

## Preparing for winter

# Life after tourists at the wildlife park

By ROB MILLS  
NEWS staff reporter

SHUBENACADIE — Some of the patrons leave for the winter, packing for warmer climes. Others, native to the area, laze around, watching the changing seasons from behind bars. Still others stuff themselves full of the finest food available and go to sleep for a few months.

Despite its similarity to certain offices, the Shubenacadie Wildlife Park description above pertains to animals, not office workers. Both are preparing themselves for the onslaught of winter, although the animals are undoubtedly more complacent about the coming chill.

Why shouldn't the animals be relaxed about winter? After all, the supervisor at the park has been on the job since it opened 34 years ago, making sure all the animals from the groundhogs to the Hawaiian ducks weather the storm.

The supervisor is Lands and Forests employee Eldon Pace, who oversees happenings at the Wildlife Park, which closed for the season Oct. 15. Mr. Pace says the park contains 28 species and sub-species of animals, as well as a large number of bird species.

Several of the bird species at the park are on the endangered list, including the trumpeter swan, the cranes, and some of the pheasants. While a number of the waterfowl leave in the winter, the expensive ones have their wings clipped. "They're grounded," says Mr. Pace.

The fancy ducks spend the winter indoors, while the hardier breeds fly south, though in some cases not very far south. For instance, the Canada goose winters in the Musquodoboit Valley and Shelburne—hardly Miami Beach.

With some of the birds gone, others come in for the winter, including eagles, hawks and owls, says Mr. Pace. They stay a few months in the park and its surrounding sanctuary, comprising 1,000 acres.

Eagles and other visitors are not the only animals who drop by the park in the winter to see how their captive brethren are fairing. Weasels, skunks, raccoons, bobcats and a fisher have all been found inside the park, wandering the grounds. Mr. Pace says such trespassers are shipped out of the area, "hopefully far enough away so they won't come back."

Some people believe its not right to keep animals in cages, he says,

but explains most of the animals in the park were born in captivity, and to release them "would be a death warrant."

In some cases "their parents, grandparents, and even great-grandparents have been born here." Being in captivity extends an animal's lifespan, he says. As a case in point, Mr. Pace speaks of "one old guy 36-years-old" a Canada goose.

Birds and waterfowl are not the only patrons of the park requiring special care at this time of year. Most of the animals are given extra feed to ensure winter fat and a healthy coat. However, they remain in their cages for the winter months, with lots of straw, and protection from snow.

The two animals at the park that hibernate — bears and groundhogs—are filling up for the winter. The groundhogs usually go underground for the winter in late September, but the black bears (there are two) are more difficult.

"If you feed them too late in the fall," he explains, "they'll stay up all winter."

Winter and fall are also mating times for the animals. The deer rut in the fall—during October, and other animals such as the cougar, give birth in the spring. The park has had great success with the cougars with the couple producing triplets for the last three years.

The park doesn't need nine small cougars, so it "trades" for other animals with the International Zoological Distributors company, which supplies parks and zoos around North America and beyond.

The park is currently looking for coyote pups, since it does not have any coyotes. With the capture of three pups in the Hilden area this month, hopefully the different sections of the Lands and Forests Department will be able to get together.

The park did well this year, attracting between 300,000 and 350,000 people. The most popular attractions are the animals with young, says Mr. Pace, noting "the otters seem to attract people anytime of the year."

What time of year is the favorite of Mr. Pace?

"Spring is my favorite," he says. The young are out, and old friends return. Geese may begin nesting as soon as March. Mr. Pace recalls early migrants nesting in a snow storm. "We could see their heads sticking out of the snow."



# Nova Scotia's wild kingdom

## A visit to Shubie Park



An Aoudad Sheep bounds across a meadow and only meters away a Rhea munches happily on a

clump of grass. No, it's not Wild Kingdom but it's the closest thing to that television show in Nova



Scotia a person can find.

The two animals can be found living a peaceful existence at the Shubenacadie Wildlife Park, about 60 km north of Halifax.

Among the other animals at the park are bears, otters, deer, raccoons, skunks and moose to name only a few.

Opened in 1949, the department of lands and forests-run park has provided millions of Nova Scotians and tourists the opportunity to see wild animals in a controlled environment.

This year more than 300,000 people are expected to have visited the park during its May 15-Oct. 15 season, and 75 per cent of those will be Maritimers.

Although the animals cannot completely represent how they would live in the wild, many people would not otherwise come close to seeing a fisher, mink or otter.

"The park's main purpose is to educate people about animals," said Eldon Pace, supervisor of wildlife parks. "But it also is a way to conserve threatened species and hopefully re-introduce

them into the wild."

Today the park offers something for everyone: 35 different species of fur-bearing animals and 50 different bird species.

Pace said the park has changed over the years but its appeal, especially for children, has not diminished. In fact the popularity is increasing.

One of the less-known facts about the park is that it costs on about \$150,000 a year to run.

"We're not a major expense for the provincial government," said Pace. "In fact a lot of our money comes from donation boxes set up at the entrance to the park and so far visitors have been very generous."

He agrees that the park does have its critics but says much of what they were criticizing has been changed.

"Some people were upset about the cougars' pen being small. But we've just moved them into a new and much bigger pen."

The bears at the park are also scheduled to get a new pen.

"Every day is new and exciting out here," said Pace. "There's always something going on."



## **Burt Vissers**

# *Shubenacadie park supervisor right at home on game farm*

SHUBENACADIE (Staff) — Like many of the animals at Shubenacadie's Wildlife Park, Burt Vissers can say he was bred, born and raised on a game farm, except his was in his native Holland.

The new supervisor of Nova Scotia's largest wildlife park and animal sanctuary is right at home walking through the 25 acres of parklands which attract more than 340,000 visitors each year between May and October.

Mr. Vissers still has coffee once a week with Eldon Pace, long-time park supervisor, who retired in the fall.

They both marvel at how much the park has grown and developed during the last decade when Mr. Vissers first began working here and since the provincial government recognized the importance of preserving wildlife native to Nova Scotia as well as educating the public.

The park is the ideal place to take leisurely strolls through the maze of fenced-in areas where animals graze carefree and beside ponds where birds swim and feed.

Highlights of this year's animal exhibits include two peregrine falcons, shipped from a breeding farm in Alberta where they were too

old to produce more offspring. It's a just retirement for the endangered birds.

