1
00:00:06,970 --> 00:00:16,730
Hello and welcome to this episode of Capital Stories, a podcast we are doing this year as the NCC celebrates its 125th anniversary.

2
00:00:17,370 --> 00:00:23,850
And I'm here this morning with Alex Stone, who's a biologist at the NCC working on Ontario lands.

3
00:00:24,050 --> 00:00:37,040
And Alex is going to talk to us today a little bit about the Greenbelt, where we're sitting right now on the eastern edge in Mer Bleue Bog, which is a very important part of the NCC's Greenbelt.

4
00:00:37,520 --> 00:00:44,400
But before we talk specifically about the Mer Bleue Bog, Alex, it might be good to situate ourselves.

5
00:00:44,400 --> 00:01:06,320
So the NCC Greenbelt, over 200 square kilometres of important lands, agricultural conservation, initially started at the encouragement of Jacques Gréber, who, as we've talked about in other episodes, in the 1950s, developed a master plan for the National Capital Region, which encouraged the creation of the Greenbelt.

6
00:01:06,960 --> 00:01:16,200
And Alex, I guess it's fair to say that on the one hand, the Greenbelt has very much succeeded as an area of extraordinary biological diversity.

7
00:01:17,400 --> 00:01:24,960
On the other hand, some urban planners might say it did not succeed in limiting urban growth to inside the Greenbelt.

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00:01:25,400 --> 00:01:29,800
Jacques Gréber, I think, anticipated a population of Ottawa of about 500,000.

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00:01:30,120 --> 00:01:31,320
We've almost doubled that.

10
00:01:31,680 --> 00:01:42,160
And of course, development has now leapfrogged the Greenbelt and we have, I think, an equal number of people in the city of Ottawa living outside the Greenbelt as inside.

11
00:01:42,960 --> 00:01:51,520
But, that being as it is, we're here to talk about the wonder and the incredible majesty of the Greenbelt.

12
00:01:52,080 --> 00:02:00,480
And I guess what would be interesting to hear from you, Alex — is a little bit — we're going to go from the 1950s back a couple thousand years.

13
00:02:00,960 --> 00:02:06,280
So tell us a little bit about how some of these spaces came to be.

14
00:02:06,280 --> 00:02:11,560
What is the geological history of this area that you think people would want to understand?

15
00:02:12,800 --> 00:02:17,840
I think the geological history of Ottawa is fascinating.

16
00:02:17,840 --> 00:02:23,680
We have so many different things that happened from 1.6 billion years ago to today.

17
00:02:24,840 --> 00:02:30,760
Back 1.6 billion years ago, this area was covered by Himalaya-sized mountains.

18
00:02:30,840 --> 00:02:30,960
Wow.

19
00:02:31,480 --> 00:02:41,280
So we can see those remnants in the Carp Hills and Gatineau Hills as erosion wore them down to just the hills they are today.

20
00:02:42,240 --> 00:02:46,080
These are formed from igneous and metamorphic rocks.

21
00:02:46,440 --> 00:02:56,160
And, you know, fast forwarding, you know, about 500 million years, we see that there was a tropical ocean here.

22
00:02:56,440 --> 00:03:08,040

So all the sea creatures that were here 565 million years ago formed the sandstone and the limestone that we see today.

23
00:03:08,400 --> 00:03:15,920
So in the shallow channels where the tropical creatures used to live, we see more sandstone.

24
00:03:15,920 --> 00:03:18,400
And then in the deeper channels there was dolomite.

25
00:03:18,760 --> 00:03:25,160
And these forms, you can even see in the Greenbelt today at P5 at the Old Quarry Trail where there's actually a geological trail.

26
00:03:25,160 --> 00:03:38,400
So you can follow the history. Fast forwarding to about 165 million years ago, tectonic plates kind of shifted and pushed apart the Gatineau Hills from the Carp Hills.

27
00:03:38,760 --> 00:03:42,240
So, there was a big trench that was formed, and that's what we call the Ottawa Valley.

28
00:03:43,440 --> 00:04:01,880
So, fast forwarding again to fairly recent history, about 1.6 million years ago, to 15,000 years ago, there was a series of ice ages that happened, which depressed the earth down 220 metres below where we currently sit.

29
00:04:02,080 --> 00:04:02,200
Wow.

30
00:04:03,040 --> 00:04:08,280
And the 10 kilometres of ice that was over top of us depressed the ground.

31
00:04:08,720 --> 00:04:15,800
And about 15,000 years ago, when the ice sheets retreated, the Atlantic Ocean started coming in from the east.

