

# Captain Otty's Log

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Distribution: Dick Atkinson, Robert Cosh



## President's Message

Robert Cosh

Happy New Year to you all! Otty Lake Association Board members and other volunteers have been busy on your behalf attending meetings of the Drummond/North Elmsley and Tay Valley Township councils and meetings of the Committees of the Whole, as well as the Lake Networking Group, Friends of the Tay Watershed, and other related organizations including local conservation authorities, the provincial Ministry of the Environment and Ministry of Natural Resource, and participating in various committees. If you have some spare time and are interested in getting involved, send us an e-mail and let us know.

Many thanks to our webmaster Rick Stojak for all the work he has been doing in maintaining our web site, and in switching our e-mail address from Sympatico to ola@ottylakeassociation.ca. Nice work Rick!

We have several activities planned for 2012. Look for information elsewhere in this newsletter and in future notices concerning the Shoreline Naturalization Planting Program, the 2012 Pitch-In Program, and many others. We are planning a mid-summer fun day again this year, under the heading of Capt'n Otty Day, with lots of fun for all ages, including a repetition of the pirate theme which has been so popular in the last couple of years.

We have another calendar planned with a new theme of flora and fauna around and on the lake, so please send photos. Also, historical photos with captions or a write-up are a welcome addition to the web site.



Photo: Lynne Stockless

If you have any suggestions or comments on OLA plans, activities or priorities, visit our web site at <http://www.ottylakeassociation.ca/>, click on "contact us", and e-mail us your thoughts. You can direct your e-mail to a particular Board member or to the Board in general.

Advice for Winter on the lake: If you venture onto the lake on foot, on skates, snowshoes, or cross country skis, remember that it can be very cold out there. Stay warm and dry. Some ice patches may appear wet, and look like surface melt, but they may indicate areas where spring water has melted the ice from underneath.

Capt'n Otty suggests that we stay close to shore and avoid all wet patches in Winter, and stay out of the water except in Summer!

Residents tell us they want Otty Lake to be a healthy lake, with safe swimming and safe drinking water for all. While warming ourselves in front of the fire while gazing out over the lake this Winter, we may at our leisure ponder the interrelation of rainfall, beavers and water levels; zebra mussels, aquatic vegetation, the

*Continued Page 2*

## In This Issue

President's Message.....	1
Lake Links.....	2
Notes and Comment.....	3
Day in the Life.....	4
Otty's Bass Fishery News....	5
Coyotes in the News.....	7
Membership.....	8

natural mineral content of the lake, and aging septic systems. Both Drummond/North Elmsley and Tay Valley Townships are contemplating mandatory septic re-inspection programs. Perhaps if we all exercise due diligence and follow recommended practices, we may help lower nutrient levels in the lake, which in turn may help reduce aquatic vegetation, and enhance the appearance, enjoyment and value of our waterfront properties.

A friend of Capt'n Otty overheard the following conversation some time last Fall:

First cottager: How did you cut your foot?

Second cottager: I stepped on a zebra mussel.

First cottager: Will you have a scar?

Second cottager: No thanks, I don't smoke.

Capt'n Otty suggests we stock up on water shoes during off-season sales.

Finally,

If you wish to pay your 2012 OLA dues,

please send your cheque for \$20 (or \$15 if you pay before 1 April 2012) to:

Otty Lake Association  
Box 20122, Perth Mews Mall  
Perth, ON, K7H 3M6  
Have a great 2012!



President Robert Cosh confers in Florida with Past President and long-serving Database Administrator Dick Atkinson  
Photo: Robert Cosh

## Lake Links 2011 Highlights Lake Capacity, Planning, and Development By Murray Hunt, Otty Lake Steward



On Saturday, October 29 2011, 160 participants gathered in Perth for the Lake Links workshop, which was by far the largest attendance for this annual event. The main draw for this level of interest was the focus on issues such as lake capacity assessment, lakeshore planning tools and lake development case studies.

