

2023 Mary Stuart Education Award: Patty McLaughlin

In recognition of outstanding achievements in the field of natural history education in the Ottawa Region.

This year the Mary Stuart Education Award goes to Patty McLaughlin, Education Program Manager, at the Ottawa Valley Wild Bird Care Centre (OVWBCC). The Mission of the OVWBCC is to provide care to injured, sick, or orphaned wild birds with the goal of releasing them back into their natural habitat... and to provide people of all ages an opportunity to learn about wild birds, their habitats and conservation.



Patty is an outstanding educator who has been with the OVWBCC for over 20 years, beginning as a 16-year-old volunteer caring for injured birds. She continued work as a summer and high school co-op student, and throughout her undergraduate degree in biology. In 2010, after completing her Master's in Biology at Carleton University, she returned on contract to the Centre. Whenever she could break away from bird care, she worked on creating the education program, starting with the Junior Avian Ambassador Program, which encourages and rewards small actions to help wild birds in backyards and communities.

In 2018, a Trillium Grant enabled Patty to focus on program development which now includes:

- a curriculum linked education outreach program for Kindergarten-Grade 6 with presentations and teacher resources for each grade. It has been delivered to schools in Ottawa's three English area school boards;
- over 100 presentations delivered annually to schools, Scouts, Guides, daycares, City run summer day camps, and other independent summer camps;
- a Naturehood program in Ottawa offering after school programs in three "priority neighborhoods" focusing on how to appreciate and coexist with wild birds in our urban environment.



In addition to the formal education program, Patty is also responsible for presentations at: seniors / retirement homes, museums, local area field naturalist groups, and World Migratory Bird Day events. Behind the scenes, Patty creates the social media content for the OVBCC with fun-filled, educational bird stories used at events and in informational products such as:



- webinar chats hosted by Wild Birds Unlimited,
- the OVBCC yearly calendar and Baby Bird Posters,
 - “Fun Fact Fridays” on Facebook,
 - a feature on OWL TV,
 - an episode for TVO Kids “The Green Squad.”

Patty has a unique ability to communicate with all ages about the dangers facing wild birds (for example, window collisions, cats) and how we all can help minimize the numerous threats to their survival (such as proper feeding techniques, citizen science programs, etc.). Patty’s care and passion for wild birds is evident in every interaction she has with the public, from her emails to people concerned about an injured bird at the OVBCC, to the media events about the OVBCC work. Thanks to Patty, many more people – young and old – know how they can “Help Save Ottawa’s Birds”.

