

community forum

You can help create a bird-friendly city



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Life in the city can be dangerous for birds. Hazards include cars, windows, tall buildings, cell towers, and even storm drains.

I learned first-hand about the dangers of storm drains to birds on Victoria Day when my neighbour's daughter knocked on my door.

Some ducklings had fallen into a storm drain. Hailey and her mom, Eileen, were out for a bike ride when they found a young girl, Emma, trying to help. The nearby hen was frantic. Her whole brood had fallen into the drain.

The large opening into the "beehive drain" is covered by a grate that resembles a honeycomb. The bars are close enough together to prevent children from entering the pipe system but they did not stop the entry of newly-hatched ducklings.

The bottom of the drain was almost within reach of Hailey and Emma. If the ducklings jumped high enough, the girls could grab them. While Eileen called 311 to have someone remove the grate, the girls caught the ducklings one-by-one. It took over an hour and an aquarium net to complete the rescue.

When the last duckling was released to the hen, she immediately stood up and walked down the sidewalk with her brood.



Photo by Michele Kading

Hailey escorting a family of rescued ducklings to a local wetland.

We stopped traffic so the family could cross the busy street on their way to a small wetland behind our houses. It was a wonderful experience that Emma and Hailey will never forget. Thanks to the city workers who came out to help on the long weekend.

The experience got me thinking about how we can make Winnipeg more bird-friendly.

Some cities are "daylighting" streams that were forced into underground pipes or buried as cities grew. Vancouver is uncovering some of its lost streams and restoring them to a natural state. It is converting parking lots and paved streets into greenways with riparian habitat, urban greenspace, and shared-use paths.

Another way we can make Winnipeg

better for birds is to plant trees that provide winter food. Nature Manitoba's Bluebird Fund will subsidize one bird-friendly tree per household. Mountain ash and ornamental crabs purchased at Ron Paul Greenhouse qualify for the subsidy (half of the cost, up to \$55). If the tree survives three years, a rebate for the balance of the purchase price is available (up to \$55). Let's show Emma and Hailey that we share their love for urban birds. Join this tree-planting campaign to make our city more bird-friendly.

Michele Kading is a community correspondent for St. Vital and the executive director of Save Our Seine — www.saveourseine.com