

The Quest to Help Species at Risk: Despite Ontario's Attempt to Dismantle Our Endangered Species Act

by SHERRY HAYES



THE NEVER-ENDING BATTLE RAGES ON AS those in power continue their quest to disrupt and destroy valuable natural spaces, critical habitats, species at risk and fertile farmlands – all for the sake of ‘necessary growth and revitalization’. Or so we are told. But this fight, spurred on by conservationists, environmentalists, nature lovers and concerned citizens is far from over.

While there appears to be a general consensus regarding housing and the need for residential growth in this province, the ‘how-to’ and ‘where’ have many at odds. There must be better options for the approach and location of development to avoid the destruction of vital lands.

The ‘Triple F’ Threat...

The dismantling of the Endangered Species Act will surely wreak havoc with the Triple F - our flora, fauna and farmlands. All are in critical need of protection, especially in light of the recently passed Bill. Balance must be maintained for the overall health of our planet including our food crops, delicate ecosystems and species at risk.

Logic dictates that as more land is developed, there will be less space for farmland and natural habitats. Less local food, natural spaces and native species can lead to a potential breakdown in the chain of life. One species lost could devastate a chain. Land fragmentation is often a contributor to these losses.

While species and habitats dwindle and farmland is swallowed up for urban sprawl, highways and quarries - there comes a time when we must collectively take a stand on the side of right.

Choosing To Stand Up for The Cause...

Imagine the loss of wetlands across the Niagara Escarpment and the profound impact on the balance of nature. The Jefferson salamander is a perfect example of an endangered species that is in peril. The choice should

be simple. Protect and treasure our UNESCO Biosphere Reserve rather than dismantle and destroy this rich, diverse region.

In an effort to draw attention to these local issues, I felt the need to create ‘Within The Darkened Forest’, a painting dedicated to the Mount Nemo region of the Niagara Escarpment. This piece highlights the escarpment and the Jefferson while a percentage of proceeds is donated to support local organizations that study the salamander’s habitat.

Listening To Those in The Know...

Not long ago a renowned Canadian environmental advocate pointed out to me that the one million species at risk for extinction noted in the 2019 UN report is now possibly two million species. Apparently, many within this at-risk group are insects which are often considered crucial for survival of life on earth.

The bee, for example, is a highly important little warrior. Crucial as pollinators, we often depend on them for food production, a critical component for our own survival. It seems unfathomable to lose the very entity that is often the catalyst for life on earth.

To that, I took on the task of creating another painting honouring, in part, the humble bumble bee. With input from David Suzuki regarding subject matter, this piece also highlights several endangered species in the western part of Canada. ‘Shadows in the Brush Lands’ is dedicated to these fragile creatures and also to David for his decades long efforts in raising awareness of Canada’s environment and ecosystems.

Lessons Our Younger Generations Can Learn...

The beauty of childhood is the tale of innocence but also a willingness to learn. It is up to older generations to help guide our youngest population in the right direction with



Monarch Butterfly, a species of special concern

respect to the value of nature and its importance in our wellbeing and the wellbeing of the planet. Nature should be treasured and protected.

With every acre of natural land destroyed, there is the potential for loss of species, which begs the question - what will be left for our future generations? While we cannot predict the future, we can do our part now to raise awareness. Change starts with the efforts of everyone, including our youngest generation.

To reach curious young minds regarding these important issues, 'Saving the House That Jeff Built', my first children's storybook came to life. It is based on my Niagara Escarpment painting and inspired by the courageous little Jefferson salamander. The story follows 'Jeff' and its battle to survive during the annual spring breeding migration. The book is designed to help children understand the significance of this special creature and the fragility of its local home. I am currently working on another book that takes children through a journey of upper and lower Hamilton to teach the importance of nature in and around this special city.



'Within the Darkened Forest'

Today's children are the next generation of stewards for nature. Let's do our best to make them great stewards. When we encourage our youth to participate in the wellbeing of our planet, we provide the opportunity for more generations to become involved. Collectively, we can choose to work together to save fragile farmlands and natural spaces and their vulnerable species so we all can enjoy local food and nature's beauty now and for generations to come.

Caring – Because We Choose To...

When we look carefully at symbiotic relationships, we realize that humankind and nature have a special bond that is precious, vital and necessary for survival. We depend on each other for life on this planet. There should never become a time when the scales are tipped so severely to one side that the other cannot successfully survive. We are in this together. Let's share this beautiful planet that we call home - for the love of all things nature.



'Shadows in the Brush Lands'

Sherry Hayes is a local artist, author and advocate who donates a percentage of her proceeds to support organizations that protect and preserve Canada's species and spaces at risk.

All images by Sherry Hayes