

The Nature of Merrickville ~ There still be Osprey – for now...

Our first Osprey couple has definitely settled in to their new nest on the pole at the track, about 100 m west of the beach. Nearby snags (standing dead or dying trees) are serving them well, as fishing and surveillance perches. They seem unperturbed by joggers, dogs and Tuesday-night fire-fighters, though they are not beyond harassing any being they might perceive as threatening. As I write this to deadline June 18, they are reportedly taking turns feeding their newly-hatched young – how many chicks, undetermined.

When I wrote about the breakthrough last issue, about the fact that we have never had a couple settle on that pole – not since it was donated in 2010 – I had not thought through to the now obvious question: Yikes! How will they react to Canada Day fireworks!! A number of readers alerted me to the problem, the minute The Phoenix hit the news-stands and their mailboxes. How will these raptors react, indeed...

An article published in the Globe and Mail on July 1, 2018 carried the headline *Banff ditches big-bang Canada Day fireworks to protect wildlife*. It was similar to an article I found in the NY Times, dated June 30, 2016: *'Quiet Fireworks' Promise Relief for Children and Animals*. Both articles site disturbing occurrences during and following large fireworks displays: a spike in reports of runaway dogs, road-killed deer and coyotes, heart attacks in horses and dead birds falling from the sky *en masse*. Dog and cat owners are all-too familiar with the panic fireworks can cause in their pets; a local dairy farmer told me he had quite a job corralling his panicking cows last year.

Banff and Canmore have shifted to the quieter fireworks. Jasper out and out cancelled their traditional show last year. In Europe the trend is even stronger. Apparently the quiet ones replace the drama of big bangs with an increase in beautiful colours, given the change in the chemistry and packing structure of the fireworks. The effect is more of a special-effects 'pyrotechnics display', like you would see at a rock concert, said the Globe article.

Following my submission of article and photo for the June Phoenix, I did not see the Osprey around our pole on several checks during May and June. Concerned, I asked several beach and track 'regulars' to keep an eye out. I also asked a local birder if they might have moved on and settled in a better established but unoccupied nest in the area – say, the one west of the village on the north shore of the river. It had been empty for a couple of years and showed signs of new occupants this year. He suggested that, in his experience, Osprey are not averse to occupying pre-established nest sites, though they can be territorial about hunting sites. Well, as stated above, they have definitely stayed on our shore and I confirmed that for myself today.

I spoke to our acting Fire Chief and learned that we are 2 years into a 3-year contract with our current fireworks provider. Supplies have been purchased; it is too late to change gears this year. He said that he would follow-up with the provider about options for next year and take time to study up on noiseless fireworks, the existence of which was news to him. I expect that our municipal government would be interested to hear from locals about their concerns – or lack thereof – as they plan ahead. A list of phone numbers and email addresses for staff and councillors is published on the merrickville-wolford.ca website.

Our traditional Canada Day fireworks displays – remarkably impressive for such a small community – have not been known to drive away the Osprey on the pole across the river from the beach, but that nest site is buffered by lots of mature trees. I do hope the very local

fledglings and their folks will not freak out and abandon their home on July 1...or worse. Talons crossed!

Submitted by Andrea Howard merrickvillebuglady@gmail.ca