Mr. Vissers attended the Maritime Forest Rangers School in Fredericton before working in Cape Breton for a year and then making his way to East Hants. In 1983 he became assistant foreman and foreman in 1984.

The highlight of his career was his latest promotion.

"This is where my interests have been all my life," he said recalling his earlier years on an 8,000-acre game farm in Holland.

"It was quite a treat to get this position."

He is also supervisor of two satellite wildlife parks in Upper Clements and at Huntington on the Mira River.

The coming year will see construction of a feline enclosure for lynx and bobcats who will be able to run more freely in a grassy area with trees and no roof. Wolf and coyote enclosures were completed last year.

Mr. Visser said the wildlife parks are collectively some of the biggest tourist attractions in the province. Visitors also spend the day picnicking at nearby tables.

The park employs 22 full and part-time employees. It opened for the season May 15.



...time has not hands full with this two-month-old bear cub,  
...e of three being raised by hand at Nova Scotia's  
Shubenacadie wildlife park  
lands and Forests Depart  
rabbit hunters frightened a

## Abandoned bear cubs headed west

By BRIAN RAU  
Truro Bureau

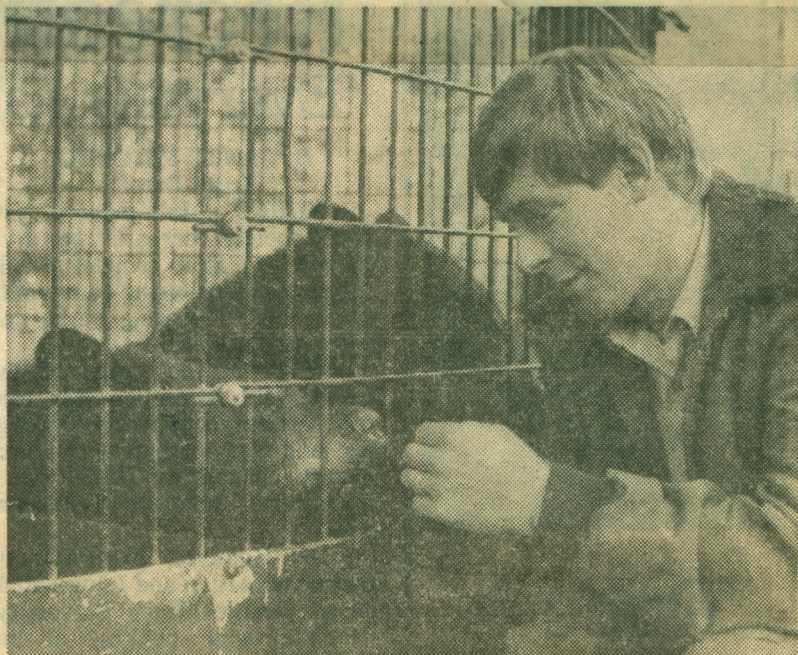
SHUBENACADIE — Ebony, Amber and Coco — the three little bears cared for by officials of the Shubenacadie Wildlife Park since last winter — are headed for Montreal until a new home can be found for them.

Shubenacadie Wildlife Park supervisor Bert Vissers said the cubs will be shipped to an animal distributor later this month. They will likely spend the rest of their lives on display in either a zoo or a wildlife park. Shubenacadie already has two full-grown bears.

"Hopefully, they'll stay together because they were raised together," he said in an interview. "But whatever happens, they shouldn't have too much trouble adjusting because they were all hand-raised."

The cubs, abandoned by their mother, were only 10 days old when they arrived at the park last January.

They needed 24-hour care like human babies, requiring



Bert Vissers, supervisor of the Shubenacadie Wildlife Park, shares a few moments with his friends Ebony, Amber and Coco. The three little bears will soon be leaving the park.

feedings at four to six-hour intervals. They stayed inside and required constant attention until the spring, when they were old enough to go outside for park visitors to see.

"Everybody here at the park office will miss them," Mr. Vissers said. "They're something you get attached to ... sort of like a part of the fami-

ly."

The cubs appeared on television last spring and were a hit with children and other visitors until the park closed for the season Oct. 15.

When they first arrived in Shubenacadie the cubs only weighed about eight ounces each, but now at 10 months they each weigh more than 80 pounds.



# Bear cubs at home in wildlife park

By JANET MITCHELL

Truro Bureau

**SHUBENACADIE** — A Lunenburg County hunter made a rare discovery while out rabbit hunting last month.

Nestled under a pile of brush, where their mother apparently had abandoned them, were three bear cubs too young to walk or even open their eyes.

Arnold Veino of Beach Hill took one look at the threesome and decided they needed professional care, so he packed them into his car, took them home and notified the Department of Lands and Forests in Bridgewater.

Department representative Ronald Crouse passed them onto Shubenacadie Wildlife Park, where they have been staying since.

On arrival, the cubs weighed only 24 ounces, said park supervisor Eldon Pace, but they have been growing at a rate of two ounces a day.

The cubs were only 10 days old when they arrived at the park at the end of January, immediately demanding 24-hour care from staff.

Park foreman Bert Vissers even devotes weekends to caring for the cubs, who require feedings at four-to six-hour intervals.

Raising his voice over the cubs' hoarse crying, Mr. Pace said caring for them is similar to caring for human babies.

"Their milk has to be heated to a certain temperature or else they cry, spit up and fuss at you," he said, "and they demand lots of attention."

The last time the park received a bear cub was eight years ago, with the arrival of Norma, now a familiar inhabitant to park visitors.

Norma was different from three cubs now under care, Mr. Pace said, since she was alone while the new cubs can cuddle up together and play with each other.

"We're learning a lot from the



Mitchell

**This bear cub is being well cared for at Shubenacadie Wildlife Park. Foreman Bert Vissers feeds him milk through a baby's bottle.**

cubs," said Mr. Pace. "We've seen when their eyes first open, when they get their first teeth and how they play with each other."

Although the cubs look cute now, bears are not desirable pets, Mr. Pace said.

"There's nothing worse than a bear cub as a pet," he said. "They become too attached to their own-

ers and often hurt them because they don't know their own strength. They definitely can't be trusted."

The cubs will stay inside under constant care until spring, when they will be old enough to go outside, just in time to go on display for visitors when the park opens in May.



# Pace returns from Arctic with more Brant to study

By ANNETTE KEUNING  
Truro Bureau

SHUBENACADIE — A short, stocky and little-studied goose called the Brant has been the passion of Eldon Pace, provincial supervisor of wildlife parks, for more than 30 years.