In a widely anticipated presentation, Neil Hutchison of Hutchinson Environmental Sciences reviewed the application of the phosphorous model developed by the Ministry of the Environment as means of determining lake capacity. His main concern with the model is that it often predicts higher levels of phosphorous, than actually occur. For example, the model is based on the premise that the largest man-made contribution of nutrients to a lake is from normally functioning septic systems. The model assumes that all nutrients introduced into a septic tile bed within 100 metres from a lake will eventually reach the lake. However, current research indicates that a significant portion of these nutrients may be bound in the soil and not reach the lake.

Nonetheless, Neil recommends the use of the MOE phosphorous model as a first level of assessment. If that analysis shows that there may be an issue, then he recommends determining the "sensitivity" of the lake. This in effect is a measure of the degree to which the lake will react to additional nutrients.

Judi Brouse, the Director of Watershed Planning for the Muskoka Watershed Council followed Neil with a very interesting presentation explaining how this approach of "sensitivity analysis" has been used successfully to classify lakes in the Muskoka watershed. This classification of lakes is then used to determine how land development policies will be applied to individual lakes.

Judi is an Otty lake cottager. She was 13 when her parents purchased their family cottage on the Otty Lake South West Shore Road. One of her early memories was sitting in a canoe in the middle of Little Otty talking with her siblings and friends. It was not until some years later that she learned how well their voices carried across the enclosed waters of Little Otty.



Judi Brouse  
Photo: Murray Hunt

Bridget Dilauro and Matt Goodchild of the Centre for Sustainable Watersheds gave a very informative statistical presentation projecting development pressures on Eastern Ontario lakes. It shows that projected population growth is much lower in many rural counties such as Lanark compared to the growth in urban areas such as Ottawa and Toronto. However, the relatively low prices of local waterfront properties compared to areas north of Toronto may encourage the migration of retiring people. This and other factors will lead to a much larger proportion of seniors in these rural areas compared to large urban areas.

There were several other excellent presentations and I refer interested readers to the link [http://www.watersheds.ca/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=74&Itemid=95](http://www.watersheds.ca/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=74&Itemid=95) for this material.

The 2012 Lake Links Workshop will take place on Saturday, October 20 at the Perth Civitan. Please plan to attend if interested. It is always an interesting day.

## Notes and Comment

### *Our OLA E-Mail Address Has Changed*

The new address is [ola@ottylakeassociation.ca](mailto:ola@ottylakeassociation.ca). Please change your list of e-mail contacts.

### *You and the Snowshoe*

If you are looking for an inexpensive way for the family to get out and enjoy winter, here's your chance! Foley Mountain Conservation Area is offering half-day sessions for families to try out and learn snowshoeing. Snowshoeing is growing in popularity and is a sport the whole family can enjoy. It is easy to learn, relatively inexpensive, poses little risk of injury and is a great way get active during the cold winter months! The RVCA snowshoe clinics offer a fantastic opportunity for the family to strap on some shoes and test "drive" one of the oldest forms of transportation in Canada. Clinics will show simple snowshoeing techniques and how to dress for outdoor activities. They will also include a scenic, informative nature hike through the conservation area's trails with one of the RVCA's outdoor interpreters. The cost, which includes snowshoe rental, is \$15 per adult and \$10 per child or a family package of \$40 (five person family maximum).

Foley Mountain Clinics, Westport – Saturday, February 11, 2012- Session 1: 10:00 to 11:30 a.m. · Session 2: 1:30 to 3:00 p.m. · Contact Rebecca Whitman at 613-273-3255 or [rebecca.whitman@rvca.ca](mailto:rebecca.whitman@rvca.ca) to register or for more information. This program is being offered as part of the RVCA's Active • Outdoor • Life series. To learn about other Active • Outdoor • Life events, visit [www.rvca.ca](http://www.rvca.ca). Special thanks to the Rideau Lakes Environmental Foundation for their support of our winter programs. Your local Conservation Areas offers unforgettable visits to the beautiful Eastern Ontario wilderness. Enjoy the quiet and serenity of our snow-covered wilderness while snowshoeing at a conservation area near you.

### *New Well Water Testing Pickup/Dropoff Location*

Since 2000, when seven people died in the Walkerton tragedy, Ontario residents have been aware of the danger to health posed by E. coli bacteria in drinking water. The Walkerton deaths were caused by contamination of a water well.