32
00:04:16,040 --> 00:04:16,400
Right.

33

00:04:16,840 --> 00:04:24,080
And so that the Atlantic Ocean had whales, it had all kinds of things come through the Ottawa Valley.

34
00:04:24,360 --> 00:04:31,400
But as the land rebounded, the ocean moved further east towards the Maritimes.

35
00:04:31,560 --> 00:04:43,000
So the reason why we had the recession of the sea at that point is because the ground is slowly lifting, recovering from the pressure of all of this ice on it for so many millions of years.

36
00:04:43,160 --> 00:04:43,760
Exactly.

37
00:04:44,160 --> 00:04:44,840
That's interesting.

38
00:04:45,240 --> 00:04:59,640
And with regard to this aquatic history of the region, are there examples of… do we have fossils of some of those species like whales that have been here in the area?

39
00:05:00,480 --> 00:05:13,520
I would say from the tropical ocean 565 million years ago, there certainly are fossils of that area even 3.6 billion years ago, when the stromatolites were here.

40
00:05:13,800 --> 00:05:16,040
They're kind of the ancient cyanobacteria.

41
00:05:16,360 --> 00:05:20,280
You can even see some of them at Hogs back area and Shirleys Bay too.

42
00:05:20,320 --> 00:05:28,320
So there's a nice fossil record in in the Greenbelt, and some people even find shells, fossil shells, in Jack Pine Trail for instance.

43
00:05:28,320 --> 00:05:28,760
Wow.

44
00:05:29,560 --> 00:05:40,680

I remember when I first went to Pinhey Dunes, I think it was with you Alex, and you explained to me that all of that sand we see there are remnants of almost beach-like…

45
00:05:40,680 --> 00:05:42,280
Is that a good way of saying it?

46
00:05:42,400 --> 00:05:43,160
Yeah, yeah, yeah.

47
00:05:43,160 --> 00:05:51,240
So the kind of, how things formed with the Atlantic Ocean coming in that dropped kind of our leda clay that we see, see here today.

48
00:05:51,560 --> 00:06:05,680
And then we have the Lake Agassiz back in 10,000 years ago, it started moving freshwater through the Ottawa Valley and into the ocean, which is kind of what we call the Ottawa River today.

49
00:06:06,000 --> 00:06:20,400
So the Ottawa River formed these sand channels and sand banks, and as time passes and the river gets smaller and smaller, the wind actually picked up the sand and actually deposited that at the Pinhey Sand Dunes.

50
00:06:20,840 --> 00:06:26,720
So we see between 10-metre depth of sand at the Pinhey Sand Dunes.

51
00:06:26,720 --> 00:06:30,120
Wow. All wind-blown sand from the Ottawa River.

52
00:06:30,440 --> 00:06:31,280
Isn’t that amazing?

53
00:06:31,880 --> 00:06:36,720
We’re going to turn and talk about the Mer Bleue Bog, where we’re sitting right now, in a few minutes.

54
00:06:36,720 --> 00:06:45,720
But before we get there, let’s talk about some of the other sort of more interesting and ecologically fascinating parts of the NCC Greenbelt.

55
00:06:46,080 --> 00:06:47,960
We’ve been talking about Pinhey Dunes.

56
00:06:48,160 --> 00:06:52,600
What are some of the other areas that you think are particularly important and noteworthy?

57
00:06:53,000 --> 00:06:57,360
So I really think Stony Swamp's a beautiful gem in the area.

58
00:06:57,800 --> 00:07:03,200
The NCC is a caretaker of a lot of provincially significant wetlands with a lot of regionally rare plant species.

59
00:07:03,640 --> 00:07:08,840
And the wetlands have a big function for the greenbelts.

60
00:07:08,840 --> 00:07:15,320
They also function as flood storage and other ecosystem services, making sure water quality is very high.

61
00:07:16,000 --> 00:07:20,920
We have a lot of different species of turtles, most of which are endangered now.

62
00:07:20,920 --> 00:07:26,280
So we have painted turtles and Blanding's turtle, all in Stony Swamp and Shirleys Bay.

63
00:07:26,280 --> 00:07:34,840
It's a real stronghold for them and it's nice to see them flourish with all the work that's being done to make sure that they stay safe,

64
00:07:34,840 --> 00:07:38,640
like the road fencing on Old Richmond Road and Cameron Harvey.

65
00:07:38,640 --> 00:07:41,800
So it's… those two areas are… are wonderful.

66
00:07:41,800 --> 00:07:44,280
There's… they're so diverse, different habitats.

