

Our Ontario ‘Species At Risk’ – This Artist’s Cause Continues Locally...

by SHERRY HAYES

THE COP 15 WORLD CONFERENCE in Montreal last December clearly stated that leaders from around the world would agree to a historic global framework to safeguard nature and halt and reverse biodiversity loss. Surely, as individuals, we can also come together to make a difference.

As a wildlife artist, I have felt a duty to expose the critical issues surrounding our species at risk, whether flora or fauna. Our wetlands, forests, rivers, lakes, alpine – frankly, all natural spaces and their fragile inhabitants, need protection. Being good stewards to ‘everything Nature’ is what, collectively, we should be doing. And, what our natural areas and the vulnerable creatures within deserve.

In last summer’s issue of *The Wood Duck*, I provided details of a special donation program that I had recently initiated which is dedicated to our Ontario species at risk. I founded this program with the direct intent that partial net proceeds from all paintings and prints in this series would be directed to my chosen nature and environmental organizations to assist with their efforts in preserving our wild species and spaces in Ontario. I will eventually expand this program throughout Canada.

Through my art, my voice is now their voice. It comes via the stroke of a brush being swept onto canvas, which subsequently, allows me to tell their story. I do so through my ‘Darkness’ series. These paintings are purposefully designed with slightly exaggerated realism while maintaining a bold and edgy element to highlight the subject. Each scene moves from light to dark to show what is and what could be if there is no corrective intervention. To date, I have ‘spoken for’ the special concern Monarch Butterfly; the Ontario extirpated Karner Blue Butterfly; the endangered Drooping Trillium and now, my most recent subject.

We, as members of Nature organizations, understand the need for the survival of our precious species at risk. Therefore, the concept for this painting was to capture the story of a local endangered species set against a simple background. However, as there was much more to tell about this creature, it evolved into a bigger ‘story’ within a complex scene. The region covered in this painting sits in close proximity to where I resided as a youngster within a pristine, fifteen-acre wetland forest that teemed with diverse wildlife. Clearly, when it came to this project, Nature was calling.

This piece reached fruition in December of last year. ‘*Within The Darkened Forest*’ had sprung to life. As timing would have it, the launch of this painting in March of this year coincided perfectly with the annual spring migration of the subject of

this artwork – the Jefferson Salamander. Partial proceeds from this painting and its product line will be donated to my two chosen organizations in Burlington to assist, in part, with the studies of Jefferson salamander populations and their habitats.

This precious endangered species always makes headlines in late winter as announcements for road closures appear in the media. Populations and nesting sites are monitored. It is without doubt, members of HNC get involved with this necessary process. Given the importance of Jefferson’s endangered status, it is the perfect time to bring additional public awareness to this elusive creature, including a reminder to all regarding the critical need for its protection.

And so, the depiction of this species began a year ago. This painting features the beautiful Mount Nemo region of the Niagara Escarpment and most importantly, the story of ‘Jeff’.

Whether we choose to get directly involved with the survival of this little salamander or any other at-risk species, the truth is that we all need to play a role in the health and well-being of our natural world, especially in our own backyards.

For my part, with paintbrush in hand, I will continue my own mission to bring awareness to those willing to listen and hear the voices of Nature. Current works in progress are: the special concern Beluga Whale and Shumard Oak; the endangered Laura’s Clubtail Dragonfly and the Five-lined Skink. Future works will cover the threatened Polar Bear and Algonquin Wolf as well as the endangered Barn Owl and Eastern Flowering Dogwood.

Of equal importance and as mentioned in my previous article last year, my intention is to add The Hamilton Naturalists’ Club as one of my chosen organizations to be a recipient of the net proceeds of a future dedicated painting. I look forward to the final decision of the ‘Species at Risk’ that is most dear to HNC, which ultimately, will be the subject of that dedicated painting.

Sherry Hayes, shown at right with her latest painting – ‘Within The Darkened Forest’. Read more about Sherry’s endangered species story and program and what well-known nature and environmental advocates such as David Suzuki are saying about her art and cause. Find it all at artscapesbyserry.ca



‘Within the Darkened Forest’ – painting by Sherry Hayes depicting the endangered Jefferson Salamander and its habitat.