Mr. Pace, Shubenacadie, has just returned from another trip to the Brant's high Arctic breeding ground to bring back more Brant geese to study.

On this expedition, made in July to Melville Islands 150 miles south of the North Pole, he captured 10 Brant, a species similar to the familiar Canada Goose but smaller and lacking the distinctive white cheeks.

He said in an interview he has studied the Brant — using his own money — as a personal project for many years because so little is known about the species, which is primarily a sea goose and is rarely seen inland.

"Nobody knows how many there are. Very little research is being done on them."

But if little is known about the species, even less is known about the bird's subspecies. Mr. Pace said there are three recognized subspecies of the brant: Atlantic, Pacific and Russian.

Subspecies have different markings, but otherwise are too similar to merit being called a separate species.

Mr. Pace is attempting to fill

the gap in knowledge. At the Shubenacadie park, there are birds of each of the Brant subspecies, along with the countless other species he raises, some for distribution across the Maritimes to fortify natural populations.

For instance, he releases up to 700 wood ducks, once near extinction in Nova Scotia, each year. Wood ducks are making a comeback in Nova Scotia, he said.

He's also recently finished a three-year project restoring the Canada Goose to Cape Breton.

These days Mr. Pace's attention is focussed on another form of the Brant called the Lawrence.

He says the Lawrence hasn't been given recognition yet as a subspecies — in fact, there is considerable controversy about which forms should be named subspecies and which separate species — but Mr. Pace believes the 10 young he brought to Nova Scotia this year from the Arctic are Lawrences. Positive identification can only be made when they're adults.

The Lawrence is slightly different in coloring and appears to molt slower than the other birds, said Mr. Pace. It also differs from other subspecies in that it breeds in pairs (each pair is about 30 kilometres away from the next pair) on the south-facing slopes of mountains, where the snow first melts in spring. The other subspecies nest in colonies.

Mr. Pace plans to have tests

conducted in the future on the Lawrences to determine if their genetic makeup constitutes a separate species, but for now he is concentrating on observing the birds and collecting information on their breeding, egg laying, mating and molting habits.

He said the idea is to gather as much information as possible because so little is known now and "the more you know the better."

The research may also help protect the future of the species. In past years environmental changes have hurt the Brant, particularly the Atlantic subspecies which feeds on eelgrass.

Although eelgrass is now making a comeback on the eastern coast of North America, the wintering ground of the Atlantic subspecies, the loss of eelgrass in past decades killed many Atlantics. As well, fewer Atlantics are coming to the east coast in the winter. "They changed their whole pattern."

Although management of the birds has increased their numbers, the Atlantic population declined so significantly officials banned hunting of Atlantics. "Season has never been open since."

Like the Atlantic subspecies, the Lawrence many too some day be threatened to extinction by natural or man-made disaster. If that happens, Mr. Pace hopes to have enough knowledge of breeding behavior and enough birds breeding in captivity to rebuild populations.



# Marty, Maggie, Paja and Jay—they won't be forgotten on Christmas

By MURRAY HIGGINS

Eldon Pace will spread 650 pounds of food on a 55-acre table on Christmas morning.

The guests, 800 of them, will assemble before dawn. Having spent a chilly night in the open, they will be looking forward to a breakfast of oranges, rolled oats, liver, eggs, vitamins, bran, browse, peanuts and alfalfa.

This hearty fare is for the animals and birds of Shubenacadie, Nova Scotia's wildlife park.

Eldon and his two "waiters" will serve Christmas-day break-

fast to all corners of the sprawling, tree-covered sanctuary.

At the puma cage he will gingerly offer a yuletide treat of poultry heads and vitamins to three fierce and hungry cats — Tammy, Paja and Jay.

Nearby, Carries, the seven-month-old caribou, enjoying her first Christmas at the park will munch on half a bale of alfalfa and deer pellets. She is the only caribou born in captivity on mainland North America.

One section of the animal community who won't get their provincial government repast will be two 300-pound black

bears — who are snugly tucked away in the warm corners sleeping through the winter.

Another noticeable absentee is Larry the Lynx — he's away in Alberta on a romantic quest.

At the next clearing, near an ice-covered pond, 150 ducks, 90 geese, a dozen peacocks, 14 wild turkey, 200 bob white quail and numerous other exotic birds will be waiting for their Christmas fare of cracked corn, wheat, rye, and oats.

There will be a jostling for places as a large number of transient ducks, geese, blue jays, crows and sparrows never miss the annual opportunity to drop in for the free meal.

The gaily feathered visitors — most of them refugees from the snowy wastes of northern Canada — get a special sympathetic handout from burly Eldon.

Park Superintendent Pace and his team will next visit the broad-shouldered moose, Marty and Maggie, a husband and wife, patiently awaiting their share. They need both quality and quantity.

Each receives about 50 pounds of specially vitaminized pellets and two large buckets of ground browse (a mixture of small maple, birch, alder, willow and fir branches.)

Eldon and his helpers become dietitians as they prepared to feed the principal gourmets of the park — the otter. These glossy furred river swimmers tumble over each other playfully as they feast on oranges, liver, horsemeat, bran, bone

meal, charcoal, halibut oil, malt and eggs.

Dawn is breaking as Eldon and his helpers move on to feed the dozens of other animals that comprise the population of the wildlife homestead.

After a three-hour stint of hosting the weary park-keepers head homewards for yet another breakfast — their own.

Behind them they leave 800 contented creatures—which in their natural setting, attracted a record 200,000 visitors this year.

It costs the Department of Lands and Forests \$37,000 yearly to feed and look after the inhabitants of the park.

## **Bald Eagle makes comeback**

The bald eagle, at one time almost extinct in Nova Scotia, is once again flying high.

One wildlife biologist described 1985 as a boom year for the eagle population.

The majestic black bird with a white head left the province because its environment, poisoned by pesticides, could no longer support it.

But the reduction in the use of pesticides and an aggressive re-introduction of the bird by the Nova Scotia department of lands and forests has resulted in a healthy population being established.

Lands and forests biologist Pete Austin-Smith says that about 175 young eagles were counted this spring, mostly in the Bras d'Or Lakes area of Cape Breton.

"There is no real explanation for the success of the eagle," he said. "But we are very optimistic about the eagle's future in Nova Scotia."

Austin-Smith said one possible explanation for the bird's big comeback might be the good supply of fish the eagle had found in the Bras d'Or Lakes.