67
00:07:45,000 --> 00:07:49,400
We have alvar habitats at Stony Swamp, which are kind of arid limestone.

68
00:07:50,280 --> 00:08:00,640
There’s very little soil, maybe two centimetres to five centimetres, and that allows junipers and other rare species to grow, which adds to the diversity of the region.

69
00:08:01,080 --> 00:08:01,600
Interesting.

70
00:08:01,920 --> 00:08:16,760
There’s been, certainly, I think, a growing recognition of the importance, not just of spaces for conservation, but of linking different important spaces between areas, between regions.

71
00:08:17,160 --> 00:08:28,480
And I’m curious, when we think about the Greenbelt in the different areas that we’ve been talking about, are there species who utilize different parts of the Greenbelt?

72
00:08:28,480 --> 00:08:36,840
Are we seeing examples of, essentially, habitat where species are moving from the west to the east or from the north to the south?

73
00:08:37,120 --> 00:08:38,840
And if so, what are some good examples of that?

74
00:08:39,360 --> 00:08:44,960
Right now we’re sitting in Mer Bleue, which is a beautiful bog and it’s home to a good amount of moose actually.

75
00:08:45,040 --> 00:08:54,400
So, in winter we see the moose changing from kind of upland habitats down into the willows and into the swampy areas.

76
00:08:55,360 --> 00:09:03,800
But what’s interesting is in Pine Grove, a sector fairly close to here, but across the highway, we see a lot of moose usage during the winter.

77
00:09:04,200 --> 00:09:08,880
So we think that the moose are actually using Pine Grove in the winter more so.

78
00:09:09,160 --> 00:09:12,640

And they’re using Mer Bleue, more so in the summer, because it’s quieter here.

79
00:09:12,840 --> 00:09:14,760
Here we are in Mer Bleue Bog.

80
00:09:14,960 --> 00:09:18,360
Tell us a little bit about why this is such an important space.

81
00:09:18,600 --> 00:09:22,400
Mer Bleue is easily the most accessible bog in Ontario.

82
00:09:23,000 --> 00:09:29,560
We have 1.1 kilometres of boardwalk, which is the longest boardwalk in Ontario for bogs.

83
00:09:30,840 --> 00:09:35,400
It’s very close to the City of Ottawa and the population centres are here.

84
00:09:35,680 --> 00:09:43,840
We have a lot of researchers from Carleton University and McGill University that use the space to study impacts of climate change on bogs.

85
00:09:44,440 --> 00:09:49,480
Bogs cover around 17% of the entirety of Canada, so it’s a huge landmass.

86
00:09:49,480 --> 00:09:49,680
What

87
00:09:49,680 --> 00:09:50,480
was that number again?

88
00:09:50,480 --> 00:09:51,400
17%.

89
00:09:51,400 --> 00:09:52,240
17.

90
00:09:52,640 --> 00:10:03,480

…of Canada’s landmass. So it’s incredible, and its ecosystem’s very similar to the ecosystems we see in the James Bay area, but it’s very difficult to go to the James Bay. Yes, it is.

91
00:10:03,960 --> 00:10:07,080
It [would] take you a while. You take a train to Moosonee, right?

92
00:10:07,520 --> 00:10:10,480
But it would take you most of the better part of a couple of days.

93
00:10:12,080 --> 00:10:14,920
So yeah, it’s pretty inhospitable there,

94
00:10:14,920 --> 00:10:21,320
so, the series of events that kind of led to the bog, again, was the… this was actually the Mer Bleue Channel.

95
00:10:21,840 --> 00:10:28,160
So right now we’re sitting on a sandy ridge that used to be a sandbar of the Mer Bleue Channel of the Ottawa River.

96
00:10:28,440 --> 00:10:35,920
And as that kind of dried up, it left clay basins, and these clay basins were impermeable to water.

97
00:10:36,120 --> 00:10:37,920
So we had this water sitting over top.

98
00:10:38,560 --> 00:10:40,400
So the water was just staying there.

99
00:10:40,400 --> 00:10:46,680
So it wasn’t moving, and we had sphagnum sort of encroach slowly from the edges.

100
00:10:46,680 --> 00:10:52,480
It encroached all the way in and now the sphagnum grows around two centimetres a year.

101
00:10:53,280 --> 00:10:54,920
Is that a kind of moss?

102

00:10:55,200 --> 00:10:58,920
Yeah, it’s a peat moss that grows in our… in bogs.

103
00:10:59,240 --> 00:11:02,400
There’s different species, but we just mostly call them sphagnum mosses.