Many Otty Lake property owners have regularly submitted water samples from their wells for testing, but until now they had to drive to Smiths Falls, the nearest place where samples could be dropped off. Recently a new location in Perth was established, both for picking up the water sampling bottles and dropping off the samples for testing by Public Health Ontario.

The new location is the office-supplies company The Office, at 11 Wilson St. East in Perth, Monday - Thursday, 09:00 - 17:30.

The Health Unit does not contact you if the test results are unsatisfactory: you must interpret them yourself. Your water is unsafe for drinking if either the total coliform count is greater than 5, or the E. coli count is greater than zero. Be safe - test your well water!

### *Record Sales of OLA Calendar*

482 Otty Lake calendars have been sold! What a great project to get out those important stewardship messages, involve Otty Lake photographers, and show off beautiful Otty Lake. A real three in one! Sincere thanks to Gail Read for all the work that she did in bringing this together.

The 2014 calendar theme will be flora and fauna around Otty Lake. Now is the time to start thinking about taking photos and setting them aside for the 2014 calendar!

### *Fishing Season Dates for Otty Lake*

The Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources has published the open season dates for fishing in Otty Lake. The bass season does not open until the fourth Saturday in June, and lasts until 30 November. If you see anyone fishing for bass before the opening date, please report them to MNR at 1-877-TIPS-MNR (847-7667). Illegal fishing before opening day destroys spawning bass which compromises the bass population.

Perch, sunfish and crappie may be fished all year.

You can see the full fishing regulations at [http://www.mnr.gov.on.ca/en/Business/LetsFish/Publication/STEL02\\_163615.html](http://www.mnr.gov.on.ca/en/Business/LetsFish/Publication/STEL02_163615.html), then click on Zone 18.

### *Pitch-In Week in 2012*

This year's Pitch-In Week is 23-30 April. During this week, volunteers clean garbage and debris from roadsides and ditches near Otty Lake. Plans for Otty Lake's Pitch-In aren't final yet, but please reserve some time to participate. We are looking for a coordinator and would appreciate your help. Please contact Robert Cosh at 613-267-5723 or [robertcosh@hotmail.com](mailto:robertcosh@hotmail.com).

### *Part-time Volunteers Needed for the Communications Committee*

Every year the OLA creates a Summer Information Package that is distributed by the Area Counsellors to everyone on Otty Lake. Otty Lake owners find the SIP helpful and look forward to its arrival each year. We need volunteers to assist the Board in preparing the package. Could YOU help? Please contact Robert Cosh at 613-267-5723 or [robertcosh@hotmail.com](mailto:robertcosh@hotmail.com).

### *OPP Presentations: Neighbourhood Watch and SafeGuard Ontario*

The annual meeting of lake associations with the OPP will be held at the Tay Valley Township offices on Harper Road at 09:00 Wednesday 21 March. Neighbourhood Watch is a partnership with local police, whereby community members can learn how to make their homes and businesses less inviting for opportunistic criminals, how to participate in other crime prevention programs and how to recognize and safely report suspicious activity in their neighbourhoods. SafeGuard Ontario provides property security reviews and ways of "target hardening" to discourage breaking and entering. If you would like to attend, please contact Karen Hunt at [mkhunt@ripnet.com](mailto:mkhunt@ripnet.com) so we can plan for the expected number of people.

# A Day In the Life of A Lake Steward

On an unsettled day in August, the sun and the rainclouds can't seem to decide who is boss, so they take turns warming and wetting the three people taking water samples in a small aluminum outboard boat on Otty Lake.

At the helm is Murray Hunt, OLA Lake Steward, who has been sampling Otty Lake water quality for seven years. He provides the boat, and assists the two Rideau Valley Conservation Authority (RVCA) staffers who have brought their scientific equipment from their Manotick headquarters. Kaitlin Brady, known to OLA members from her invertebrate displays at OLA Pirate Day, is a graduate of the Aquatic Resource Management program at St. Francis Xavier University. Funding for Kaitlin is part of an outreach program by the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters. Mike Arnott is a student in the same academic program at StFX, working as a summer RVCA employee.



