

Rescued cub gets new home

By CHRIS LAMBIE
The Daily News

A bear cub rescued after hunters shot its mother in February near Pugwash will be moving to Ontario at the end of the month.

The bear, which could fit in the palm of your hand five months ago, now weighs more than 20 kilograms, said Bert Vissers, superintendent of the province's wildlife parks. Vissers kept the cub at home for the first few months of its life, but now the bear — which some admirers have dubbed "Winnie" — is rooming at the Shubenacadie Wildlife Park.

"He won't be at the park much longer, though," said Vissers. "We don't have any facility for him because we already have the two adult bears."

The cuddly creature will make an African Safari Park in Galt, Ont. his new home. Vissers said the Ontario park's management is excited to be getting such a healthy bear.

"He's doing real good," Vissers said last night. "In fact, he's probably a little heavier than what they would be in the wild at this time because of the somewhat richer diet and better care."

The fuzzy bruin "gulps down" a steady diet of milk and several kinds of dog food. "And of course we add some fruits and vegetables for a little variety."

Vissers took the newborn home in February to nurse with a bottle, but those days of burping the baby bear are long gone, he said.

"He got too large. He tends to be somewhat rambunctious. He'll bite and he'll scratch. It's all playful, of course. Nevertheless, it does hurt. He can do a little damage."

When the bear reaches adulthood, Vissers estimates he'll weigh about 160 kilograms.

The African Safari Park "has a very nice bear facility," he said.

An investigation into the shooting of the cub's mother showed a pair of rabbit hunters and their dogs were responsible, he said.

"The dogs stirred up the mother and she came out of a brush pile. The people felt threatened and shot her," he said. "That's when they found the bear cub."

It won't be too difficult letting the cub leave, he said. "We have quite a few orphaned and injured animals that come in annually that we spend a lot of time with We try not to get too attached."

It wouldn't be safe to release the orphan back into the wild because he associates humans with food, he said.

"The animal really likes people."



Bear cub at the Shubenacadie Wildlife Park last weekend (top), and shortly after its rescue in February (left).

NO FREE LUNCH

Fees for picnics new policy at park

Those who took for granted that the best things in life are free are now lining up at the toll booth paying for those same things.

The latest squeeze on recreational activities formerly enjoyed by families free of charge is at the Shubenacadie picnic park. Several local residents say charging for that privilege is

unfair and often hurts the people who can the least afford it.

A new toll booth is operating at the beginning of the park. Visitors will pay one fee allowing them access to the Wildlife park and to the picnic area.

The Shubenacadie Wildlife park has been open to the public approximately

40 years, says superintendent Bert Vissers. It's only been in the last three years that visitors are required to pay admission to enter into the wildlife park. Mr. Vissers said that it is with regret that in setting the original fee, that they failed to include a charge for the picnic park.

"Since the cutbacks, we

are subsidizing the money made on the wildlife park to put into the picnic area," Mr. Vissers said. He said the picnic area includes a large playground area with approximately \$30,000 worth of equipment. The crew is constructing more shelters (covered picnic areas), increasing the picnic tables, looking at upgrading

the playgrounds, and such. "These things are expensive," he added. In addition, garbage left by the picnickers has to be hauled away at approximately \$50. per week, and the 20 acre area has to be moved frequently. "We just can't afford it anymore. It's not fair to take it (money) out of one area to subsidize for the playground."

In setting the price of \$3.00 per adult, \$1.00 for youth between six to 17 years, and children under six years old free, Mr. Vissers said "that's is still a good deal. We looked at other zoological facilities in the Maritimes to bring us more in, (when setting up the fee) and we are still the cheapest. Most zoological facilities don't have the picnic area."

Most people, he said, wouldn't complain about the cost of going out to see a movie and buying popcorn, pop and such, but will complain about spending money to go to a park.

He suggests visitors buy a seasonal pass, \$25.00 per family, or an adult pass at \$10.00, or buy the youth pass at \$3.50, and enjoy the privilege for five months (May to October).

He said he sympathizes with people who have a harder time paying, adding "we can't satisfy 100 per cent of the population."

For several local residents who took advantage

of sunny afternoons picnicking in the park, the admission charge dampened their enthusiasm.

Rosalie Woodworth has a nine-year-old son, and often looks after other people's children. She said, in the past she would go once a week to take the kids to the picnic area... "Now I will go probably one or two more times for the rest of the season."

She said she doesn't mind paying to go to see the animals, especially when she sees the recent improvements in the park but, she said, paying to enjoy the picnic area imposes a financial hardships for some people.