104
00:11:02,400 --> 00:11:05,120
And you say it’s growing in depth two centimetres a year?

105
00:11:05,120 --> 00:11:05,640
Exactly.

106
00:11:05,640 --> 00:11:06,440
That’s incredible.

107
00:11:06,680 --> 00:11:07,400
Yeah, yeah.

108
00:11:07,760 --> 00:11:16,640
So it is slow-growing, and it basically covers the basin and then it starts infilling the basin.

109
00:11:16,920 --> 00:11:20,520
So there’s some areas where there’s no longer water here.

110
00:11:20,680 --> 00:11:22,440
It’s all just biomass.

111
00:11:22,840 --> 00:11:25,000
And this biomass is trapped carbon.

112
00:11:25,960 --> 00:11:32,280
So underneath the peat we have around six metres of trapped carbon in our… in the bog, so

113
00:11:32,280 --> 00:11:48,720
the bog’s around 1,500 hectares of protected, you know, trapped carbon and plant material and habitat for rare species of birds that aren’t found anywhere close to here.

114
00:11:49,080 --> 00:11:54,360

You have to go to north of Algonquin Park to find these species of birds that are here.

115
00:11:54,480 --> 00:11:56,000
So a challenging question for you.

116
00:11:56,360 --> 00:12:04,320
If wetlands consist of 17% of Canada's landmass, why is the Mer Bleue Bog so special?

117
00:12:04,320 --> 00:12:16,040
Why do we have an internationally recognized space here and what distinguishes the Mer Bleue Bog from the rest of the 17% of wetlands throughout the country?

118
00:12:17,080 --> 00:12:21,840
Well, it's the southernmost bog, so it's special that way.

119
00:12:22,120 --> 00:12:25,920
So it's sort of out of its range for the area.

120
00:12:25,920 --> 00:12:34,360
So we attract a lot of visitors to the area that are interested in seeing the rare plants that are here, the rare orchids and the other ericaceous plants.

121
00:12:34,680 --> 00:12:40,440
And it's also, you know, under a lot of pressure compared to the other bogs in Canada.

122
00:12:40,920 --> 00:12:50,760
So it's important to steward the land properly and making sure that the bog remains a bog and so that species here can thrive.

123
00:12:51,040 --> 00:13:01,560
It's also an IMPARA site, so it hosts a lot of reptile species here, so the IMPARA is internationally recognized as [an area of] importance to reptiles and amphibians.

124
00:13:01,680 --> 00:13:03,040
Oh wow, I didn't know that.

125
00:13:03,480 --> 00:13:20,800

It’s interesting you say that’s [it’s] the most important southernmost bog in Canada, because that explains why sometimes when I walk through the bog and I see a lot of the black spruce, it’s reminiscent for me of parts of northern Canada where the black spruce really dominates and these short, almost sort of stunted, trees.

126
00:13:21,600 --> 00:13:34,840
And does that have to do with the fact that there is a different quality of soil which is not able to support the same kind of trees that we see in the rest of eastern Ontario?

127
00:13:35,000 --> 00:13:45,000
So yeah, the bogs are very acidic, very poor nutrient quality as part of their… as far as the sphagnum and the pH.

128
00:13:45,000 --> 00:13:49,080
So it’s actually inhospitable to plant life in general.

129
00:13:49,320 --> 00:13:51,600
So these plants have adopted very special techniques.

130
00:13:51,920 --> 00:14:01,960
So, a lot of the plants are ericaceous plants, which means that they have a waxy layer on their leaves, and this waxy layer traps the water so they don’t dehydrate as quickly.

131
00:14:02,880 --> 00:14:08,840
So that’s why we have Labrador tea and kalmias, sheep laurels, bog cranberry.

132
00:14:08,840 --> 00:14:13,520
These are all plants that have these special adaptations to live in such an inhospitable environment.

133
00:14:14,200 --> 00:14:19,160
Black spruce and tamarack, they’re two trees that also grow in very inhospitable environments.

134
00:14:19,480 --> 00:14:24,240
That’s why they form the boreal forest, because it goes to minus 40 in winter and it goes to plus 40 in summer,

135
00:14:24,240 --> 00:14:26,920
so it’s a really tough environment for plants to live in.

136
00:14:27,320 --> 00:14:28,200
Isn’t that interesting?

137
00:14:29,240 --> 00:14:32,400
As we are sitting here, it’s early in the morning.

138
00:14:32,480 --> 00:14:35,280
We also are hearing a fair bit of bird life around us.

