



**John F. Cameron:
October 1925 - February 2006**

John remained active with the Friends until his death. He chaired our Executive Committee held at the Visitor Center on February 7, 2006 and the Communication Committee a week earlier. He made a quoted statement to the *Ottawa Citizen* on behalf of the Friends on February 8. He was a key contributor to setting our course of action for the current year and had aspirations for the years ahead. He cross-country skied in the Park (his favorite outdoor sport) during the week of his passing.

Recognition: The Friends' Research Forum and Annual Grant(s) was named in the honor of John and co-founder Jean Marc Purenne in 2006.

John was a nominee for the Canadian Environment Award - 2005 under the achievement category: Environmental Learning.

In 1999, in standing for election to the Friends' first Board of Directors, John said "I have hiked and skied in Gatineau Park, and studied its natural history for over thirty years. I am a retired communications manager and advisor, having served with Environment Canada for 20 years. I did similar work for two major corporations, after employment as a reporter for the *Toronto Star*. Besides serving on the committee that organized the effort to establish Friends of Gatineau Park, I bring nine years' experience working as a volunteer with the Canadian Museum of Nature's school program and a similar amount of time working with the Ottawa-Carleton chapter of the Multiple Sclerosis Society. I am a member of the Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club and Rideau Trail Association."

In November 2001, John spoke of his motivation and vision for the Friends's organization with *Peace and Environment News*. He said: "In 1997, I began exploring the idea of a group *Friends of Gatineau Park* along with Anneke Schwarz of Ottawa and Jean-Marc Purenne of Hull. That October, working with Park Managers, we staged an information meeting attended by seventy-five people at the O'Brien House overlooking Meech Lake. One of our key speakers was Claude Cousineau, a

director of the Friends of Algonquin Park. Claude later played a major role in bringing Friends of Gatineau Park into being."

"I was attracted to the idea of creating such an organization because of my long experience and enjoyment of the Park, and my volunteer work with the educational program of the Canadian Museum of Nature. During the years that I worked with children in this program, I thought how marvelous it would be if the Park's resources could be used in this way, not only for young children, but also to help adult visitors learn more about the Park's fascinating qualities."

John concluded this article by saying "My hope for the Friends of Gatineau Park is that it will become successful in gaining public support to provide volunteers and financing for many worthwhile interpretive projects in the Park". John lived to see these hopes realized in today's many and varied educational programs offered by the Friends, frequently in partnership with the staff of his beloved Park. To his last days, John remained confident that others would take up and expand this vision. A justified confidence in others' doing so is indeed John's legacy.

The family has requested that condolences and in memoriam donations be made through the Friends of Gatineau Park. You can do so by mail or on-line via our website.

Reflections on John's association with the Friends of Gatineau Park

- Founding member: 1997
- Member of the Provisional Board of Directors: 1998
- Member of the Board of Directors: 1999-2006
- Executive Committee: Vice President 2001-2004
- Executive Committee: President 2004-2006
- Communications Committee: Chair 2000-2006

Food for Thought

by Justin Peter, Interpretive Naturalist, Gatineau Park

It is not everyday that lunch is a nail-biter. However, if you had stopped by the Visitor Centre this past winter, you might have had the opportunity to witness a timeless natural drama that could have changed mealtime ambiance quickly.

This is the story of a brief encounter that changed the course of lunch in Gatineau Park...

On Monday, February 6, around 12:30 p.m., I went to eat my lunch in the King Room at the Visitor Centre. This public dining room is a great place to have lunch indoors during the winter, as it affords a nice view of two large bird feeders that are maintained during the cold months. One of these feeders is next to the building not far from the King Room windows, while the other is across the open field near the parking lot. In addition to squirrels, one can regularly see many different bird species at the feeders: chickadees; nuthatches; blue jays; hairy woodpeckers; mourning doves, American goldfinches...the occasional mallard duck too!

My favourite of all of the common feeder birds is the Mourning Dove, its delicate beige plumage contrasting softly with the morose winter sky, accentuating the bird's reputed gentle disposition. As luck would have it, a number of these doves were streaming in towards the feeders just as I was sitting down at a table. Not wanting to miss a moment of seeing the dozen or so doves around the closer feeder work out their pecking order, I proceeded to put together my egg salad sandwich as quickly as possible. The doves went about gorging on sunflower seeds, some directly on the feeder, while others fed on spilled seed on the ground below. For a few minutes, everyone ate in peace. "This is bliss", I thought to myself.