*Murray and the Secchi disk  
Photo: Murray Hunt*

Today's work in the boat is sponsored by RVCA's Watershed Watch, which has been monitoring 39 lakes in the Rideau watershed using more sophisticated equipment than is available to the OLA. The crew are measuring dissolved oxygen/water temperature profiles, pH (a measure of how acidic the lake is), TP, nitrogen, calcium (a measure of how easily zebra mussels can grow in the lake), electrical conductivity (a measure of particulate density), and Secchi depth.

The oldest measuring device is the Secchi disk, named after Pietro Secchi, the Italian scientist who invented it in 1865. Murray lowers the brightly painted disc into the water, recording the depth at which the disc can no longer be seen. When few algae are present in the lake, such as in the spring and fall, the Secchi depth is greater because the algae don't obscure vision as much as in the month of July when they peak.

The Secchi disc also gives an indication of the depth of the thermocline, which is the depth where a snorkeler with good lung capacity discovers the colder water below the surface. The thermocline is more abrupt during the summer than in the winter, because in the autumn the water starts to mix (this phenomenon is called the "lake turnover"). If you are an exceptionally hardy swimmer, you would notice in October the cold water rises much closer to the surface. The seasonal mixing is important because it flushes out nutrients that otherwise would settle to the bottom.

One aspect of Otty Lake is that below the thermocline the amount of dissolved oxygen isn't sufficient to maintain fish life. Because juvenile lake trout live in the cold water below the thermocline, they can't survive in Otty. Bass, perch, and sunfish are happy in the warmer surface layers, so Otty supports large populations of those species.

At the place where McLaren Lake enters Mud Lake, Mike takes shallow measurements one metre below the surface with a high-tech device: a bottle fastened to a broomstick with duct tape. The sample bottle will be sent to a laboratory to establish E. coli, TP and nitrogen levels.



*Mike with Red Green equipment*

Later, at the deepest point of McLaren Lake, Kaitlin operates the YSI Environmental Monitoring equipment. She lowers its probe on a cable, then takes readings at each metre of depth. Murray records temperature and dissolved oxygen at each depth, and also the pH and conductivity at the bottom.

Another deep-water measurement uses a Van Dorn bottle, lowered on a rope. The Van Dorn bottle is a tube of 10-cm diameter with a spring-loaded cap held open at each end. When Mike drops a lead weight down the line, the weight releases the caps, which trap the water in the tube for later analysis.

At the mid-point of Otty Lake, the crew take a composite measurement at twice the Secchi depth, for TP, nitrogen, and calcium. Calcium levels are measured to determine the susceptibility of a lake to sustaining zebra mussels. A value of 20 milligrams/litre is considered the threshold. In Otty Lake the calcium level is 28 mg/litre due to limestone rock, so (unfortunately) the mussels thrive.



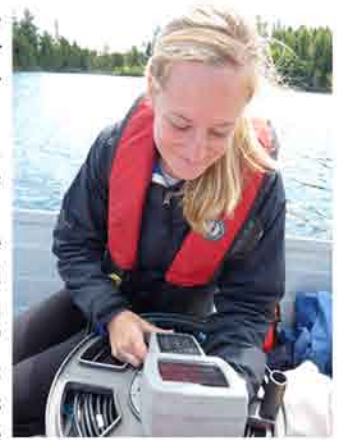
*The Van Dorn tube*

The crew also test for invasive species, using a zooplankton net whose contents are later examined under a microscope. Otty Lake is troubled by zebra mussels, but has not yet been invaded by spiny water fleas. Some people believe that zebra mussels have long ago been introduced into every local lake, but in fact Long Lake, to the south of Otty, was only recently affected. The moral is that boaters going from Otty to other lakes should take all precautions to avoid transferring zebra mussels out of Otty, remembering that zebra mussels can attach themselves to a boat within a day. When leaving Otty, boaters should either dry their boats for five days, or pressure-wash them away from the lake. Fishers should also avoid carrying bait buckets from one lake to another.