139
00:14:35,600 --> 00:14:46,640
So let’s turn to birds for a minute, and tell us a little bit about what kind of birds enjoy the Mer Bleue Bog and are there particular species that are unique to this area?

140
00:14:46,880 --> 00:14:54,400
So Mer Bleue Bog is a boreal zone, it’s a boreal kind of hotspot in the area.

141
00:14:54,400 --> 00:14:58,480
So, in winter, we have special visitors called evening grosbeaks.

142
00:14:58,960 --> 00:15:01,200
And these grosbeaks are species at risk.

143
00:15:01,360 --> 00:15:05,520
They’re a special concern and they fly around in very, very large groups.

144
00:15:05,520 --> 00:15:08,040
So it’s like a party of 50 or 100.

145
00:15:08,040 --> 00:15:12,240
They’ll move around the bog looking for different cones and things like that to eat.

146
00:15:12,560 --> 00:15:19,560
And as they fly around, they could even go from here to search for food in the Yukon Territory, for instance.

147
00:15:19,640 --> 00:15:21,520
So they move quite a lot.

148
00:15:22,520 --> 00:15:37,120
And this is kind of a hotspot for them in winter with large flocks. We're just after the breeding season in August, but typically in May we'd be hearing palm warblers.

149
00:15:37,600 --> 00:15:40,600
So there's two different subspecies of palm warbler.

150
00:15:40,600 --> 00:15:43,840
There's the brown palm warbler, which lives in most of the boreal habitats.

151
00:15:44,040 --> 00:15:49,160
Then we have the yellow palm warbler, which lives in… here to kind of New Brunswick.

152
00:15:49,360 --> 00:15:55,960
So it's kind of… but this is the most western, most population of this eastern warbler.

153
00:15:56,360 --> 00:16:09,560
Okay. So we have people that flock to here to see them because it's closer to see these yellow palm warblers, and they actually have a different migratory habit than the brown palm warblers.

154
00:16:09,960 --> 00:16:11,600
Yellow pine warbler.

155
00:16:11,600 --> 00:16:12,920
Yellow palm warbler.

156
00:16:13,800 --> 00:16:17,200
And would they still be here at this time of year or have they started

157
00:16:17,200 --> 00:16:17,640
to migrate?

158
00:16:17,640 --> 00:16:18,920
They've started to migrate through.

159
00:16:19,680 --> 00:16:26,360

You can often hear them on the boardwalk itself and about… as they pass through,

160
00:16:26,760 --> 00:16:33,600
they’re a much smaller population than the brown palm warbler, so palm warblers are named because they’re first seen on the Gulf Coast.

161
00:16:34,120 --> 00:16:38,320
So they’re found in the palm trees, yet they nest in the boreal forest.

162
00:16:38,440 --> 00:16:40,200
So I think they should be called spruce warblers.

163
00:16:40,840 --> 00:16:41,200
That’s right.

164
00:16:42,280 --> 00:16:42,600
That’s...[unintelligible].

165
00:16:42,640 --> 00:16:43,280
[unintelligible]

166
00:16:44,920 --> 00:16:45,600
That’s great.

167
00:16:45,840 --> 00:16:54,880
And if we… have we ever done a species count, do we know the number of bird species that can be found in the NCC Greenbelt?

168
00:16:55,880 --> 00:17:07,720
We know that around 250 bird species can be seen throughout the year in the Ottawa region, most of which are found in the Greenbelt, because it’s such a hotspot for the area.

169
00:17:07,960 --> 00:17:12,840
In Mer Bleue, we have about 150 species of bird that pass through every year that are found here.

170
00:17:12,840 --> 00:17:24,400
So, people are very excited to come here, it’s a good spot for Lincoln’s sparrow, which is another boreal specialist that also is very local to the region here.

171
00:17:24,400 --> 00:17:27,600
So this is the only spot I know what we'll find Lincoln's sparrow, or palm warbler,

172
00:17:28,280 --> 00:17:30,280
and it's a good spot for sandhill crane too.

173
00:17:31,440 --> 00:17:32,320
Sandhill cranes.

174
00:17:33,560 --> 00:17:36,560
So I do have to ask you, Alex, do you keep a list?

175
00:17:36,560 --> 00:17:37,560
Do you have a bird list?

176
00:17:37,560 --> 00:17:37,960
I do have

177
00:17:38,120 --> 00:17:38,800
a big bird list.

178
00:17:38,920 --> 00:17:41,160
What is the number you can share?

179
00:17:41,720 --> 00:17:44,320
It's about 301 for Ontario.

180
00:17:44,440 --> 00:17:45,080
Wow.