The program of exporting eagles to Massachusetts had also met with great success. This year Nova Scotia sent eight young eagles there.

"All of them were placed in hacks (outdoor cages) when they arrived in the states.

The eight were all released on Aug. 9 and, according to Massachusetts officials, they all got away with no problems."

The osprey, another Nova Scotia bird that had faced many of the same problems as the eagle, is also more numerous.

Most of the province's native birds are doing well and several other bird species not native to the province have begun to appear.

Austin-Smith said that many birds previously seen only in more southern climates had found their way to Nova Scotia.

"This year we have had reports of the turkey vulture, cardinals and mockingbirds in the western area of the province and the Annapolis Valley. Previously these birds would not come this far north."

He said milder winters and a changing Nova Scotia habitat could explain the bird's presence.

"As more forest is cut down and more land dedicated to the growing of grains and corn we'll experience a greater diversity of birds."



# Shubenacadie facility haven for wild animals

Thousands  
visit  
popular  
park

By Hattie Dyck  
Truro Bureau

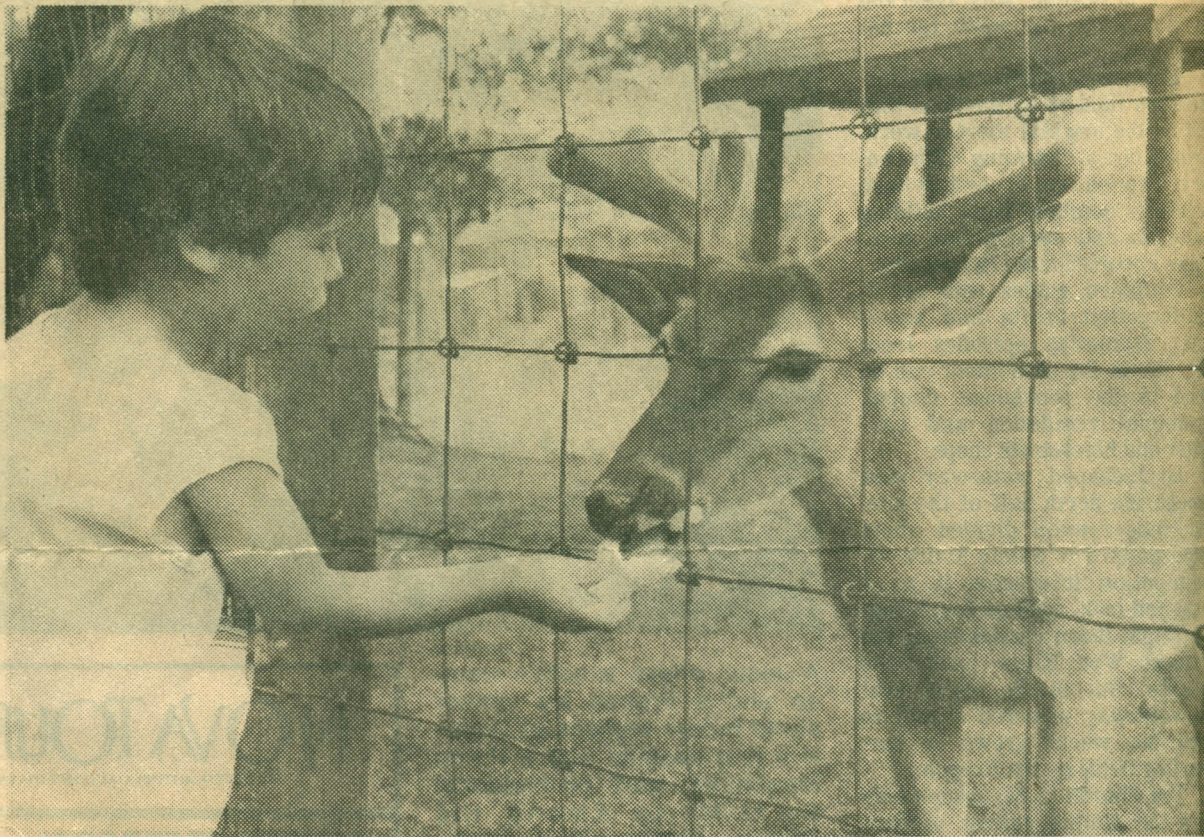
SHUBENACADIE — A little black bear cub was alone, walking slowly across the road at Wentworth. A passerby stopped, picked up the animal and took it home. Eventually the cub ended up at the Shubenacadie Wildlife Park, a sanctuary for orphaned or wounded animals as well as a haven for many species of wild animals and birds.

Last year 340,000 people visited the 50-acre park, located about 75 kilometers west of Halifax. The popular park is surrounded by a 1,000-acre sanctuary.

It is a family park where visitors can watch and feed the animals, and picnic if they wish on the surrounding grounds.

Bert Vissers is superintendent for wildlife parks in Nova Scotia. He said people are basically very kind about bringing in animals. This year 42 raccoons have already been brought in. Also three bear cubs, three tiny robins, four quail, several fawns, two flying squirrels and two porcupines, one an albino, have been left at the park.

The porcupine hasn't acted as viciously with the attendants as one would have expected, Vissers said. In fact, one porcupine likes his belly rubbed, something he doesn't advocate visitors attempting. The albino gave birth to a healthy dark-quilled baby, only two days after it was brought in.



Hattie Dyck/Truro Bureau

The fawns are always a major attraction at the Shubenacadie Wildlife Park. Justin Webb, Eastern Passage, smiles happily as he feeds bread to a young deer during a visit to the 50-acre park.

It's fun to watch the harbour seals bask in the warm sun after a bath in one of the park ponds. Close by, Hawaiian geese strut happily along, completely oblivious that as an endangered species, they are special. Native to Hawaii, with a foot that's only half webbed, they spend nearly 95 per cent of their time on land where they nest in grasses and have successfully raised their young in captivity.

The newest additions are the wolves and the coyotes. Vissers said the wolves are less hazardous to the public than the coyote because they will run from a per-

son if at all possible.

"They (wolves) are classed as one of the greatest balancers of wildlife," Vissers said. Their food consists of deer, moose, caribou and smaller game, and they seek out and kill the weaker animals.

Most of the park's animals were bred in captivity, including the bobcat which takes its name from its short tail.

The peacocks are among the most beautiful birds in the park, and will fan their wings for a spectacular array of color. The ring-necked pheasants are beautiful to see but Vissers said they are noted for their cannibalism.