"I know people that won't be able to go. I can't afford to go every week...the children will miss out," she said.

Ms. Woodworth said if they have to charge a fee, then charge the minimum fee, like a quarter per person, which she said she feels is reasonable.

Marie Lucy, Cooks Brook Road, said she is disappointed because she feels a lot of parents can't afford the extra fee. "I understand the fee for the wildlife park but the playground area should be free."

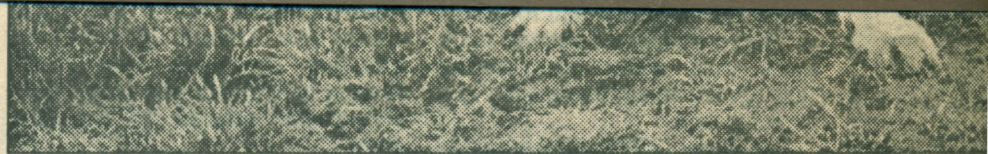
She said that as a result, her family will be looking into other alternatives — that don't cost.

Another resident living
See page 2



Just an hour before opening the new toll booth at its new location in front of the wildlife park, Darrell Burris, an employee with the Department of Natural Resources, sweeps any remaining dirt. One fee allows visitors entrance to both the wildlife park and the picnic area.

(White)



These two handsome brothers are the newest residents at the Shubenacadie Wildlife Park. The wolves were raised in captivity in Quebec.

Arctic wolves join park's pack of attractions

By BRIAN RAU
Truro Bureau

Shubenacadie

It's hard to tell these brothers apart.

Two Arctic wolves born in captivity in Quebec last year are the newest residents of Shubenacadie Wildlife Park, which opened for the season last weekend.

"One is slightly larger than the other and a little bit more friendly. Other than that they're pretty much the same because they're brothers," says park superintendent Bert Vissers.

Since arriving at the park at the age of two months, the off-white wolves have displayed an excellent temperament and appear content in their new home, an enclosure measuring 37 by 30 metres.

"They're very inquisitive," said Mr. Vissers. "They like to roam around the enclosure like the gray wolves we have here."

The visiting public is invited to participate in a Name the Arctic Wolves contest at the park this summer. Entries can be dropped off in a suggestion box at the park and the winner will receive a book on Nova Scotia wildlife.

The 30-hectare park is home to

a host of animals, mammals and birds. Recent newborns include reindeer, white-tailed deer, martens, Barbary sheep and Mouflon sheep.

"We had 4,000 visitors on the Victoria Day weekend and, considering the weather, that wasn't bad," Mr. Vissers said.

Elementary schools will be happy to know the park is in the process of renovating a building into a classroom. Wildlife-related education programs will be offered to students next fall.

"This will enable us to bring in classes and talk to students about wildlife before or after they go on guided tours at the park," Mr. Vissers said.

The program will likely be supported by the Nova Scotia Department of Education and have an in-house instructor. Students will be asked to pay a nominal fee.

"We're looking at offering the program from mid-October to mid-April and hope to accommodate up to 7,500 students from across the province," he said.

The park is open seven days a week from mid-May to mid-October from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. Children under six are admitted free.

Experience the wonder and excitement of the Shubenacadie Wildlife Park

Black bears, bald eagles, Sarus cranes, reindeer, peacocks, Sable Island horses, small animals, big animals, and newborns; you can see these and many more at the Provincial Wildlife Park in Shubenacadie.

Located halfway between Halifax and Truro, it's easy to find and easy to get to. A leisurely stroll along the two-kilometre trail, photographing native North American and exotic wildlife, followed by a relaxing picnic at the 10-hectare picnic park and playground makes a nice day trip for the entire family or group.

The Wildlife Park, which is owned and operated by the Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources, was opened in 1954 to provide a home for injured and orphaned wildlife. It has grown and expanded over the years, and today 33 mammals and 65 bird species are found throughout the 25-hectare park.

More than 100,000 people pass through the gates each year; approximately 25,000 of whom are out of province visitors.

According to Susan Mader of the Department of Natural Resources, the species in the park fall into three categories: permanently injured, captive-raised, and captive-born. All of the birds of prey, for example, have permanent injuries and cannot be released back into



WALK IN THE WOODS

DON CAMERON

Forester

Department of Natural Resources

the wild as they would not survive.

According to park supervisor Bert Vissers, animals are not taken out of the wild for the purpose of display in the park. In addition to the captive animals, visitors can see red squirrels running about freely and Nova Scotia's official bird, the osprey, flying overhead.