181
00:17:45,120 --> 00:17:48,480
And I think it's about 240 for Ottawa.

182
00:17:48,480 --> 00:17:52,640
So I've been birding since I was nine years old

183
00:17:52,880 --> 00:17:55,320
and no, I love it.

184

00:17:55,320 --> 00:17:56,120
It’s great to be here.

185
00:17:56,360 --> 00:18:06,440
Thanks to the Merlin app, I’ve become a little bit more aware of songbirds and the different sounds and the different calls that they have.

186
00:18:07,080 --> 00:18:11,480
But compared to your 301, I could maybe recognize 10.

187
00:18:11,480 --> 00:18:13,440
So I’ve got my work cut out for me.

188
00:18:13,840 --> 00:18:15,480
I just need to spend more time with you.

189
00:18:16,240 --> 00:18:16,800
That’ll help.

190
00:18:17,120 --> 00:18:21,880
So I want to turn to what the Greenbelt means for people.

191
00:18:22,000 --> 00:18:30,480
And we know that here in the Mer Bleue Bog, you mentioned that certainly birders come here to see some of these more rare species.

192
00:18:31,080 --> 00:18:37,360
What role do you think the Greenbelt plays in terms of life for residents and visitors in the Capital?

193
00:18:37,480 --> 00:18:40,760
I think it’s huge for residents in the Capital to visit.

194
00:18:40,760 --> 00:18:53,520
There’s 27 parking lots exhibiting plenty of different opportunities for people, whether it’s on a nice even pathway, or whether you want to do a more difficult hiking trail.

195
00:18:53,800 --> 00:19:03,320
So it kind of offers remote environments and also kind of more busier, more manicured sites too, for people to enjoy.

196
00:19:03,320 --> 00:19:19,440
So, I think its value became especially apparent during the pandemic as a really good place for people to connect to nature and to be alone, but kind of together at the same time, which was, which is really cool to see.

197
00:19:19,880 --> 00:19:40,280
I'm always struck by the varied uses throughout the Greenbelt, I mean, from the agricultural lands that are increasingly growing food and turning to organic ways of growing food, to… of course there's research that happens in the Greenbelt thanks to our colleagues at Agriculture Canada.

198
00:19:41,080 --> 00:19:55,400
And then all of these other functions from a conservation and ecology point of view that we've been talking about, and one species that maybe we need to spend a few minutes on just because we hear lots of stories about them.

199
00:19:55,400 --> 00:19:58,400
And you've already mentioned the moose as one example.

200
00:19:58,720 --> 00:20:05,800
But tell us a little bit about the mammals that are here and what sort of trends are we seeing in terms of mammal life in the Greenbelt?

201
00:20:06,040 --> 00:20:17,240
We have quite a cool variety of mammals… so, we've actually put camera traps up throughout the Greenbelt, underneath roads and culverts to kind of understand what what's around.

202
00:20:17,560 --> 00:20:20,960
So these camera traps have caught all kinds of cool wildlife.

203
00:20:21,320 --> 00:20:25,200
We had one black bear in Stony Swamp.

204
00:20:25,480 --> 00:20:34,640
They're not regularly seen in Stony Swamp or Shirleys Bay, but they do sometimes poke their heads in and then say hi to the Greenbelt, which is lovely to see.

205
00:20:35,480 --> 00:20:37,800
We have our meso mammals.

206
00:20:37,800 --> 00:20:42,480
So our fisher, for instance, which is a very large weasel.

207
00:20:43,840 --> 00:20:50,720
They primarily hunt porcupines and other semi-large mammals too.

208
00:20:50,720 --> 00:20:56,360
So I've seen them twice in the Greenbelt and we also caught them on camera a couple of times.

209
00:20:57,560 --> 00:21:07,200
They're beautiful mammals, long-tailed weasels, short-tailed weasels, snowshoe hare, a lot of photography opportunities for snowshoe hare across the Greenbelt.

210
00:21:07,200 --> 00:21:13,880
It's probably one of the most photographed mammals here. Even… the coolest mammal that I've seen,

211
00:21:13,920 --> 00:21:22,520
and I described it to my field partner, as it looks like a fairy frog, it was hopping and I was like, what is this?

212
00:21:22,960 --> 00:21:26,760
And turns out that we have two species of jumping mice in the Greenbelt.

213
00:21:27,040 --> 00:21:33,040
So I saw both species a couple of weeks apart, but I described it like a frog with fur.

214
00:21:33,040 --> 00:21:35,200
I couldn't think of another way to describe it.