Because of their aggressiveness attendants have to move the weaker birds away from their larger siblings.

Two skunks walking safely around their cage are not really a problem to their viewers because they have been de-scented.

The lynx, otter, snowy owl, bald eagle, falcon, hawks and beavers join the other animals to make a total of 27 different types of animals and 55 species of birds at the park. Although most are native to Nova Scotia, some animals such as the cougar and badger are not indigenous to this region.



**A** STORM was sweeping across the Arctic. Eldon Pace was huddled in his sleeping bag with some very hungry brant chicks, trying not to fall asleep and crush the young birds.

"I didn't know whether we were going to get off the island or not," says Mr. Pace. In 21 days he lost 23 pounds.

That was in 1960. Mr. Pace and two American biologists were able to bring back 18 healthy Atlantic brant chicks from their expedition to Southampton Island. (Brants are a form of Arctic goose.)

The chicks were taken to the provincial wildlife park in Shubenacadie. There they thrived, forming the only captive breeding flock of Atlantic brant in the world. At the park, there are also Pacific, Black and Russian brandts.

For more than 20 years, Mr. Pace has worked to collect comprehensive information on the birds. He has pioneered the study of brants' pair formation, sexual behaviour, plumage development, nesting and re-nesting habits and the behaviour of newly-hatched brant. It is only with such knowledge that the species can be protected.

His work with brants is remarkable in that it has been done on his own time and at his own expense. Working with the captive flock, Mr. Pace has discovered that the birds' sense of security is an important aspect of breeding them.

It seems the birds think of him as a very large and oddly-shaped member of the family. Mr. Pace has been known to get right down on the ground with them. The young brant love to climb up on him and pull at the hair of his chest.

"Hi, kids!", he yells as he approaches the enclosure. The birds come running.

Currently, Mr. Pace is trying to determine whether a distinctive type of the bird, known as the Lawrence brant, is in fact a subspecies. This calls for genetic analysis, for which no funds are available.

Brants breed in the far north and winter in the United States along the coasts. They had come under great pressure as the beds of eel grass on which they depend for food in their winter grounds in eastern North America had been largely destroyed by a virus. The beds have been generally reestablished but the happening serves to underline the fact that in the world's fragile eco-system the birds are particularly sensitive. Tiny natural changes in the north from time to time cause drastic falls in the brant population. There is a very real danger that man's activity in the north could wipe the brant out altogether.

With the knowledge gained at Shubenacadie, large-scale breeding programs can be set up should disaster ever befall the birds. This, of course, is not an alternative to sound environmental management.

While Mr. Pace's work with waterfowl has earned him an international reputation, in Nova Scotia he is better known as the man who established the department of lands and forests' wildlife park at Shubenacadie.

It was no accident that Mr. Pace was given the job of setting up the park in 1947.

Eldon Pace was born in Glen Margaret and his interest in wildlife developed at an early age. "When I was three years old," he recalls, "some Canada geese stopped near our place in March. My Dad fed them."



Michael G. W.

► Eldon Pace with a waterfowl friend ... even when he retires, Mr. Pace will continue his work with various species of water birds.



and when they got used to him, he took me along. I remember it quite clearly. I had a shortening pail full of feed but as soon as the geese saw me, they flew away. Within a week, however, they were eating out of my hand which they wouldn't do with my Dad.

"From then on, it was just wildlife, wildlife, wildlife. If I heard ducks or geese flying by, I'd run out of school just to see them." School was a one-room building at Glen Margaret with grades from primary to XII.

"After I finished grade XII, I wanted to go to veterinary school," says Mr. Pace. It was during the Second World War, however, and he joined the RCNVR, where he received asdic training before going to sea.



Michael G. W. Connor

► Eldon Pace ... director of wildlife parks.

After the war, Mr. Pace enrolled at the Maritime Forestry Ranger School in Fredericton. He went straight from the school into the department of lands and forests.

His first winter on the job was spent in the Liscomb Game Sanctuary working with a team trying to discover why the moose were mysteriously dying. "We didn't find out then, but we did get some clues."

Mr. Pace has a special way with animals. There was always some injured or orphaned animal he was working with on the side. This came to the attention of the then deputy minister, Dr. Wilfred Creighton, who sent Mr. Pace to the exhibitions around the province with the department's booth. Mr. Pace was in charge of six pheasants, two black bear, a number of fawns, two beavers and some fox cubs. He could not have been happier.

After the exhibition season ended, the government of the day announced that the province was going to open a wildlife park. To Dr. Creighton, the obvious man for the job was Eldon Pace.

Working with one other man, Mr. Pace literally built the wildlife park from the ground up. It was at his suggestion that the land behind the provincial fire headquarters in Shubenacadie was purchased as a site for the park.

Animals flooded in to the park. Budgets were tight in those days and Mr. Pace became an effective scrounger while building the enclosures. If a fox farm or a chicken house was being torn down, word would get back to Mr. Pace and there he would be with a truck and a smile offering to buy the scrap.

fencing.

While the park (and the pleasure it gives to thousands of people each year) is a significant achievement, Mr. Pace's work in other areas of wildlife is of equal, and certainly less known, merit.

About 1950, the wood duck, once common in parts of the province, had all but disappeared. Mr. Pace and Dr. Creighton decided Mr. Pace should try to re-establish the birds at the Shubenacadie Provincial Wildlife Park. He was able to buy four pairs of the birds from a Mr. Chappel in Cape Breton.

At that time, nobody was able to raise wood ducks in captivity. The hens would lay eggs in great numbers, if properly handled; and it was relatively simple to incubate them in machines. Getting the chicks to survive their first few days, however, was another matter. They simply would not eat. Standing on piles of food, the chicks would starve.

Wood ducks, as their name implies, nest in trees. In the wild, the



young climb out of their nests, drop to the ground and follow their mother to the water right after they hatch.

One day Eldon Pace had a brainstorm. At the park, the newly hatched chicks were being gently taken from the incubator and placed in brooders with easy access to feed and water. They were not feeding, Mr. Pace realized, because they thought they were still in their nest, high in a tree.

He scooped a few chicks out of an incubator and into a paper bag. He then held the bag over a brooder. The chicks climbed out of the bag, fell to the floor of the brooder where they picked themselves up and started feeding. The fall, it seems, triggers their feeding mechanism.

