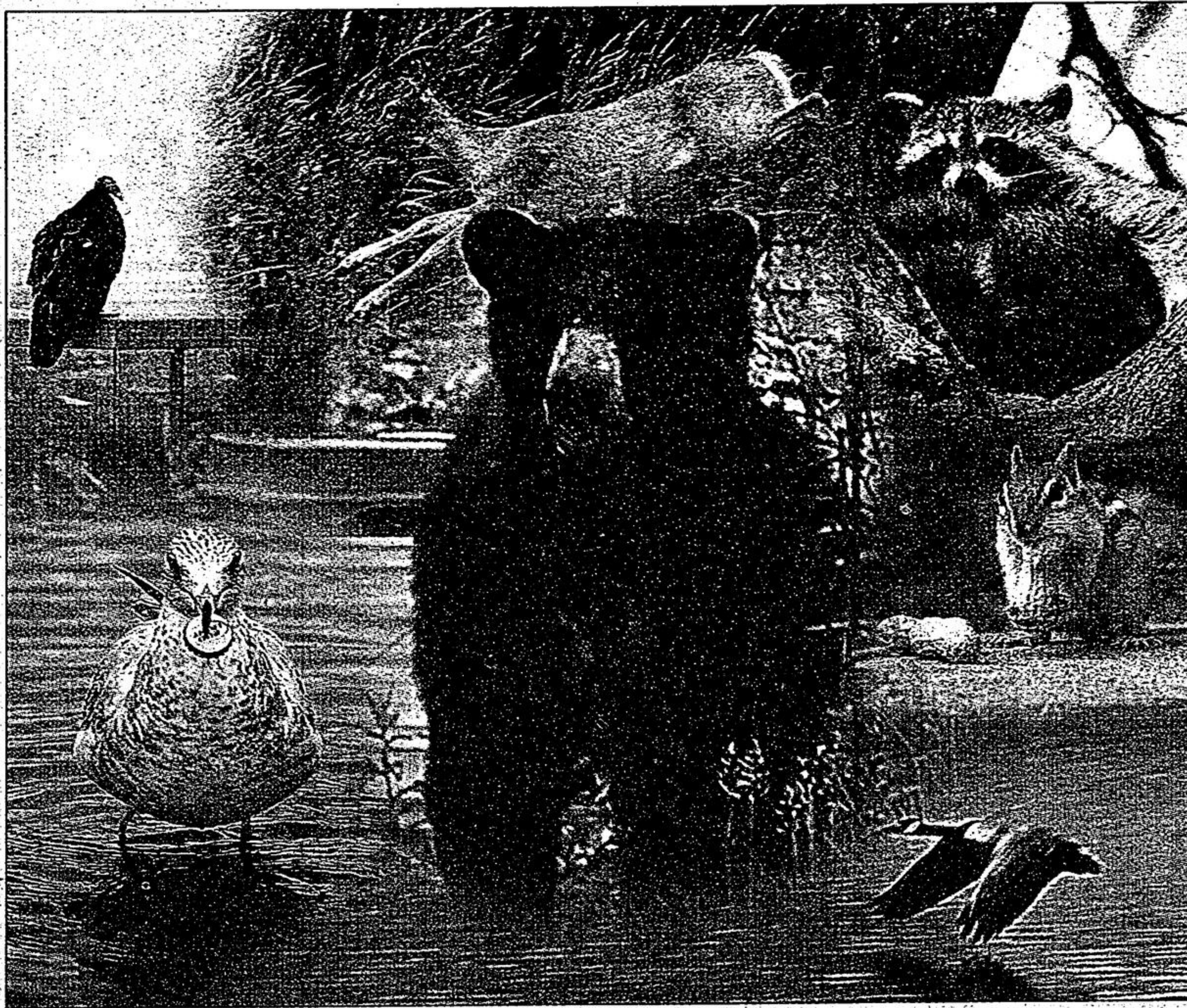
Learning this, Mrs. Smith proceeded with care.

"I just hope it doesn't bring lunch to the terrace," Mrs. Smith said.

"I don't encourage or discourage it from visiting. I don't feed it but I don't scare it away either. I love to watch it fly. It soars."

In mid-April, Connie Brown of Richmond Hill pulled into the Loblaws store at Hwy. 7 and Bayview Avenue when something near a little bush caught her eye.

The something was a Canada goose. Mrs. Brown was especially alarmed to realize the goose had



ILLUSTRATION/MIKE BARRETT

SUBURBS GONE WILD

Animals aren't moving into our back yards, we're moving into theirs

picked one of the busiest parking lots in York Region to sit on three eggs.

Knowing the mother goose and her eggs needed protection, Mrs. Brown put a plan into action.

A call to Loblaws head office got results. The company quickly installed a protective barricade around the nest.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Brown turned up every day with food and water.

Mrs. Brown also contacted a migrating bird specialist with the Ministry of Natural Resources. Since goslings can walk as soon

as they are born, Mrs. Brown was advised to keep a close watch.

"They'd hatch within a month," Mrs. Brown said. "I could just imagine the babies trying to cross Bayview Avenue."

Realizing the severity of the situation, Mrs. Brown called Richmond Hill Mayor Bill Bell and explained the dilemma. The mayor agreed to help relocate the geese.

Mrs. Brown's next move was to contact Canadian Wildlife Services to secure a permit to move the mother bird and the soon-to-be-born goslings.

With permit in hand, Mrs.

Brown called private company Bird Control International of Mississauga to carry out the job of relocating the geese to a natural habitat in western Ontario.

When Mrs. Brown showed up at the mall May 15, she found three newborns nestled under their mother's belly.

The wildlife service company was called and a relocation crew arrived.

"They used a net and captured the babies first," Mrs. Brown said. "Then they caught the mother. The babies were crying and the mother was crying. It was quite an experience."

Canada geese can be found anywhere in the GTA, Mr. Almond said. They're most often seen on ponds, rivers and shore lines.

Canada geese are very adaptable and will nest wherever it seems safe. This could be on the edge of a runway at an airport, near a water trap on a golf course and, yes, in a parking lot at a shopping plaza.

Geese may be common enough — but bears?

When a bear sauntered into Newmarket over the May 24 weekend, residents couldn't believe their eyes.

After seeking refuge in a tree in a residential backyard, following a chase through Fairy Lake park in the heart of town, a crew from the Ministry of Natural Resources hit the bear with several tranquilizer darts before lowering him to safety.

The bear remained in custody for about three hours before being released several hours north of Newmarket.

All was quiet until a week later when a 180-pound black bear spent the good part of a Saturday jumping fences in a quiet residential area in east Markham.

The two-year-old bear led police and wildlife officials on a nine-hour chase through the Hwy. 7 and Ninth Line area. While wildlife staff managed to tranquilize the bear, it took another 90 minutes to subdue the animal in the back yard of a Colonel Butler Drive home.

Jolanta Kowalski, senior information officer with the ministry, said both bears were released into an unpopulated area.

Humans share Ontario with more than 75,000 black bears. While most live in the north, a few find their way into southern Ontario every year, Ms Kowalski said.

In 2001, central Ontario experienced a widespread failure of the food supply on which black bears depend.

Some bears became stressed, making them more determined in their search for food.

"Every year, we get a couple of calls about bear sightings," Ms Kowalski said.

Now that the Oak Ridges Moraine is under provincial government protection from extensive growth, residents can expect to see even more wildlife as time goes on, Mr. Almond said.

"At least, we're not going to lose anymore wildlife because the Oak Ridges Moraine is being protected," he said.

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