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On The Wild Side

Enjoy owls but do not interfere

ANN BROKELMAN
 is an avid birder and nature photographer
naturephotosbyann.blogspot.ca

While over the years I have seen many owls, if all you ever saw were my posted photos or heard were my favourite stories, you might assume it is easy to find them.

Unfortunately, when friends assume this and then come to visit and ask me to take them to see one, it's actually really difficult to say 'no problem'.

Owls, like most birds, move around to wherever the food is, and relocate regularly.

While they may stay in one spot for weeks or months, they can also leave without warning.

Luckily, when my friend Holly was recently visiting from Florida, not only did she get to see a variety of birds, but we got to witness an owl successfully hunt a vole.

Our adventure began with us slowly driving down a quiet 'drive at your own risk', road outside the GTA. It didn't take me long to spot a barred owl a little off into the woods.

We parked, got out with our cameras, and enjoyed a quick show of him flying from tree to tree and even

down to the ground a few times. At one point he disappeared into a pine tree and we assumed our sighting was over.

Amazingly, a few moments later he not only reappeared in flight, but he did so clutching the biggest meadow vole I think I've ever seen.

He landed on a tree in plain sight and we got to watch him transfer the vole from talon to beak and then swallow his vole in one large gulp.

Holly, to say the least, was ecstatic.

On our return to my home we saw the two eastern screech owls in my backyard nesting box.

Check out one of my previous articles on the owl babies born in my back yard a few years ago. <https://www.beachmetro.com/2017/06/28/backyard-owl-babies-clear-highlight-wildlife-adventures/>

What to do once you find an owl?

If you should happen upon an owl, be very still and quiet.

Try to imagine that everything you're doing is in slow motion.

Also, thinking that if you've been watching the owl for two minutes, he's been watching you for 20, might already feel threatened, and is probably con-



PHOTO: ANN BROKELMAN
 On a recent outing in the GTA, Ann Brokelman spotted this barred owl about to feed on a captured vole.

sidering flying away.

Don't be disappointed if he does, any owl sighting, no matter how brief, is worth getting excited over.

If the owl manages to relax, you might get an extensive viewing opportunity. If the owl looks alarmed, (elongating its body or moving its head back and forth), back off very slowly and quietly, and try to keep your profile low.

Please do not ever use call tapes, imitations of owl calls,

or spotlights.

Also, never disturb an owl nest or roost site.

The biggest threats are flash photography or shining light directly on owls when they are roosting, flying or capturing prey. You could become the reason a nest fails or a roost is abandoned.

Seeing or hearing an owl provides an exciting experience for both young and old, just please enjoy the animal without interfering with it.

Dental Matters

Some dental tips for Generation Y

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The following scenario is played out time and again in family oriented dental practices across the GTA.

A family with dental benefits brings their children to the family dentist every six months for a preventive check-up and cleaning.

In addition to the cleaning and polishing, a fluoride treatment may be provided to prevent formation of cavities, and in some cases diagnostic x-rays are taken periodically to check for small cavities forming in between the teeth. Of course, there is also the obligatory brushing and flossing 'tutorial' (read 'nagging').

Then, after finishing high school, there is college or university or apprenticeship, often out of town. The cleaning and check-up visits become less frequent and start to lapse.

After post-secondary education comes grad school, or travel, or an unpaid internship, or perhaps an entry level job or contract work without dental benefits.

Throw in moving out of the house and paying rent for the first time, and you have millennials as the new 'working poor'.

Living on a tight budget with no benefits often means the preventive dental care lapses further. In many cases, these young adults are now in their late twenties or early thirties when they resume dental care.

Sometimes they return because they now have benefits again. Other times it is because they have developed dental discomfort or even toothache symptoms.

To the mutual dismay of the returning patient and the dentist, the dentist finds five to 10 large cavities in a mouth that had never had problems in the past.

It would be easy to blame the lack of regular dental visits as the sole cause of the problem. However, there are other factors which also contribute to this unfortunate scenario.

For one, the diet of young adults away from home or on a budget also changes, often for the worse. Then there is the stress of exams or job hunting, not to mention the social stresses of living away from home for the first time.

Sometimes it is merely the feeling

of invincibility that creeps in after so many years of cavity-free check-up visits. It is easy to see how the 'perfect storm' for dental disease can be created.

Here are some simple strategies to avoid this far too common scenario:

1. Try to continue scheduling appointments during winter breaks, reading weeks and summer breaks from post-secondary school. Many dental offices are also open evenings and weekends to help with demanding schedules.
2. Even if it can't be every six months, create a new cleaning frequency every 12 or 18 months.
3. Consider visiting a dental school or hygiene college clinic, where low cost cleanings provided by dental or hygiene students under supervision are available.
4. Floss!

Your dentist can help devise creative strategies to manage this vulnerable period in a young adult's life. Take advantage of their experience in this area.