The breeding program then moved into high gear. Over the years, the handling of wood ducks has been refined to the point where, as Mr. Pace says, "We can raise 'em like chickens."

To date, more than 17,000 of the birds have been released in the province, establishing a number of breeding populations.

Canada geese were another species that had largely disappeared from Nova Scotia.

"Should we start a program?", Mr. Pace asked Dr. Creighton.

"Let's not get too heavily into this breeding business," Mr. Pace was told. "But we should have a few geese for the park."

That was all Eldon Pace needed. Two pairs of Canada geese were bought from Prince Edward Island.

The first spring, raccoons killed one pair, but the other birds raised five goslings. Everything was working well. The young birds spent the winter in the park with their flightless parents. Then in the spring, a wild flock flew over and the young birds automatically joined it, never

to return to Nova Scotia.

"This happened year after year after year. We couldn't get them to stay here," says Mr. Pace. "But I figured I would fix it one way or another."

He had read that the greater Canada goose, a sub-species thought to be extinct, had been found living in Manitoba. The greater Canada is a non-migratory bird.

Mr. Pace bought two pairs of the birds and crossed them with birds in the park, inventing the non-migratory sub-species of Canada goose that now nests throughout the center of Nova Scotia.

"You have to be real sneaky with wildlife," he says.

Eldon Pace's enthusiasm for wildlife is something his family has accepted from the very beginning.

In 1958 he married Ruth MacDougall of Halifax. He had accumulated a great deal of vacation time and so they were able to drive out to Montana for their honeymoon. They came back with a whole carload of young geese. Mr. Pace acquired five different varieties in the United States.

The birds rode on papers in the back seat of the honeymooners' sedan. "Man, it was hummy!", Eldon Pace remembers. "You got out to go into a restaurant and people looked, and it wasn't the perfume you were wearing. It stunk to high heavens."

The descendants of those birds can be seen today in the wildlife park.

A love of animals and wild creatures has provided a common bond in the Pace family. Ruth Pace, a nurse at the time of her marriage, now works as an attendant at a local veterinary hospital, "nursing sick animals rather than people."

One daughter, Elizabeth, a graduate in environmental biology from McGill University, is now working on her masters degree at Dalhousie in conjunction with the Nova Scotia Agricultural College at Truro. The other daughter, Katherine, is a graduate in office administration and marketing from Mount St. Vincent.

Eldon Pace, who recently underwent major surgery, is approaching retirement. At his home near the park, he is building a facility where he will carry on his study of the brant. Undoubtedly, he will always keep an eye on the park.

5

As he says, he is a lucky. He's been able to do the work he loves and in doing so has enormous pleasure to untold sands. He once wrote a letter to a woman whose grand-daughter, spite dozens of warning signs, been nipped while feeding at the park:

"I'd feel very badly if this experience has turned her away from wildlife. There's not that many dedicated people and we need them. I can get."

There are very few like Eldon Pace.



# Dedicated to wildlife



Forest

Eldon Pace, who founded the Shubenacadie Wildlife Park more than 38 years ago, retires today as supervisor. He says he'll miss the animals, especially the otters, as much as his co-workers.

## Wildlife park founder retires today, says goodbye to otters

By STEPHEN FOREST  
Truro Bureau

**SHUBENACADIE** — The Shubenacadie Wildlife Park closes for the season Oct. 15, but when it opens as usual next May 15, something will be missing.

Eldon Pace, its founder and supervisor, is retiring today after 38 years at the park.

Mr. Pace started the park in 1950 at the request of the province's deputy minister of lands and forest at the time. He collected pheasants and a group of animals and toured provincial exhibitions, bringing the wildlife to children. The animals were kept in an open field near the park's present site.

A few years later he happened upon a spot in Shubenacadie that eventually became the park's permanent home in 1954.

Millions have visited that

spot since it opened. Up to 450,000 people a year come to Shubenacadie to see the 50-acre park, surrounded by a 1,000-acre sanctuary.

People have come, literally, from all over the world to visit. Every province and American state has been represented, along with England, Italy, India and Japan, to mention a few.

"They like the place," explained Mr. Pace. Surveys have shown more than half park visitors come simply to enjoy themselves. Parents bring their children for the learning experience.

He is noticing more Nova Scotia license plates in the park's parking lot.

But that is just one of the changes he has seen during his 38 years. There is more wildlife — more than 100 animals of 30 species — and more staff, than when

he began as the park's sole employee.

"It's a part of you," he said recently, reflecting on his time at the park. "You're there at its conception and it has grown over the years. It's just like raising kids."

• The 63-year-old wasted no time saying what he will miss most after his retirement.

"Everything — the people you work with; the animals you're used to," he said, sitting in his office with his faithful companion Charlie — or Charlene — an African Gray parrot. The parrot, who does not belong to the park, is going home with Mr. Pace.

Eldon Pace will, no doubt, take a final walk around the Shubenacadie Wildlife Park today. He'll say goodbye to his personal favourite — the otters — and reminisce.



# Shubenacadie Park Takes On New Look This Year

By HATTIE DENSMORE  
SHUBENACADIE — The Shubenacadie Wild Life Park has taken on a new look this year with an expanded park and picnic area which gives the family visitors lots of room to play as well as enjoy a rest and lunch.

The park now contains about 1,600 acres.

Hundreds of people came Sunday as the warm sun made it a beautiful spot to be. Last year the park had 210,000 visitors and if the present trend continues it could well be topped long before the season ends this year.

The newest addition to the

park is three bear cubs. Superintendent Eldon Pace says that mama bear is a very cross animal and these days is well caged with her youngsters. Papa bear struts around in a paddock next to her cage, as if he was really all that proud of the first babies the two bears have produced in captivity.

The Mouflon sheep weren't as lucky as the bears and they didn't produce young this year. They are natives of Croscica and instead of greeting visitors from their home at the entrance to the park this year they're being moved to a 20-foot man-made mountain in the park grounds.

Breeding animals in captivity isn't a job for amateurs and Mr. Pace is internationally famous for his work. In addition to the many trophies he's won in other years, in 1968 he won the International Wild Waterfowl award for the outstanding game breeder in the world. He also won the Master Breeders Bronze Medal for outstanding game propagating. Mr. Pace is very happy with the park extension as he feels it will give the children a place to romp and play before they enter the park to see the animals. It's always helpful when some of their steam is run off before they get to the animals. He recommends when bus loads of children come that there be

one adult to each 10 children for supervision. He feels that if the children are in small groups they see more and the supervisors can read them the animals story posted on cages. It also eliminates the danger of over zealous children either teasing or making too much noise which has upset animals to the extent that they will kill their young.