215
00:21:35,200 --> 00:21:37,200
And it ended up being a woodland jumping mouse.

216
00:21:37,200 --> 00:21:42,280
So I was very, very stoked to see those… even small mammals.

217
00:21:42,320 --> 00:21:49,240

Wow, that was the first time that you had sighted them, and we didn’t know until then that they were, that they made the Greenbelt their home.

218
00:21:49,320 --> 00:21:49,720
I didn’t.

219
00:21:49,720 --> 00:21:50,440
I didn’t know.

220
00:21:50,480 --> 00:21:51,920
I didn’t know until that moment.

221
00:21:51,920 --> 00:21:52,440
That was…

222
00:21:52,800 --> 00:21:53,560
that was incredible.

223
00:21:54,160 --> 00:21:55,960
What about the endangered raccoon?

224
00:21:59,600 --> 00:22:00,920
That’s a species that doesn't take…

225
00:22:01,240 --> 00:22:05,000
It’s not very hard to find one of those in the city of Ottawa, is it?

226
00:22:05,120 --> 00:22:07,120
No, that’s great.

227
00:22:07,120 --> 00:22:07,680
And the moose?

228
00:22:07,880 --> 00:22:10,440
Do we have a sense of the size of the population of moose?

229
00:22:10,840 --> 00:22:13,080
We don’t really right now have a size.

230
00:22:13,720 --> 00:22:17,520

I’ve seen three in one day when I was cross-country skiing across Mer Bleue.

231
00:22:17,560 --> 00:22:24,040
But again, we haven't really done too many moose surveys in recent times.

232
00:22:25,200 --> 00:22:27,040
So we know that they’re still present.

233
00:22:27,240 --> 00:22:33,840
And you know, if you don’t disturb nature too much, then we know that they’ll still be here.

234
00:22:34,080 --> 00:22:34,280
Right.

235
00:22:35,600 --> 00:22:47,960
I want to go back to the idea of the importance of linking different natural areas and of course the NCC also stewards Gatineau Park, another really important ecological and conservation area.

236
00:22:48,960 --> 00:22:54,640
Do we have examples of species that you think are taking advantage of both of these important spaces?

237
00:22:54,800 --> 00:23:01,240
I think that a lot of them do cross the river when it’s nice and icy and they’re able to do so.

238
00:23:01,240 --> 00:23:09,000
So I think there’s, you know, certainly foxes and coyotes, and even moose that… and bears possibly that do cross over.

239
00:23:09,320 --> 00:23:12,320
So there are some connections between Gatineau Park.

240
00:23:12,320 --> 00:23:16,320
We have a few islands in the river that they may also hop over to.

241
00:23:16,880 --> 00:23:19,240
We also have the linkages to Carp Hills.

242

00:23:19,240 --> 00:23:25,560
We've got the linkages southwards towards Larose Forest and other areas.

243
00:23:25,560 --> 00:23:29,480
And then we also have a sister bog to Mer Bleue called the Alfred Bog.

244
00:23:29,720 --> 00:23:35,920
And that's just becoming a new provincial park now in Alfred, about an hour east of here.

245
00:23:36,160 --> 00:23:37,240
Oh, isn't that… I didn't know that.

246
00:23:38,520 --> 00:23:42,400
We talk a lot and hear about the impacts of climate change.

247
00:23:43,040 --> 00:23:45,680
We certainly see that on the Rideau Canal Skateway, as we know.

248
00:23:46,360 --> 00:23:54,040
Are you seeing different kinds of species and changes in the ecology of these spaces as we're getting warmer temperatures?

249
00:23:54,280 --> 00:23:59,280
We do see some more southern species of birds, for instance, move further north.

250
00:23:59,280 --> 00:24:05,840
So, there's been a big effort in the 1980s, they did a five-year survey for breeding birds.

251
00:24:06,240 --> 00:24:10,920
In 2000 they did another five-year survey and in 2020 they've done another survey.

252
00:24:11,200 --> 00:24:17,320
So we can really see the change over time of the different birds over those 40 years.

253
00:24:18,160 --> 00:24:24,880
It's one of the longest-term studies in the world basically, on birds, on breeding birds especially.

254
00:24:25,320 --> 00:24:31,960
And so we've seen in the 1980s, they didn't really have northern cardinals here — at all.

255
00:24:32,480 --> 00:24:36,720
So it's seeing the cardinals move further north in 2000 and 2020.

256
00:24:37,160 --> 00:24:41,760
We're also seeing southern species that used to be near Kingston move further north.

257
00:24:41,760 --> 00:24:45,240
So we're seeing more red-bellied woodpeckers, more Carolina wrens.