The park has not been expanded in recent years, but rather, emphasis has been put on improving the facilities and educating those who visit the park. Over the last four years, work has been done to enlarge and improve the animal enclosures to provide a more natural and open environment. One drawback is that the animals can now hide more easily; although, species that are hand-raised from birth or an early age are tame and easier to see.

"This is much better for the animal and provides for a much better exhibit. People have a better opportunity to see the animals because they are not easily startled," Vissers says. "We're also

changing the layout of the park to improve the flow so people have a better opportunity to see everything."

People can now walk along the sides of a moose enclosure, which makes it better for photographic opportunities. Hand-raised snowshoe hare are a new addition this year. Public washrooms were built last year, and a granite entrance sign greets visitors as they enter the park, providing a setting for a family photo. Many people visit the wildlife park for a pleasant recreational outing, but park staff consider visitor education to be an important factor as well. New interpretive and enclosure signs provide visitors with information about wildlife species; for example, where they live in the wild, what they eat, and how many young they have. If you have yet to experience a trip to the wildlife park, and even if you have gone recently, there is no time like the present to check out the new and improved entertaining and yet informative destination.

Tre Trivia

The Nova Scotia section of the Canadian Institute of Forestry recently hosted a successful national conference in Halifax. Dozens of speakers from around the world provided informative presenta-



A HOME WHERE THE ANIMALS ROAM

tions based on the timely theme of Integrated Resource Management. In general, it appears as though Nova Scotia is on the right track with respect to the direction in which the newly structured Department of Natural Resources is going.

The staff of the three regional offices, located in Bible Hill, Bridgewater and Coxheath have been recently structured into IRM Groups. These groups will work as teams to develop future programs and activities in which DNR is

Feb 19, 1996

Bear cub kept alive after mother dies 'mysteriously'

By **JACKIE FITTON**
NEWS Writer

EAST STEWIACKE — Once upon a time there were two bears in Pugwash, a mommy bear and a baby bear.

One day mommy bear died under suspicious circumstances — leaving the seven-day-old baby alone to fend for himself.

The Department of Natural Resources stepped in and although officials are vague about the circumstances, a spokesman said Friday that his department is continuing an investigation into the death of the adult bear.

Reg Aggas, of Natural Resources, regional director of the Central Region said no other information could be released at this time because it could jeopardize the investigation.

While investigating the death, Natural Resources discovered the baby on Tuesday. It was taken to the Shubenacadie Wildlife Park, but because it was still a baby it had to have night time feedings.

So the baby was taken into the home of Natural Resources Superintendent of Wildlife Parks, Bert Vissers, whose wife Karen is used to her husband bringing his work home.

The baby sleeps in the Vissers bedroom in a box. A heating pad on low is kept underneath and a blanket covers the box, acting as insulation from noise and to avoid the light until the baby's eyes open.

The now 10-day-old baby's eyes probably won't open for another week, Bert Vissers said.

All baby bottles are sterilized daily, the blankets are washed nightly and

the formula is made with a mixture of Vitalac, a human baby formula and Esbilac, an animal formula containing vitamins.

When full grown, the baby will be a strapping 300 to 400 pound bear.

Once the night feedings stop, the bear will be taken to live at the Wildlife Park, where it will be looked after by the female bears at the park.

"Female bears are one of nature's

most excellent mothers, they always protect the young," Vissers said.

Vissers stresses that wildlife animals are meant for the wild and don't make good pets.

But bringing the baby home while it continues nighttime feeding is a cost-saving measure by the department and it's also in the best interest of the baby not to be taken out into the cold.



BERT VISSERS of the Department of Natural Resources nurses a bear cub which was located last week after its mother died. The investigation into the mother's death continues. (Fitton Photo)

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Bear cub care

BERT VISSERS, the province's superintendent of wildlife parks, welcomes the inconvenience presented by a visitor in his East Stewiacke home.

His guest is a young bear cub, brought from the Wentworth area after the death of his mother.

In the wild, the cub still would be in semi-hibernation with its mother. In the Vissers' home, its presence is more disruptive. It must be fed every three hours, it must be cleaned regularly and its bedding must be laundered daily.

Why undertake such a chore? To Mr. Vissers, the answer is...



Steve Proctor / Truro Bureau

Shubenacadie Wildlife Park attendant Heather O'Hara wrestles with Winnie, a black bear cub being raised by park staff. Ms. O'Hara said the playful nine-week-old cub loves to snuggle after he has had his bottle.

Winnie gets own digs at Shubenacadie park

By STEVE PROCTOR

Truro Bureau

Shubenacadie

A black bear cub who spent the first weeks of his life curled up at the foot of Bert Vissers' bed has new digs.