"Lottie" is a real favorite with everyone as she takes a public bath completely oblivious of the many eyes upon her. She's a 35 pounds of fighting fury and swims with another female otter in their large cage. Lottie has only one friend; Mr. Pace, and as far as she is concerned the rest can move on. Mr. Pace

takes her out for a walk on her harness and she will give him a slobbery kiss for his kindness.

Animals and birds have come to the park both by purchase and trading from all over the world. There are \$20,000 worth of cranes there and many many more. At feeding time wild birds come to the sanctuary and feed too. There's no hunting allowed at any time.

Included in the list of animals there are the perky ground squirrels, horned owl, wildcats, badgers, lynx, cougars, wolverines, caribou, fisher, porcupine, moose and the beautiful deer. They live a happy and protected life under the watchful eyes of their caretaker.



# LYNX VANISHING ALONG WITH THE WILDERNESS

Man's encroachment on the habitat of Nova Scotia wildlife is having positive and negative effects on animal populations, according to department of lands and forests biologists.

While bald eagle, deer, beaver and many other fur bearing animals are thriving, concern is rising about the future of the lynx.

Once abundant on Nova Scotia's

mainland, the man-shy cat has all but disappeared into the upper highlands of Cape Breton and has been replaced by the bobcat on the mainland.

Biologists say the cutting practices of pulp and paper companies have contributed to the disappearance of the lynx and helped the bobcat population grow.

"The lynx loves primitive wilderness,

much of which has disappeared," said biologist Neil van Norstrand. "But the more aggressive and adaptable bobcat is thriving on the mainland."

The bobcat prefers light, brush covered areas which are often available after a stand of forest is cut down.

Van Norstrand said changes in habitat, the degree of hunting and trapping, and disease

greatly affected the type of animals which live in the province.

At one point in the 1940s the entire skunk, raccoon, groundhog and other populations were nearly wiped out by a distemper epidemic.

But today all of these species have rebounded to previous levels with some even exceeding previous numbers.

"The skunk has come back very strong," he said, "so much so that complaints about it have gone way up."

The white tailed deer is another fur bearer enjoying unbridled success in the wilderness of Nova Scotia — something all deer hunters will be very happy to learn.

Because of several mild winters the deer has thrived, with the 1985 spring population topping 150,000.

In an effort to control herd size the deer bag limit has been increased to two animals a hunter in eastern

parts of the province. This includes all lands east of the 101 highway between Bedford and Windsor.

Hunters in western

Nova Scotia will only be allowed one deer. This year the season starts Oct. 25 and ends Dec. 7 in all areas.

Another more troublesome animal, causing great concern among sheep farmers, is the eastern coyote.

Van Norstrand said the population has doubled each year since the first sighting of a coyote in the late 1970s.

"We estimate there are 5,000 coyotes in the province and he's turning up in areas such as Queens county where he didn't exist until this year. There's no doubt he will cause problems, especially for the fox and deer."

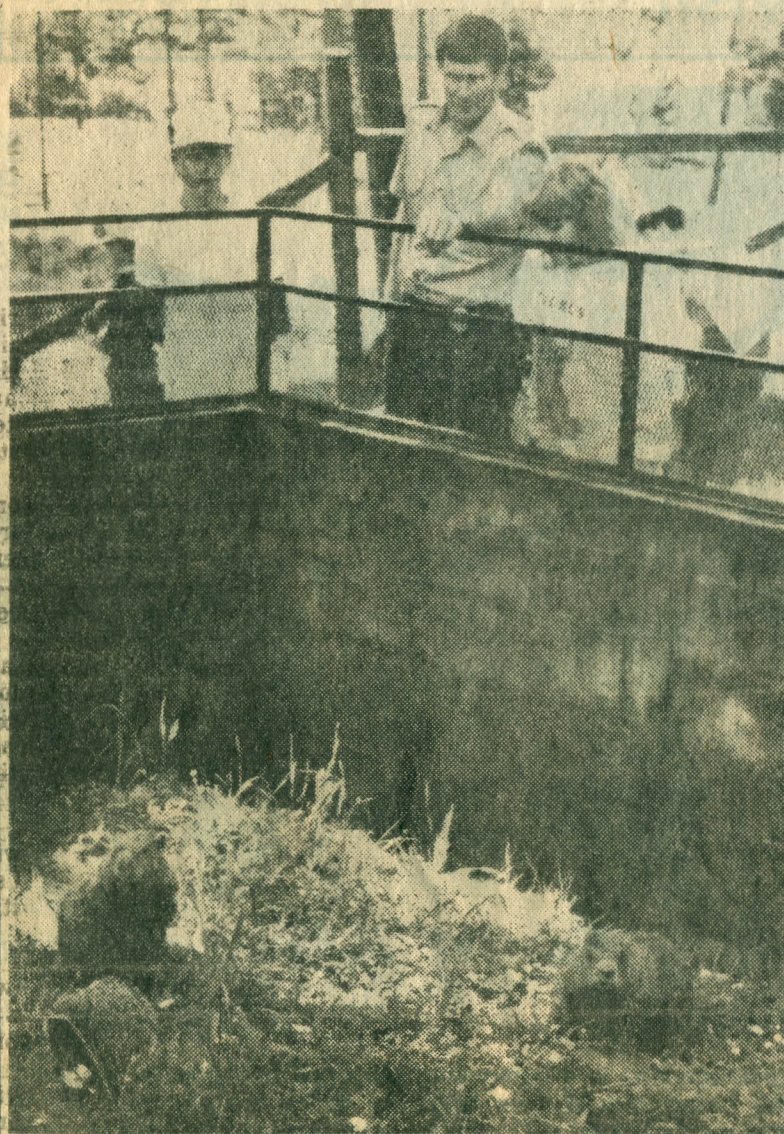
The eastern coyote is far bigger than his western cousin, the prairie coyote. Many male coyotes reach 40 to 50 lbs. here, while a big prairie coyote might weigh 30 lbs.

The future for fur bearers and other animals in Nova Scotia is pretty good with the exception of the lynx, said van Norstrand.

"Various animal populations go up while others go down and there doesn't appear to be any which will disappear totally."







Pat Lee/Truro Bureau

Bert Vissers, the new superintendent at the Shubenacadie Wildlife Park, chats with young visitors Joey Henry, 11, left, and Carrie Dauphinee, 11, both of Timberlea.