At the end of the day, the crew go ashore, pack their equipment, and send the samples to the laboratory. Their work adds to the large database that helps us to discover trends in Otty water quality, to compare Otty to other lakes, and to cooperate in planning and regulating to keep Otty Lake healthy.

RVCA, which operates Watershed Watch, is funded by municipalities that include Ottawa, Drummond/North Elmsley, and Tay Valley. RVCA's commitment to water quality testing with lake associations is a role model for conservation authorities.

Murray participates in several other water quality monitoring programs. He volunteers with the Lake Partner Program, through the Ontario Ministry of the Environment (MOE), to measure total phosphorus (TP) and water clarity on Otty with samples analyzed at MOE's laboratory. During each year, Murray takes 12 samples for TP under the Lake Partner Program. Sampling for TP has been carried out annually since 1996 and intermittently for decades before that. Also during the year Murray takes 30 E. coli samples at 10 locations specifically for the OLA. The OLA has been conducting this bacteria sampling since the early 1970's. Recent sampling results can be viewed at [www.ottylakeassociation.ca](http://www.ottylakeassociation.ca). Your annual OLA membership contributes funding to these studies which further our understanding of Otty Lake.



Kaitlin operating the YSI probe

## Bad News About Otty's Bass Fishery

By Wally Robins

For more than 20 years Otty's bass fishery has been in excellent condition. But, things have changed, and changed for the worse. Currently, there are clear signs that the bass population is in serious decline. Over the last four years, my records show a marked decline in the number of fully mature smallmouth bass being caught. This has been noted by other experienced anglers whose judgement I respect. Here's why.

Healthy fish populations require four fundamental things. Clean water and a sufficient supply of food are two essential ingredients. Otty Lake has both. But a fishery also requires protection during the annual spawn and responsible harvesting practices during the open season. Otty is sub-standard in these respects.

### Illegal Fishing

In Otty, bass start the spawning cycle in early to mid-May and stay on their nests until mid to late June. During this time both the female and male fish are extremely aggressive, attacking anything that intrudes on the spawning bed. As a result, bass are extremely vulnerable to angling.

Each year the bass season opens on the fourth Saturday in June. However, the pike season opens the second Saturday of May. Inevitably, some bass are inadvertently caught by people who are legitimately fishing for pike or panfish. Unfortunately, there are other individuals who do not respect the law and target bass during the spawn. Their ever-present excuse when confronted is that they are "fishing for pike." And, they add that they never keep a bass that they catch out of season.

So, why is this a problem? Here are some proven scientific facts that demonstrate how out of season fishing can devastate a bass population. These facts should be considered together to clearly understand their combined impact:

1. a three- pound female bass produces 5-7,000 eggs per pound of body weight, a total of between 15,000 and 21,000 eggs. Of this number, only two or three "baby bass" live to reach adult status. Adult fish are classified as fish of two pounds. This takes roughly 8-10 years!
2. female bass vacate the nest site shortly after they have deposited eggs, leaving the male fish to protect the young. If a male fish is away from the nest for more than 60 seconds, close to 90% of the fry will be lost to natural predation.
3. if the male is off the nest for more than 3 minutes, it will abandon the nest completely. One hundred percent of newly hatched bass will perish.

4. fry that survive until their first winter must be at least two inches long or they will die before the following spring.
5. only 1/3 of male smallmouth bass participate in the annual spawn. If a spawning male is killed or abandons a nest, it is not replaced by another male. Based on traditional area density of adult smallmouth in Ontario waters, there are roughly 400-500 smallmouth spawning nests on Otty Lake.

Note: All of the above scientific data applies to undisturbed, natural conditions where angling does not occur at any time during a calendar year. When we factor in the increased mortality of bass due to legal fishing, the numbers drop significantly.



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By Jean Kerr

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What can you do to protect bass during the spawn? First, be observant. Take note of anyone fishing on Otty before the fourth Saturday in June. Understand that the anglers may be legally fishing for pike or panfish but don't assume that's the case. If you think that you're witnessing illegal fishing for bass, jot down a description of the boat and its occupant(s) including boat colour, make and serial number if visible, the number and description of anglers, and the date and time that you saw the boat on Otty. Then, call The Ministry of Natural Resources TIPS toll-free hotline (1-877-847-7677) and report the potential offence. You do not have to identify yourself.