Winnie, as he has been unofficially nicknamed, has moved from the comfort of the park superintendent's East Stewiacke home to his own cage in a private section of the Natural Resources Department's wildlife park in Shubenacadie.

"He loves to sleep on his stuffed elephant," says Heather O'Hare, the park staffer who has established the closest bond with the playful critter.

"He's just learning to climb on a log we've put in there for him. He fell off a lot at first, but he's beginning to get the hang of it."

Mr. Vissers took the cub home in mid-February after its mother was shot by a hunter in the Tatamagouche area. When the bundle of fur arrived, he was about a

week old and required intensive 24-hour-a-day care.

Mr. Vissers and his wife Karen fed him, burped him and watched him grow from a helpless eight-ounce infant into a playful toddler capable of inflicting serious damage with his sharp claws.

"When he started walking around, I knew it was time for him to head to the park," Mr. Vissers said Thursday.

He says his former house guest has had no difficulty settling into his new cage located alongside an orphan seal and across the way from a turn of turtles.

"He doesn't really pay any attention to the other animals," Ms. O'Hare said. "He sleeps, plays with the three stuffed animals in his cage and spends a lot of time begging for lunch."

Where the cub will end up is still a mystery. "He'll be here at least to the middle of May," Mr. Vissers said. "We've got plenty of time to find him a home."

Chronicle Herald - Apr 13/96

Concerned people take orphaned fawns to wildlife park

By JACKIE FITTON
NEWS Writer

SHUBENACADIE — Six orphaned fawns have taken up residence at the Shubenacadie Wildlife Park.

Concerned people began arriving with the baby White Tail Deer fawns after they assumed the fawns had been abandoned.

"The mothers usually hide their babies in different locations to reduce the chance of loss from predators," supervisor of wildlife parks Bert Vissers said.

He said people began arriving weekly through the summer with the fawns, from various areas of the province.

The fawns all born in the Spring were bottle fed by Department of Natural Resources wildlife workers until September. They have now been weaned and are on regular food.

Vissers said the babies should not be removed from the wildlife unless they are distressed or the mother has been killed.

He said 95 per cent of fawns

brought to the park are not orphans. Vissers suggests that if in doubt as to whether the baby is an orphan the best thing to do is to wait 24 hours and then check again to see if the baby is still there — then it should be taken to the wildlife park, he said.

Baby fawns aren't frightened of humans and you can usually walk right up to them. So if you see the fawn alone, the mother is usually hiding somewhere watching over the baby, Vissers said.

Another added attraction to the park this year is that it's open to amateur photographers in groups of four. The photographers are permitted to rent the park for the day for photography sessions. The cost for the day's rental is \$50.

"We do permit the photographers to enter some of the cages under supervision," he said.

The Nova Scotia Photographers Guild rents the park every Saturday, Vissers said.

He said it's a great opportunity for the photographers to photograph the bears, cougars, and eagles in their element.



Four of the six abandoned white tail deer fawns came closer to pose for the camera. The fawns were bottle fed by Department of Resources, Wildlife Park workers after they arrived at the park during the summer. DNR Wildlife Park Supervisor Bert Vissers said 95 per cent of the fawns have not been abandoned. The mother moves them to different locations with less chance of loss to predators.

(Fitton photo)

Park fee boosted funds but scared off patrons

By **STEVE PROCTOR**

Truro Bureau

Shubenacadie

Just half the usual number of people walked with the animals at the Shubenacadie Wildlife Park this year, but the park supervisor says the introduction of user fees was still a success.

"There were fewer people through the park, but nothing we didn't really expect," Bert Vissers said Thursday. "Even with the decreased attendance we're in a better financial position now than in previous years."

In April, the provincial government introduced a \$2 entrance fee for adults and a \$5 family fee to try to make the park more self-supporting.

"Most parks and museums have been charging an entrance fee for years," Mr. Vissers said. "People here should be happy they didn't have to pay anything for the past 40 years."

Annual attendance at the 23-hectare park for the past five years has been estimated at just more than 200,000. Paid attendance in 1994 was just more than 100,000.

Studies done before the fee was introduced suggested park attendance would drop 35 per cent. Mr. Vissers said the decrease was larger than that because there was also a drop in the number of visits from school classes.

The park doesn't charge for educational outings, but Mr. Vissers said schools had less money available for bus rentals and trips of any kind.

He said it's also possible the drop appears bigger because attendance numbers for previous years were estimates and may have been overstated.

"It's going to take people some time to get used to the fee," he said. "Some people griped this year and others walked away, but there were some who recognized you can't get something for nothing."