## Park chief gets no backtalk on the job

By PAT LEE  
Truro Bureau

SHUBENACADIE — The new head of the Shubenacadie Wildlife Park may enjoy talking to the animals but what he likes best about the job is that they don't talk back.

"I've enjoyed animals all my life," park supervisor Bert Vissers says with a chuckle, "because they don't argue, for one thing."

Mr. Vissers, who has worked at the park for 10 years, took over the top position last fall when Eldon Pace retired.

He comes by his love of animals and chosen career honestly, having been raised on an 8,000-animal game farm run by his father in Holland.

On his arrival in Canada in 1973, he worked on his uncle's Stewiacke East dairy farm before heading to the University of New Brunswick to train to be a ranger.

"I was quite fortunate the way things went," he now remembers of getting a lands and forest job after graduation and being hired as a park attendant in 1979. In 1984 he was promoted to acting foreman at the Shubenacadie facility and then foreman, a position he held until taking over as supervisor.

"I've always felt comfort-

able here," he says. "The whole staff works together."

As superintendent, Mr. Vissers oversees the 50-acre park just outside of Shubenacadie, including a 20-acre picnic area, which houses 27 types of animals and 55 species of birds.

The province's only wildlife park has been one of Nova Scotia's top tourist attractions for the past few years, with approximately 340,000 visitors at the site last year.

Along with caring for the animals the public sees, the park also assists Dalhousie University with its wolf research program, breeds certain types of birds for release, and nurses injured or young orphaned animals back to health.

"We try to bring them back to a state where they can be released to the wild," a time-consuming job because each spring a large number of squirrels, raccoons and white tail deer fawns are brought to the park.

"If we kept them all there would be no room for people."

Mr. Vissers says future projects for the park will include a new cat exhibit and possibly a home for beavers.

"We would like to improve and expand" as provincial money is made available, he says.



# Provincial parks open for another season

Provincial parks operated by the Department of Lands and Forests will open for the 1989 season on May 19. They will remain open until the Thanksgiving weekend, closing on Oct. 10.

The provincial parks system encompasses nearly 30,000 acres and includes 118 parks ranging from 21 provincial campgrounds to three wildlife parks and more than 90 day-use parks.

"Expansion and improvement of our parks in recent years has given us a parks system which is second to none," says Lands and Forests Minister Chuck MacNeil. "With their diversity of landscapes and services, our parks are now a significant tourist attraction and also make an important contribution to the quality of life enjoyed by Nova Scotians."

Special facilities for disabled people have been developed in 36 pro-

vincial parks. There are also now campsites for the disabled in parks at Dollar Lake, Halifax County; Amherst Shore in Cumberland County; Ellenwood in Yarmouth County; Porter's Lake in Halifax County; Blomidon Park in Kings County and at Smiley's Park in Hants County.

Other facilities include playgrounds which have been developed at Graves Island and Risser's Beach provincial parks on the south shore, at Smiley's provincial park campground in Hants County and Blomidon in Kings County.

Flush toilets and show-

ers have been added to the campground at Dollar Lake park in Halifax County and similar improvements will be made at Blomidon and Amherst Shore campgrounds opening in June.

The "Parks are People" program initiated in the Halifax-Dartmouth metropolitan area in 1987 has been expanded to provincial parks throughout the province this year. Brochures listing interpretive and special events planned under this program will be available at camping parks and across the province.

Also available this year is a new full colour provincial parks brochure which features a locator map which pinpoints the site of provincial parks. There is also a complete index of the various services and facilities available at each individual park.

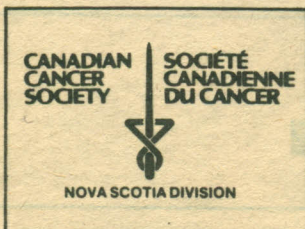
"Whether you like woodlands, beaches or breathtaking seascapes, our parks have a lot to offer," says Dr. MacNeil. "I encourage Nova Scotians and tourists alike to visit them often and discover and enjoy the diversity and beauty of the provincial parks system."



## The perfect pair?

The lion may lie down with the lamb, so why not this pair? Although not on display, these two recent orphans arrived at the Shubenacadie Wildlife Park and were housed in separate cages. Some-

how the door connecting them was left open and the two were found sleeping peacefully, the little fox draped over the young bear's back. They've been together ever since. (Dawe)





# Wildlife officials hope to re-establish endangered peregrine falcons in N.S.

By BRIAN RAU  
Truro Bureau

SHUBENACADIE — Visitors to the Shubenacadie Wildlife Park next spring will be able to see two of the rarest falcons in the world.

Park supervisor Bert Vissers says two female peregrine falcons have a new home at the park, thanks to the generosity of the Wainwright Breeding Facility in Wainwright, Alta.

"Officials there were kind enough to contact us when the falcons became available and we're very happy to have the two of them here in Nova Scotia," Mr. Vissers said in an interview.

Their breeding days over, the precious birds will now spend the remainder of their life at the park, where they are sure to attract much attention from visitors.

Now an endangered species, peregrine falcon populations declined drastically world-wide following the Second World War when use of pesticides such as DDT increased.

By the mid-1960s, no known breeding pairs remained in eastern North America south of the sub-arctic, but with the eventual ban of DDT on the continent and the introduction of restocking programs, survival of the species has become possible.

Beginning in 1982, the Canadian Wildlife Service did its part by releasing young falcons in Fundy National Park, New Brunswick, and near Advocate, Colchester County.

By 1984 a total of 19 had been released in Nova Scotia. Last summer 15 others were let loose.

"Seven falcons from Wainwright were released from Blomidon Provincial Park in the Annapolis Valley and then an-



Rau

Nova Scotia wildlife officials hope peregrine falcons — like those found at the Shubenacadie Wildlife Park — will again become established in the province through restocking efforts.

other eight were let loose from the park in Five Islands," Mr. Vissers said.

"The idea is for the falcons to meet halfway in the hope they'll eventually form a breeding population."

Before being released into the open, the falcons are placed in cages on a platform near a cliff. "The idea is to let them become familiar with the sur-

roundings in the hope they might return and breed the following year," Mr. Vissers said.

Once the falcons are let go, the job of wildlife officials is to monitor sightings and determine whether any breeding takes place.

"Our hope is that the species will once again become established in the province," Mr. Vissers said.