But that all changed very suddenly. In a burst of speed, all of the doves at and around this feeder took off, in various directions. Perplexed, I dropped my sandwich and tried to see what was going on. Several doves flew across the open field and alighted in the high treetops near the other large bird feeder. All appeared distinctly upright, with their feathers held flush against their



photo: Justin Peter

bodies and their necks stretched out. "Something's definitely not right", I thought. I looked back at the feeder. "There's nothing there...what could be the bother?" I looked again and squinted. In the background, I could see a fuzzy, dark-and-light object moving quickly through the air towards the feeder (and me!). Could it be...? Why yes, it was a **Cooper's hawk!**

A venerable raptor about the size of an average gull, the Cooper's Hawk has been known to frequent bird feeders during the winter in search of prey. With its characteristic stiff and irregular wing beats, this Cooper's hawk cut through the air and aimed straight at the feeder! Yet there were no birds there, the doves and others all having been alerted.

At that moment, it looked like the hawk had made a serious miscalculation. Undaunted, the hawk swept past the feeder (and the window) at high speed, rising suddenly in the air, and looking as though it was now aiming for those alert doves up in the treetops near the other feeder.

"There's NO way the hawk can get one of them!" I said to myself as I hurriedly stood up and gawked in disbelief through the window. The hawk headed towards them nevertheless. As I expected, the doves promptly took off.

Then suddenly, the hawk dove down towards the ground. There was *still* a mourning dove *on the ground*, under the other feeder!

"What?!" I blurted aloud. In a split-second, this dove took flight, but it was not one metre above the ground when the hawk was already right behind it. One lash, and a second, and a third...the hawk tried to grab at the dove's body with its sharp talons as they flew parallel to the ground. I was overwhelmed at this point! "It's over!" I exclaimed.

Just then, as though through sheer determination, the dove somehow managed to break away from the hawk and sped off into the sky. "Cool!" I thought. Feeling good for the dove, and bad for the exhausted hawk, I rushed outside without a coat to examine the scene. The unsuccessful hawk had just perched in the tall basswood by the parking lot. As I approached, the usually unwary Cooper's hawk took off and flew out of

sight up Chelsea Creek, as chickadees let out their warning calls from their safe hiding spots.

“Wow!” With my appetite for lunch now completely gone, I proceeded with a *post mortem* of the attack as I ponderously returned indoors. “Why, when all the other doves were obviously alert to the hawk, did one remain on the ground? And just how did it manage to get away when the hawk was obviously grabbing at it?” There is likely no single answer, but a closer look may hint at how predator and prey could be connected in ways that go beyond what we can only glimpse on the surface.

Anecdotally at least, mourning doves are considered a favourite prey item of Cooper’s hawks, birders even jokingly referring to doves as “Cooper’s Hawk food”. Some backyard birdwatchers report whole flocks of visiting mourning doves being depleted by a single Cooper’s hawk over a single winter. At the same time, mourning doves are also known as a manoeuvrable and exceptionally fast bird, reaching cruising speeds of 65 to 90 km/hr in the open sky, making them able to outpace almost any potential aerial predator. Here’s the catch though: doves sitting on or near the ground are considered slow at gaining altitude when initially taking to the air. They also stay in the open and will not head for the closest dense shrubbery, as other smaller birds will do in the case of danger. Thus, when near the ground, a dove may be very vulnerable to aerial predators, particularly those who, like the Cooper’s hawk, typically rely on a surprise attack to catch their prey.

That still does not answer the questions though. Why did that one stay on the ground for so long? Here is one possibility: mourning doves have the strange habit of *napping* on or around bird feeders after they have stuffed themselves full of seed, rather than returning to shelter immediately like most other feeder birds. A hawk may have only to look at the right spot to find one. Furthermore, while many birds actively communicate the presence of danger to each other using alarm calls, doves have virtually no such calls, seeming to rely more on direct visual contact with a predator or the close physical presence of another, alerted dove. While in a tight group, those birds ignorant of a danger may ‘pick up’ on it when they see a nearby alerted dove flee in fear. If apart from a tight group, a dove may not be aware immediately, and may have to see the predator with its own eyes to “believe” that there’s any danger at all. Our dove was possibly not in a good position!

So, how did it actually manage to break away from the hawk? It would seem that nature prepares for all eventualities. According to the literature, Mourning doves (and their relatives in the pigeon family) have feathers that are more loosely set and thus more easily

plucked than those of other birds. When in a high-speed aerial pursuit, a Cooper’s hawk may thus grab at the dove’s body repeatedly, only to get a claw-full of feathers.

Things happened so fast that day that we’ll never know exactly what did happen, and whether the hawk was eventually successful. In the grand scheme of things, though, doves will continue to escape from hawks, and hawks will continue to capture doves.