258
00:24:45,520 --> 00:24:52,280
These are species that are more typical of the Carolinian forest and they seem to be moving north now too.

259
00:24:52,560 --> 00:24:57,680
So my strange bird story actually happened just a few days ago.

260
00:24:57,680 --> 00:25:00,960
I was out on the Ottawa River, and I saw a bald eagle.

261
00:25:01,480 --> 00:25:01,800
Oh wow.

262
00:25:02,200 --> 00:25:05,080
And I have never seen a bald eagle in the Ottawa area.

263
00:25:06,560 --> 00:25:07,760
Is that unusual or…?

264
00:25:07,760 --> 00:25:11,600
It's… it would have been unusual 40 years ago.

265
00:25:11,680 --> 00:25:15,480
They've had a huge rebound in the region.

266
00:25:15,720 --> 00:25:26,680

And over the past eight years I've been working for the NCC, I've found three bald eagle nests in the Greenbelt, which shows how well they've rebounded in the area.

267
00:25:26,680 --> 00:25:37,880
So in Shirleys Bay, in Green's Creek, we found some breeding records, but with these breeding bird surveys that were done, we know that there was none in the 1980s.

268
00:25:38,160 --> 00:25:43,720
There was one or two total in the area in the 2000s and now there's five or six nests.

269
00:25:43,720 --> 00:25:47,200
So we are seeing them come back more and more and there's more chance of seeing them.

270
00:25:47,200 --> 00:25:49,120
But they're always beautiful birds to see.

271
00:25:49,120 --> 00:25:50,760
I love seeing them.

272
00:25:50,760 --> 00:25:51,520
It's incredible.

273
00:25:51,800 --> 00:26:07,320
I want to finish off, Alex, a little bit where we started, which was talking about how the Greenbelt was formed out of the Gréber Plan in the 1950s, and that the original plan was really to form a boundary or limit to urban growth.

274
00:26:07,640 --> 00:26:21,840
We know that hasn't happened, but I guess although the original intent hasn't been manifested, you could say that the Greenbelt now serves a different function, which is because development has leapfrogged the Greenbelt,

275
00:26:22,120 --> 00:26:38,120
it's becoming a really important space, almost in the middle of the city of Ottawa, and as the population increases, a real opportunity, not just from a conservation point of view, which has been the focus of our chat today, but also from a recreation point of view.

276

00:26:38,120 --> 00:26:45,720
You mentioned skiing, you mentioned hiking and bird watching, and people like to walk their dogs in the Greenbelt.

277
00:26:46,120 --> 00:27:03,840
And I wonder if you think, as we see the population increase in decades to come, how do we best ensure that the value of the Greenbelt is maintained and what do you see those pressures being and the opportunities for preservation of the Greenbelt's [as] important?

278
00:27:04,440 --> 00:27:13,360
I think that as we see the population increase, we see a lot more visitors to the Greenbelt, which is actually really good, because you can only save what you know.

279
00:27:14,000 --> 00:27:35,040
So if the public understands the importance of natural spaces, both from their own health and well-being to their intrinsic value for biodiversity, to the ecosystem functions that they serve, the different communities, its value is almost immeasurable.

280
00:27:35,280 --> 00:27:40,280
It's to the neighbouring regions, to development plans.

281
00:27:40,280 --> 00:27:43,080
People need a place to go and enjoy nature.

282
00:27:43,080 --> 00:28:01,600
So, you know, we'll see an increase in visitors to the Greenbelt, which is great, but with that increased pressure, it's a lot more work for the NCC to maintain the level of service that we currently provide current residents.

283
00:28:01,720 --> 00:28:03,120
You can only save what you know.

284
00:28:03,600 --> 00:28:06,840
What a great line and maybe that's a good place to stop.

285
00:28:06,840 --> 00:28:09,240
So, Alex, thanks so much for joining me today.

286
00:28:09,440 --> 00:28:10,200
Thank you very much.

287
00:28:10,200 --> 00:28:10,440
Tobi.

288
00:28:10,840 --> 00:28:13,680
And with that, we'll finish this edition of Capital Stories.

289
00:28:14,160 --> 00:28:14,840
See you next time.

290
00:28:16,360 --> 00:28:19,280
And that wraps up this episode of Capital Stories.

291
00:28:19,440 --> 00:28:27,720
Join us next time as we continue to celebrate the triumphs, reflect on the challenges, and peer into the future of the National Capital Region.

292
00:28:27,960 --> 00:28:28,720
Thanks for joining us.