

Hurricane Juan

Unwelcome Visitor to Wildlife Park

By Tanya Mackey Boehner

“Hi, I’m calling to reschedule my class trip. I guess we won’t be coming this week?” the teacher asked. This was the second thought I had given to the Wildlife Park since the tumultuous visit of Hurricane Juan. “No I guess not,” I replied. “There is no power around here. And I can just imagine what the Park looks like.”

Well, I had no idea! I thought things were pretty bad around my house. The night of Hurricane Juan was terrifying. I sat and watched the rain and whipping trees out the window. Just after midnight, the top third of a 18 m (60 ft) high pine twisted off and landed on my car. We jumped into action. With the children and dogs, sopping wet but safely packed into the van, we drove away from our forest home, along the lane which runs across the hayfields. As we drove away we were surprised to see

several deer standing in the middle of the field. Their eyes were wider than I have ever seen on a white-tailed deer. And why wouldn’t they be? What creature would want to be in a forest when the tops of trees were breaking off like matchsticks or were toppling over like bowling pins? It was then that I first thought of the Wildlife Park and wondered how things were there.

At that very moment, and well into the next day, some dedicated employees were busy monitoring the storm’s effects on the park. Of course the first priority was human and animal safety. Despite Juan’s punishing strength, no people or animals were physically injured. In the proverbial calm after the storm the damage was assessed and we began to have a picture of the massive amount of work and repairs that lie ahead.

Throughout the following week, long days were put in removing ramps, as well as the fallen trees and branches that lay over fences. The roads were cleared so vehicles could get in and out, providing access for heavy equipment to remove dangerous trees and overhanging limbs. It was great to have support from other DNR offices. Assistance from several divisions in Shubenacadie, Bible Hill, and Kentville came in the form of assessment, labour, equipment, generators and gas.

Knowing how anxious we feel when faced with hurricane force winds and torrential rain, it is easy to imagine the fear of the animals out in the midst of the storm without cover. At the park, some of the birds of prey with previous injuries took refuge in their enclosures where they felt safe. For the first few hours after the storm, many animals appeared to be shell shocked.



Wildlife Park pathways and animal enclosures buried under trees downed as a result of Hurricane Juan.

One could actually go up and touch the wet peafowl, who were sitting on fences, rocking. They were disoriented as many of their roosting branches and trees were no longer standing. Several enclosures were damaged, resulting in these animals being captured and placed in the rehabilitation centre at the rear of the park.

As the week wore on, the shock of the destruction evolved into reality. Much work was necessary to bring the park to an acceptable level of safety so we could open for the public. While the park did open for visitors the following Saturday, several classes for the Education program had to be rescheduled.

Clearing of debris continues to be a priority. Reconstruction has begun on the bear, porcupine, lynx, bobcat, owl and peregrine falcon shelters. Park

staff have been busy getting new fenceposts in place before there is too much frost in the ground. Construction will be on-going to replace the many fences along the walkways that were knocked down. Visitors are shocked by the size and number of trees down. Of course, the tractors and wood-chippers are of great interest to some of the children visiting the park.

Not all the news is bad, however. The porcupine enclosure will be larger, the deer will have more windbreaks in their enclosures, and the bears will have more stumps and logs to root in as the insects move in. As the work progresses, the park will continue to be a source of interest and education for the thousands of Nova Scotians and tourists from around the world who visit annually.

Teachers looking for an educational adventure should confirm their bookings now for winter and spring dates. We are also offering out-reach programs to any schools in the province who would like our trained instructors to deliver a program relating to any of a variety of topics such as Animal Adaptations, Birds of Prey, Food Chains, Habitat, Species at Risk, or Using Your Senses In Nature. For more information, check out <http://wildlifepark.gov.ns.ca> or call the park at 902-758-2040.

Tanya Mackey Boehner is a youth educator at the Provincial Wildlife Park in Shubenacadie.

Kids Page Notice:

Unfortunately our last issue didn't get out in time to allow readers to meet the deadline for submission of the Cats Indoors! colouring sheet contest. So, we've extended the deadline to May 1, 2004. Simply go to www.abcbirds.org, and download the colouring sheet, or create your own drawing showing what can happen to cats if released into the wild. Mail to Cats Indoors! Provincial Wildlife Park, P.O. Box 299, Shubenacadie, NS B0N 2H0. We will randomly select three entrants for a family day pass to the Wildlife Park in Shubenacadie.



Rebuilding hurricane damaged enclosures for Wildlife Park residents.