Were the Mourning Dove and Cooper’s Hawk* made for each other? Food for thought...

Mussels Monitored... in the Park!

Jean-Philippe Rbeault

Friends of the Gatineau Park already know we have access to a very unique conservation area. But did we know the Park is a giant lab for the study of mussels?

Each year since 2001, divers paddle in the Park’s lakes to monitor the growth and sprawling of native freshwater mussel biological meters. This way, researchers from the Ecological Monitoring and Assessment Network (EMAN) find valuable data on environmental changes happening in the ecosystem, like invading species such as bass or eutrophication.

In order to study mussels, researchers and students pick specific spots and snorkel near the shores. They have identified a hundred sites in five years in Meech, La Pêche and Philippe lakes. Species have nice scientific names like the Eastern Elliptio (*Elliptio complanata*), the Giant Floater (*Pyganodon grandis*) and the Triangle Floater (*Alasmidonta undulata*), one that is considered vulnerable. They have not yet taken, but a lot of them can be found at the sou’ eastern end of Philippe Lake.

How do they manage to become regular citizens of the underwater world? «Larva hitchhike on fins and branchiae of fish!» explains André Martel, one of the researchers at our 2005 Research Forum. «Then they transform after a while into small mussels and detach themselves». The existence of fresh water mussels relates to factors such as the lake’s exposition to wind, available planktonic resources, the presence and variety of fish species.

In years to come, EMAN researchers will focus on



photo: E.M.A.N.

small and middle-range lakes less busy, in particular those without or with very few basses.



photo: Brian Jewitt

A Bittersweet Meeting

by *Guyline Carrière*

The thermometer read -20°C when I started my ski patrol shift. I paid particular attention to my equipment. The magnificent sunshine that sometimes comes with the bitter cold flooded the landscape with a reassuring presence.

On trail 50, along the banks of Lac Philippe, I noticed a strange brown mark on the ground. It looked like a small owl. Her face was in the snow, but she was still moving.

- “380 – Guyline calling the *roost*. I just found a small owl, I think. It is weak but still alive. What should I do?”

A conservation officer came over the airwaves.

- “Can you bring her in?”
- “That would be difficult. My first aid kit takes up all the room in my backpack. Give me five minutes and I will call you back.”

I looked at the owl more closely. She had frost around her big brown eyes. I had to find a way to bring her with me. I took the first aid kit out of my bag. I realized that I could tie it around my waist and let my backpack sit on top of it.

Then I had to figure out how to get the owl INTO the bag. I talked to her, told her not to worry. I approached her, put the bag down beside her and opened my mittened hands. She moved a little. I said to her, “I am afraid of you, you know.”

Then I noticed my sleeping pad attached to my backpack. There was the solution! I took the pad, unrolled it and slid it under my new friend. It rolled up

naturally around her, protecting her from the cold. Gently I put her into the bag. She relaxed. I looked her in the eyes. A calm look, unafraid. As if she were saying to me, “Gently, very gently, it’s OK.”

- “380 – Guyline calling the conservation officers. I have managed to get her into my bag and am making my way to P17.”

With the swaying as I climbed and the vibration as I descended, I kept telling myself that the chances of her surviving were slim twelve kilometers further, and I handed my precious bundle to the conservation officers. One of them, Marc, opened the bag. She was alive!

It’s a barred owl,” he said. He explained to me that they were going to keep her in a heated kennel and would release her when she was better. I made sure that they would give me news of my precious friend, then left.

This morning I received an email. The news was not good. My little friend had not survived. Some meetings leave their mark on our hearts, like tattoos on our skin. That this barred owl chose my backpack to make her final journey makes me feel like a privileged human being. I will never forget her look that told me, “Gently, very gently, it’s OK.”

Free Nature Programs at the Visitor Centre

The Gatineau Park’s nature walks are back this spring! Beginning in the Lynx Room with a short introduction and demonstration, participants can then follow an experienced naturalist onto the Sugarbush Trail for a closer look at various aspects of the Park’s nature. Programs usually last from 1.5 – 2 hours. Don’t miss this free educational opportunity! And tell a friend! Here are the programs and dates:

Spring Wildflowers: May 7, May 14, May 21

Birding in Gatineau Park: May 28, June 4, June 11, June 18

For more information, call the Visitor Centre at (819) 820-2020 or 1-800-465-1867 or visit the Park’s website (www.canadacapital.ca/gatineau), click on ‘Nature’.

The Friends of the Gatineau Park is a registered charity dedicated to offering activities and literature that enhance public appreciation and enjoyment of the heritage of the Park.

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