

Popular avian visitor immortalized in new book

By Mark Pavilons

The highly publicized visit of a rare bird to Schomberg has been fully covered in a new book.

Toronto's Ed McAskill has created a comprehensive, 40-page book, entitled 'LOGITO,' Northern Hawk Owl.

McAskill spent more than 120 hours observing and photographing the owl when it visited King in the fall of 2019 and winter of 2020. He said during that time he photographed 'every behaviour the owl could possibly display.'

'This event had to be documented and shared with others. Just too good a story not to share it,' he said.

Once the owl had left, he began the task of sorting the photos and doing research on the owl. It took him a couple of months to get everything together.

'This was my first attempt at writing any type of book, so there were a lot of rewrites just to make sure I was telling the story properly.'

The visit drew birders from far and wide to catch a glimpse of the rare species. Not only was it incredibly rare to see it so far south, the bird was very accessible and easy to view. Undoubtedly, bird enthusiasts left happy.

'Hawk owls are considered a sensitive species in Ontario which makes it very difficult to know when one is this far south. People tend to be very hush hush when it comes to sensitive species. To photographers and birders alike this bird is an absolute must see. As mentioned in the book I had met people from BC and New York,' McAskill said.

He would like to sell this book to the public, noting 'I think it's important to have this documented. It had an impact on the town. To this day people in the birding world still talk about the owl.'

Several people helped him out on the project, including Helena Chu who took all the drone photos. 'I don't think I would have done the book without her pictures. These pictures allowed me to show how the owl moved around and used the marsh to survive its first winter.'

King-based Motive Media was another great help to this project as they printed the posters that were sold to the public. They did this at no cost. Sabrina Furfaro of the Nik Nak Nook sold the posters out of her store. Enough posters were sold to replace the interpretive boards for the lagoon and the hawk owl board for Dufferin Marsh.

The retired TTC bus driver has been doing photography since 1985. His first photography project with film, was the Skydome in 1987 documenting its construction. He started to photograph birds in 2008 and to date, he's snapped more than 325 species of birds in Ontario.

While the book is largely complete, he's not quite ready to send it out. He noted November 2024 marks the 5th anniversary of the owl's visit so that is his 'loose' target date at the moment.

McAskill, in the book's introduction, noted the first time he saw 'Logito' (La-gee-toe) was December 11, 2019, arriving at Dufferin Marsh at dawn. While walking east along the south side of Dr. Kay Drive (white arrow), there it was, a Northern Hawk Owl. The owl was perched on a tree limb hanging over the sidewalk about 3 metres off the ground.

'I just stopped and watched as the owl hunted. Within a few minutes it flew to another tree. It was apparent the owl was comfortable

with a human presence. The name Logito was coined by Schomberg resident Mario Ferrante and is the postal code for Schomberg which is LOGITO. This book is about his time spent with ?Logito.?

?Having never seen this owl before, it was an experience that won't be forgotten. A hawk in owl's clothing, Period!?

McAskill said an amazing opportunity had presented itself. The owl was first reported to eBird November 14, 2019 and it stayed until March 3, 2020.

The news of such a rare and accessible Northern Hawk Owl reached all over Canada and the U.S.

?I had met people from Calgary, British Columbia, Michigan, Pennsylvania and New York. It was front page news and was even posted to the King Township website.

?Once the location became commonly known, there had to be at least 300 people per day coming to see the owl and these numbers grew as time went on. The town had never experienced a phenomenon like this before.?

He said no matter where you stood you could view its behaviors and due to the owl's own behavior it gave everyone great looks at its daily life. Northern Hawk Owls are very tolerant of humans in their presence, this fact is in the research. There was a rumour of a second hawk owl in nearby Pottageville Swamp which is east of Dufferin Marsh but was never confirmed.

Residents remember well that in the early days of the hawk owl's presence, parking had become a problem. From a front page photo in the King Weekly Sentinel, cars and people lined the streets and sidewalks the full length of Dr. Kay Drive and Cooper Drive.

The Township enforced no parking but accommodate visitors by allowing them to park in the nearby plaza.

McAskill said The Toronto Wildlife Centre was contacted about moving the owl to another location. A team was sent to assess the health of the owl on Dec. 19, 2019 but it was decided moving the owl would have been problematic because it was already adjusted to the area. The hawk owl was banded and determined to be a juvenile male.

Economically, the owl was good for the town of Schomberg and local businesses. They all welcomed the extra revenue.

The 40-page book is easy to read and contains some amazing, one-of-a-kind photos. It's quite a nice tribute to the bird and the local reaction.

A piece of King history to be shared. This will undoubtedly be a much-anticipated release.

He hopes to have digital copies soon. To contact him, email edmcaslill@outlook.com.