



For Immediate Release

Shades of Hope Wildlife Refuge | April 2025

PEFFERLAW, Ontario – April 10, 2025 – Shades of Hope Wildlife Refuge is one of eight Ontario-based wildlife centres sounding the alarm over the growing number of orphaned wild babies in the region.

As temperatures rise, wildlife activity increases and many species, including squirrels, skunks, bats and raccoons seek warm, secluded spaces to nest and raise their young. Attics, chimneys, and other quiet undisturbed areas become prime spots for these animals to set-up house.

Not only is this an issue for homeowners, it is also of deep concern for wildlife rehabilitation centres who are on the receiving end of the thousands of baby animals who are orphaned every year when homeowners evict their moms from their premises.

“If the orphaned animals are found quickly enough, they can be taken to a wildlife rehabilitation centre for care and eventual release... but many are found too late” said Gail Lenters, Founder of Shades of Hope Wildlife Refuge. “ALL the wildlife centres in Ontario will soon reach their capacity, and calls will keep coming in for months. This means rehabbers will struggle to keep up with the influx of babies and do their best not to turn any animal away due to overcrowding”.

This tragedy is not only devastating but entirely preventable. To help all the orphaned babies in need, eight leading Ontario-based wildlife centres, including Shades of Hope, have united in a powerful effort to raise awareness and educate homeowners on more responsible and effective ways to deal with wildlife on their property.

"Every wild animal plays an important role within the ecosystem, added Lenters. "Together, we are encouraging the public to view wild animals with compassion and understanding — and seek the most humane way to deal with those that are unwanted house guests."

The problem with trapping and relocation.

While the majority of individuals can grasp the barbaric nature of a kill trap, many people remain under the wrongful impression that live traps are a humane option. This is simply not the case. Live-trapped animals experience significant stress, often injuring themselves in attempts to escape the trap. They are also vulnerable to extreme temperatures and dehydration while waiting to be transported to another location. Some never make it.



If released, these displaced animals face even more challenges.

Often ripped away from their young, they are left in an unfamiliar environment struggling to find food and shelter. They may also encounter territorial disputes with other wildlife, adding more stress to an already traumatic experience.

To minimize the risks to survival and limit the potential for disease transmission, Ontario's Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act prohibits the relocation of animals more than one kilometre from their capture site. While this is intended to protect animals, ecosystems and humans, it is not fool proof. In fact, many species, have incredibly strong homing instincts and will likely return to their original territory, including to their young. As a result, legal relocation is frequently ineffective.

A more humane approach.

With these challenges in mind, it's important for homeowners to take a more humane and thoughtful approach to managing wild animals on their property.

As Debbie B., a Whitby resident, recalls: "We had no idea what to do when we found a nest of baby squirrels in our chimney. After speaking with Shades of Hope, we realized we could resolve the issue humanely, which was such a relief. It felt good knowing we weren't harming the animals."

Best practices approved by Ontario's wildlife rehabbers.



1. The gift of time.

If you are aware that the wildlife in your home has babies, the most humane approach is to allow her time to care for them until they are old enough to follow her out of the den on their own (typically around 8-10 weeks old). This prevents orphaning the babies and gives them the best chance at survival.

Important Note:

Before sealing any entry points ensure all babies have left. One way to determine this is to place a crumpled paper towel at the entrance to track movement. If the paper towel is disturbed, it likely means that an animal is still inside.

2. Discourage occupancy.

To encourage wild animals to leave on their own, experts recommend making the den unattractive for a nursing mom by incorporating various elements in or near the den, such as:

- Leaving a talk radio station playing (no music).
- Using a non-flammable light source in or near the den area.
- Introducing strong smells, like apple cider vinegar on rags placed in a plastic bag with holes.

Using all three methods together, with patience, will likely encourage the mother to move her babies to a new den. Since the majority of species have multiple den sites nearby, the transition can occur smoothly for both human and animal families.

If you'd like guidance on this process, contact Shades of Hope's animal care team at 705-437-4654. You can also visit www.shadesofhope.ca for additional information on living in harmony with wildlife.

3. Seek professional help if necessary.

If the situation becomes overwhelming, seek a reputable wildlife control company with expertise in wildlife biology and behaviour, especially during mating and breeding seasons. Their service should include:

- A thorough inspection and free estimate.
- Identifying entry points and locating the mother and her babies.
- Using humane techniques, like one-way doors to allow the mother to leave on her own.
- Gently removing the babies and placing them in a heated reunion box, where they can stay warm until the mother returns and takes her babies one by one to another safe den site.
- After the removal, and reuniting the animal family, the company should secure all entry points to prevent future stays and repair any damage caused by the animal.

We do not recommend companies that offer to “live trap” and/or “relocate”.
If in doubt, reach out: 705-437-4654.

4. Wildlife-proof your home.

To reduce the risk of future wild guests, homeowners should take proactive steps to wildlife-proof their homes. Basic steps would include:

- Removing food sources, secure trash bags and store them in secure bins.
- Sealing entry points, including the installation of chimney and vent covers.



Wildlife centres involved in this initiative:

- Aspen Valley Wildlife Sanctuary (Rosseau, Ontario)
- Hollys Haven Wildlife Rescue (Dunrobin, Ontario)
- Procyon Wildlife (Beeton, Ontario)
- Sandy Pines Wildlife Centre (Napanee, Ontario)
- Shades of Hope Wildlife Refuge (Pefferlaw, Ontario)
- Speaking for Wildlife (Orillia and Area, Ontario)
- Turtle Pond Wildlife Centre (Val Caron, Ontario)
- Woodlands Wildlife Sanctuary (Minden, Ontario)

About Shades of Hope Wildlife Refuge:

Passionate about protecting the future of our native species.

We are a registered Canadian wildlife charity dedicated to the rescue, rehabilitation, and release of wildlife.

With just under 7,000 sick, injured and orphaned wild animals coming to us every year, we run one of Ontario's busiest rehabilitation centres.

On any given day, our vets will be performing life-saving surgeries while our staff and volunteers will be caring for hundreds of animals in need.

At SOH, we believe no wild animal should be kept in captivity – so, if despite our every effort, an animal cannot be returned to the wild to live a full and healthy life, we will afford that animal the dignity of a peaceful and pain-free passing in a warm and comfortable environment.

As we receive no provincial or federal funding, our supporters are the reason we can make all this happen.

For additional information, or to request an interview, please contact:

Allison Taylor; Communications, Shades of Hope Wildlife Refuge

Tel: 705-437-4654. Cel: 416-505-5415

Email: allison@shadesofhope.ca

