

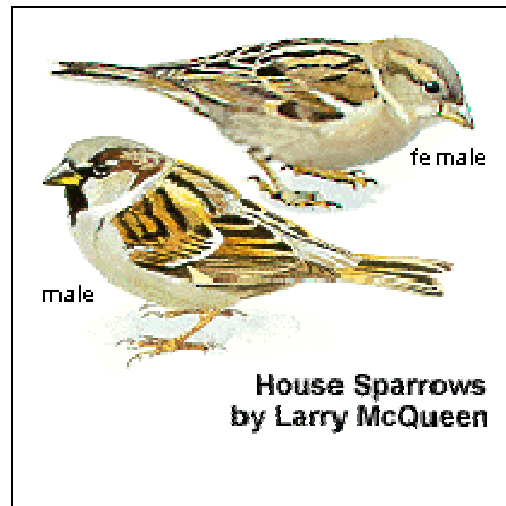
Urban Wildlife Issues
Wildlife Rescue column by Nicky Fried
as appearing in the *Burnaby NOW*

House Sparrows

It would have been a horrible way to die.

Last week two house sparrows; a male and female were brought to the Wildlife Rescue Association of BC (WRA). The small birds were both stuck fast and flat to a sticky mousetrap.

Thank goodness our Care Centre staff members were able to remove them. However, they had to use an oil based product to get them off the mouse trap. The oil is detrimental to bird's feathers and ruins waterproofing. As a result the birds needed a special bath to remove the oil. A heart wrenching experience, particularly for the terrified bird.



We tend to think a sticky mousetrap is more humane than a traditional “snap trap”, but this is not really the case. With the sticky trap, which is fairly common, the mouse will slowly starve to death. In this instance the trap caught something it had not intended to; two little songbirds.

In the past we have had chickadees, bush tits and sparrows (any bird that climbs a tree looking for insects) held fast by fly paper around trees. Accidental victims. If the bird is able to free itself its feathers may be damaged and it's waterproofing compromised, in which case it is doomed. If it is not able to free itself, than it is condemned to a slow death. Unless a kind passerby helps out and takes it to a rehabilitation centre.

We have also received birds who have encountered a product used to deter pigeons and gulls from making their home on building ledges. The product is laid on the ledge, the birds dislike the sticky feel of the product on their feet, and will most often fly away. Unfortunately they have a tendency to get their feathers stuck in it and you guessed it – they lose feathers and waterproofing.

There are alternatives. Check out humane mousetraps. There are two types depending on your needs; one captures the animal safely so that you can release it elsewhere and the other kills quickly. To keep gulls and pigeons off building ledges, try soft rubber

spikes, available at some hardware stores. I'm not quite sure what to do about trees with fly paper on them, perhaps a mesh over the fly paper would keep the birds out.

I seem to have spent a great deal of time talking about gloomy events. However there is a great deal of happy activity out in the wild world at this time of year.

Last weekend our family had a very privileged hummingbird encounter. It's been three years since last we saw hummingbirds this close. The children, who were seven and eleven at the time, were disappointed because the reality wasn't anything like the TV commercial. Also, it was later in the summer and the rather more attractive males had already left for Mexico.

This past weekend we made a trip to Harrison Hot Springs and had a wonderful and prolonged view of about seven hummingbirds around a feeder; males and females. The birds were very likely the more common Rufous hummingbird.

The hummingbird is a symbol of love, beauty and intelligence in Native culture. It is referred to as "Sah Sen" and it's a positive sign to see a hummingbird before a major event or when traveling. Seeing those glorious birds in action certainly made us appreciate our weekend away.

Everything about the Hummingbird is fascinating. If I wanted to be concise I could say the hummingbird is small and active. That is a dreadful understatement.

The hummingbird is a powerhouse. Hummingbirds have such a fast metabolism that they must go into semi-hibernation every night to allow them to sleep. They have to feed every ten minutes during the day. Their hearts beat at around 1,260 beats a minute during the day and slows to 50 beats per minute during the night. Just to give you some perspective the raven's daytime heart beat is 342 beats per minute and the turkey's is 93 beats per minute.

Normal flight speed for a hummer is around 45 kilometers per hour, but they can dive at speeds of close to 100 kilometers per hour.

Hummingbirds have split tongues which they fold into tubes when feeding. They eat both nectar and small insects found near the nectar.

The hummingbird is tiny. Nests average 1 ½ inches in diameter; a penny will almost fill the inside of the nest. And yet despite their tiny size, they are great travelers.

A hummingbird sighting is indeed lucky and reminds of just how marvelous nature is.

Nicky Fried writes for the Wildlife Rescue Association of BC located at 5216 Glencarin Drive on Burnaby Lake. The Wildlife Rescue Association cares for injured, orphaned and pollution damaged wildlife. If you have an animal in distress call the WRA at 604.526.7275.

