

Youth making effort to save local wildlife

There's a laptop on a round table sandwiched next to the kitchen, everything prepped carefully for my arrival. Matthew Flegault, it would appear, is one well organized 10-year old - he's clicking on to photographs he knows so well they're almost memorized.

A certificate slides across, verifying he has indeed adopted one young eagle (an asked-for Christmas present) injured faraway in the Northwest Territories when very young. It's part, he tells me, of services offered by WestJet transporting injured wildlife to the Madden facilities of the Alberta Institute for Wildlife Conservation (AIWC).

He pushes another image across, of a big-eyed downy fluffed sort of bird with enormous yellow feet that eagles apparently grow into. The whole history, he tells me, is on their Facebook page.

"When I was young," he remembers, "I tried to become a bird. I must have face-planted over 30 times!"

He describes his family driving to Vancouver, walking beaches and collecting feathers strewn along the shoreline. He remembers visiting AIWC's rescue facilities, "touring where the mice are, seeing old



Pam Asheton
Listening to the Land

x-rays, owls flying overhead and even hearing them hooting in the rehabilitation flying enclosure."

He recalls a bobcat hiding with one eye only just visible, a prairie falcon and relishes its incredible stealth speed swoop detail and describes a whooping crane who just looked at us.

"Every (animal) counts," remarks AIWC's Executive Director Holly Duvall. "Every animal plays a role in our eco-system. Adopting an animal is a great way for people to connect. We had 259 adoptions in 2014. As a non-profit that solely relies on donations to operate, we are always in need of funding. Currently we are over-wintering a Bald Eagle and Golden Eagle - the cost to just feed them each month is \$450!"

AIWC's education program focuses on variety and include

What's in your backyard?, Birds of Prey, Wetlands Wildlife, Migration and Supremely Skunks. School presentations typically run for an hour and include an introduction to one of the 'ambassadors of the day - Gulliver, one super charismatic striped skunk - or Griffin, a red-tailed hawk. Wild birds, easily stressed, onsite often get viewed by closed circuit television cameras, helped in part by grant monies from the Cochrane Foundation.

Matthew's family subscribe to their monthly newspaper - and where he first read about helping by adopting an animal. He and his family have fundraised, collecting bottles. He wants to volunteer, although that'll be a few years yet until he's well into his teens (because of liability issues that face many such facilities these days).

His older sister Ariane busks summertime at Bearspaw Farmers Market; the money goes towards buying towels and similar, useful items - all three siblings collect branches that will be used in rehab cages for natural perch settings.

Listening to them as they wander in and out, Matthew chatting away, makes me wonder how typi-



Ariane (left), Matthew, and Anthony Legault examine baby crows waiting to be manually fed in the incubator.

cal, representative of young people these days these three are - they've even noticed a housing development up the road has made local foxes move out, before exclaiming about a real experience with a barn

owl. That Matthew values that adoption certificate, will remember his Christmas present, is just so obvious.

sunwired@hotmail.com



A porcupine enchants young people during an educational outing to the Alberta Institute for Wildlife Conservation (AIWC).