You can confront anglers who may be fishing out of season. Be polite, non-accusatory but firm. Get the message across that illegal angling is not tolerated on Otty and that violators will be reported. Let the angler(s) know that many pairs of eyes will be watching throughout the day. Take pictures of the boat and occupants and call MNR.

#### *Irresponsible Harvesting*

Virtually every fishery in Ontario can easily tolerate the selective harvesting of game fish. "Selective harvest" simply means keeping smaller specimens for the table while releasing mature, adult fish to propagate the species. For Otty Lake, this means releasing any bass that is two pounds or heavier. These are the geese that lay the golden eggs. Genetically, big fish produce offspring that grow big. Killing large bass guarantees a stunted population in the future, a fishery that has no benefit to anyone.

In Otty, and throughout Ontario, it takes a long time to grow a large bass. According to current scientific knowledge, a three- or four- pound bass is in its late teens at minimum. Generally, a five-pound bass has been swimming for a minimum of 20 years. From a health perspective, according to the Ontario Guide to Eating Game Fish publication, bass in Otty that are over roughly two pounds are not recommended for human consumption.

In my experience, the majority of anglers who fish bass on Otty practice selective harvest or complete catch-and-release. However, there are still individuals, some who live or cottage on the lake and others who visit for holidays or even for a day, who routinely kill adult bass. Anglers are allowed to keep up to six bass of any size daily, depending on their Ontario fishing licence. While their numbers may be in the minority and they are not breaking the law, this harvesting practice inflicts serious damage. Consider this scientifically proven fact. In Ontario waters, the average population distribution of adult smallmouth bass is two to three fish per acre. Otty is roughly 1,500 acres in size. That equates to between 3,000 and 4,500 mature smallmouth, the future of the fishery. Refer to the previous data specific to the annual spawn. Simple math will show that harvesting mature bass is a recipe for disaster.

Consider the following. What happens if 20 anglers kill 10 mature fish every year for the table? What if the numbers are pushed to 50 anglers? One hundred? What if this is an annual occurrence? Remember how long it takes to grow a three- or four-pound bass. Remember the survival rate of fry until they reach adult status.

#### *Why Should I Care? I Don't Fish.*

Here's why non-anglers with properties on Otty should be concerned about the declining bass fishery. On a broad scale, angling is a major contributor to local economies. Businesses such as restaurants, motels, and gas stations rely on anglers to patronize their establishments. Should Otty lose a viable bass fishery, both small and large businesses in Perth, Smiths Falls and other local communities would feel the impact. In the worst case, jobs would be lost and potentially, some smaller businesses could fold. The tax base could be reduced. As a result services to local residents could decline. On an individual level, property values on Otty would drop. Independent research studies conducted on behalf of the real estate industry in Canada and the United States conclusively demonstrate that any water system that loses a vibrant fishery results in reduced resale value of homes and cottages.

#### *In Conclusion*

Whether or not you are an ardent angler your lake is in jeopardy. The bass population cannot survive if illegal and irresponsible harvesting continue. Rebuilding a fish population takes 20-25 years at minimum. The age-old expression about "not knowing what you've got until it's gone" is within a 3-4 year time horizon unless the Otty Lake community takes action. Please get involved.....now!

### *Reserve Your 2012 Shoreline Naturalization Plants Now!*

*The OLA has again ordered plants that you can use for shoreline naturalization, but this year there is a twist: the plants are 50% subsidized by the OLA, so your price is only \$5.00 per plant! The order consists of:*

- 30 nannyberry*
- 30 red osier dogwood*
- 30 gray dogwood*
- 30 pussy willow*
- 30 sweet gale.*

*Each plant is supplied in a one-gallon pot. Species will be confirmed after winter survival.*

*Supply is limited, so reserve now! Please contact Karen Hunt at [mkhunt@ripnet.com](mailto:mkhunt@ripnet.com) or 613 264-9273. Pick-up will be during the first week in July.*

# Coyotes in the News

In January 2012, two coyote attacks were reported in Ontario. In the late afternoon of 3 January, Jennifer Steers was walking her small dog Spike off-leash by the Ottawa River, when a coyote came across the ice and carried Spike away. Ms. Steers thought that Spike had been killed and was surprised when he was found five hours later on her doorstep with ten puncture wounds on his neck, cold and bleeding, but alive.

