

Rivers act as natural corridors



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Earlier this winter, coyotes were reported in the Rivergrove neighbourhood beside the Red River. In 2015, a small pack of coyotes was photographed on the urban Seine River. Although somewhat rare, these sightings are not unexpected. They remind us that rivers are natural corridors for wildlife.

Rivers are like roads for animals, helping species move between the places they need to go. When they freeze in winter, rivers serve as temporary “winter roads” for terrestrial wildlife.

Beaver, muskrat, mink, otters, turtles, and fish swim freely up and down rivers during the open water season. Their movement within the river is sometimes blocked by dams, weirs, debris, culverts, fast-moving water, seasonal mudflats, or ice.

During open water season, terrestrial animals such as rabbits, deer, foxes, and coyotes travel mainly on the banks of the river. They are attracted to the fresh water, food, and shelter that rivers and riparian habitats provide. Their movement along riverbanks may be impeded by fences, buildings, riprap, large debris, and roads.

Birds also fly along river corridors. Great horned owls nest and feed along the Seine

River. Pileated woodpeckers can be seen year-round feeding on the insects within dead trees that often line the river. Soon, a wave of migrating songbirds will travel north using river corridors. They will feed on the midges and other flying insects emerging from the river. The movement of birds along rivers can be impeded by wires, windows, and towers that are allowed too close to the river.

People also enjoy travelling along river corridors – by canoe or trail. There is increasing demand to establish public trails and pathways along waterways to allow people to connect with the river and its wildlife.

What can Winnipeg do to enhance rivers as corridors for both wildlife and people?

- Designate shorelines as public spaces for everyone to enjoy;
- Create new park spaces beside rivers;
- Provide enough space for wildlife and public trails;
- Establish setbacks to prevent new developments, fences, roads, and cell phone towers from impeding movement along rivers;
- Design new river crossings (roads and pedestrian bridges) to allow for the movement of wildlife and people along the river and its banks;
- Remove obstacles (e.g., replace aging culverts with bridges);
- Minimize the use of riprap for bank stabilization;
- Restore natural vegetation on riverbanks;
- Avoid mowing, trimming, or tidying the “brush” that will provide winter food and shelter for wildlife.



Supplied photo by Denis DePape

Watch for resident great horned owls along the Seine River corridor. They start nesting as early as February.

Enjoy the Seine River wildlife corridor!

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