On 19 January, eight-year old Julia Couto was playing in her backyard in Oakville, when a coyote jumped a chest-high fence and chased her into her house. The coyote had attempted to bite through Julia's snowsuit, breaking her skin and bruising her leg. Police later shot a coyote nearby, although they could not be certain that the coyote they shot was the one that attacked Julia. Apart from Julia's attack, two small dogs were attacked in the last week in the same neighbourhood. One of the pets died. Coyotes also have attacked sheep regularly in Lanark County. Sheep farmers Philip Jones on the Scotch Line, and Oliver Loten on Concession 1, have both lost sheep to coyotes. In 2008 Mr. Loten lost 21 lambs in three weeks, despite measures that later included electric fencing, a llama, and a guard dog.

One resident of Otty Lake recently filmed coyotes taking down a deer on the ice.

Clearly coyotes pose a problem when they attack children, livestock, and pets. But exactly what are coyotes, how did they come to the Otty Lake area, and how should people react to them?

## *What Is a Coyote?*

We see the eastern coyote around Otty Lake. This coyote is a hybrid between the smaller western coyote, which migrated to southeastern Ontario from the western provinces in the early 20th century, and the eastern wolf. The eastern coyote is bigger than its western cousin, with a stronger jaw, allowing it to attack larger prey. Adult eastern coyotes are 58-66 cm high and 81-100 cm long. Some people at Otty Lake have confused eastern coyotes with gray wolves, but the difference in weight is marked. Coyotes weigh 13-18 kg compared to a gray wolf's weight of 32-55 kg, and coyotes have thinner legs. Although wolves have occasionally been sighted at Otty Lake, coyotes are commoner.



Photo: Flickr.com

Coyote tracks consist of prints about 7 cm long and 5 cm wide, separated 20-41 cm when walking, with claw marks only on the centre two toes. Compared to the tracks of the red fox, coyote prints are approximately the same size, but fox claw marks are visible on all four toes. Unlike a dog's erratic tracks, coyote tracks tend to be straight and purposeful.

Coyotes often mate for life. Mated pairs usually breed in February, with pups born in April or May. Litters average five or six pups, but can range from two to 10. Both parents share pup-rearing duties, and begin to teach the pups hunting skills when the pups are eight to 10 weeks old. In some areas, coyotes can live eight to 12 years. In areas where they are hunted, or in populated areas like southern Ontario where vehicle collisions are common, the average life expectancy is less than five years.

## *The Coyote Lifestyle*

The coyote is one of the most adaptable animals in Ontario. In the country, coyotes are commonly found in open, agricultural land that includes woodlots and areas covered with brush. In cities, coyotes prefer natural green space, such as parks, ravines and stream banks. Coyotes are territorial, their territory ranging from a few square kilometres where food is abundant such as suburban areas, to more than 100 square kilometres where food is scarce.

Coyotes are opportunistic feeders and will consume a variety of foods, including meat, carrion, fruit and vegetables. They play an important role as a predator in southern Ontario, helping to control the populations of rabbits, rats and mice. In winter, their diet consists mainly of rabbits, hares and deer when the snow is so deep that the deer's mobility is restricted. In spring, summer and fall, coyotes prey mainly on small mammals (foxes, rodents, rabbits, mice and voles) and eat wild berries, birds, amphibians, grasshoppers and deer fawns.

## *How Do People Regard Coyotes?*

Most people don't see coyotes because in their natural state they are wary of humans and often nocturnal. Instead, coyotes make their presence known by their yips, barks, and howls at night. Sometimes people will mistake a coyote pack for a wolf pack (usually the pack is a mated pair with their offspring, rather than the larger pack adopted by wolves), but the coyote does more barking and yipping than the wolf. The howl of either animal can make the hair stand up on the back of your neck.

For some people who grew up with fairy tales from the Brothers Grimm, the image of the wolf is fierce and fearsome, but the coyote has a different persona. In First Nations traditional stories, the coyote is the trickster and the clown, who also had the power to transform himself into different physical forms.

Today people are more likely to think of coyotes as a nuisance, or in some cases, as a threat to children and small pets. One coyote aspect that should not be a concern is whether coyotes carry rabies. The last case of coyote-borne rabies in southeastern Ontario was reported in 1993.

## How Do You Discourage Coyotes?

Coyotes play a role in our ecosystem, so exterminating them would not be wise. In any case, coyotes have demonstrated their adaptability by increasing their birth rates when bounties were paid to kill them, such as in Nova Scotia 1982-86, although Nova Scotia re-instituted a bounty in 2010 after a fatal coyote attack in 2009. No other method seems to have been effective, either.

The solution appears to be measures to discourage coyotes from coming near humans and losing their natural fear. Coyotes displaying no fear of humans or exhibiting aggressive behaviours have likely been habituated to people through direct or indirect feeding. Coyote assaults will only escalate, wildlife officials tell us, because these opportunistic feeders learn to associate humans with easy meals.

To ensure that we don't provide smorgasbords for coyotes, we can take the same measures that we use to avoid attracting bears:

- secure garbage and compost
- fence gardens
- keep small pets indoors
- never, ever feed wildlife: deer, bears, or coyotes.

## What If You Meet an Aggressive Coyote?

Some pointers from the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources:

- never approach or touch a coyote.
- do not turn your back on, or run from, a coyote.
- back away from the coyote while remaining calm.
- stand tall, wave your hands and make lots of noise.
- carry a flashlight at night to scare off coyotes.
- if a coyote poses an immediate threat or danger to public safety, call 911.

## The Bottom Line

"Coyotes, it has been said, will still be on Earth long after humans are gone," said Scott Smithers, a biologist with the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources. "There will be nothing but coyotes and cockroaches. (Coyotes) are extremely adaptable animals. They can live in habitats that are in close proximity to humans."

So we are going to be living with coyotes. Let's ensure that we keep them at their distance by making sure that we don't teach coyotes that we are a source of easy meals.

Sources: Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources / Canadian Broadcasting Corporation / Ottawa Citizen / Stanley Park Ecology Society / Animal Tracks of Ontario, Ian Sheldon / Coyote: Seeking the Hunter in Our Midst, Catherine Reid

## Renewing Your OLA Membership!

By Phil Anderson, Membership Chair

For those who renewed their memberships last year, thank you, and welcome to all our new members. Our year runs from January 1 to December 31. If you pay your membership before 1 April you receive a \$5.00 discount! Tick it off your To-Do list today!

Please talk to your cottage neighbours and encourage them to join our association. The more members we have, the more we can do together, from checking water quality and participating in BioBlitz, to having fun at Captain Otty/Pirate Day.

Please show your continued support for the work of the OLA by sending your \$20 annual membership fee (\$15 if you pay before 1 April!) to:

Otty Lake Association  
Box 20122  
Perth, ON, Canada  
K7H 3M6

Just fill in the form below and pop it in the envelope with your cheque. Also this is a good way to mention concerns or respond to any questions the OLA may have posed to members.

### MEMBERSHIP FEE FORM

Please support the work of your lake association by mailing your cheque for \$20.00 (\$15.00 if paid before 1 April) to:  
Otty Lake Association  
Box 20122  
Perth, ON, Canada  
K7H 3M6

Name..... Lake address.....  
Mailing address.....  
City..... Prov./State..... Postal Code or ZIP.....  
E-mail address.....

Please check your preferred delivery method for Captain Otty's Log:

- Canada Post
- e-mail
- the Log by Canada Post, and updates by e-mail.

The Board would very much like to hear from you, especially your concerns, ideas, suggestions, top-priority interests, lake management, projects and activities. Please take a few minutes and let us know.

Are you interested in volunteering? We always need volunteers and would like to have you join the team. Please speak to any of the Board members.

Thank you!