Mr. Vissers said he hopes the park will regain some of its lost attendance next year when people who boycotted it as a matter of principle are no longer upset.

The park is open from May to mid-October.

Sam ready for his day in the sun, maybe

By Donna-Marie Sonnichsen
Staff Reporter FEB '99

Shubenacadie Sam got the jump on his groundhog brethren Monday, rising from his burrow in bright sunshine but seeming oblivious to his shadow.

While today, Groundhog Day, may be just fanciful folklore, believers can expect six more weeks of winter if the little varmint sees his shadow again — which is fine with wildlife officials and weather forecasters.

"Hey, if six weeks is all that's left, we'll take it," says Bert Vissers, manager of the Shubenacadie Wildlife Park, home to five of the hibernating critters.

Legend says the groundhog emerges at noon every Feb. 2 looking for its shadow. If there's none, it remains outside because the worst of winter has passed. If it casts a shadow, it's back to the burrow for another six weeks of hibernation.

Shubenacadie Sam was on the money last year. Park officials will be on hand at high noon today for the latest prognostication.

Although weather forecasters think it's little more than a cute story, groundhogs have been 30 to 50 per cent accurate, even if only by accident, says Environment Canada climatologist Bill Richards.

And he said at least the legend has benefits.

"It gets people thinking about spring, and even a forecast of six more weeks of winter would put



Sam

• continued from / A1

would coincide with the spring equinox March 21, a time when winter usually still has a stronghold on most of Canada.

And the timing has some merit, Mr. Richards said.

"This is what you would call the dead of winter.

"Normally this is when you see the lowest temperatures of the year and winter bottoms out. So if people are depressed about winter they can take heart that days are getting longer, temperatures are on the rebound and we're on our way to spring."

But even Environment Canada acknowledges there is a grain of truth to the shadow legend, since sunny winter days are generally associated with colder, drier arctic air, and cloudy days with milder, moist maritime air.

But even if Shubenacadie Sam, and his more famous counterparts, Ontario's Wiarton Willie and Pennsylvania's Punxsutawney Phil, say spring is in the air, don't put away the shovel just yet.

We've still Sheila's brush to contend with. The Irish legend calls for a fierce wind and snowstorm to strike around March 17, St. Patrick's Day.

In Wiarton, Ont., the town's trusty but scientifically unfounded weather forecasting groundhog is also set to crawl out of his hole today to tell the world whether spring will come early.

The albino rodent who lives in a custom-designed hutch in the front yard of a motel just south of this town of 2,300 has put the municipality on the world map. Why? Because he's afraid of his own shadow.

For the past 43 years, Wiarton-area residents have celebrated Groundhog Day on Feb. 2 with the world's media calling to learn if a frightened Willie has crawled back into his hole.

Feb 15/95 Two Daily News

Wildlife park receives injured bobcat

By JACKIE FITTON
South Colchester
NEWS Writer

SHUBENACADIE — A bobcat, unable to survive in the wild because of a severe paw injury suffered when caught in a snare, has had the paw amputated.

The bobcat was found in the Elderbank area on the farm of Betty Musutti, who notified authorities when the bobcat tried to attack rabbits on the farm.

"It was just exhausted and hungry," Mrs. Musutti said.

The bobcat's paw was almost completely severed, she said. "It was obvious it had been stuck in the snare for quite a while."

Snares are designed to catch the animal by the throat but in this case it caught the paw.

A dilemma arose as Department of Natural Resources wildlife officials waited for a decision to either euthanize the animal or amputate its paw.

"Bobcats by nature use their paws to attack their prey, if they don't have those defences they can't hunt or protect themselves," Natural Re-

sources Supervisor of Wildlife Parks Bert Vissers said.

The kindest thing would be to euthanize the animal, he said.

Late last week the decision was made to have the bobcat's paw amputated. The cat will stay at the wildlife park until the wound had healed.

Wildlife Park officials will try to rehabilitate the animal and see if there is any possible way the animal can be released back into the wild but it must be able to hunt and protect itself without falling prey to other animals, Mr. Vissers said.

March 3/95 Chronicle Herald

Bobcat Joe on the mend

By MARY-ANN ARCHIBALD

Shubenacadie

Bobcat Joe might be back looking for food at Betty and Joe Masutti's hobby farm in a couple of months, but that's just fine with the Elderbank couple.

Joe's left front leg had to be amputated after being caught in a fox snare for almost six weeks, but whether he'll survive after going back to the wild is the big question.

"We'd like him released near us somewhere," Mrs. Masutti said. "Just in case he can't get along, he might remember to come for food."

For now, Joe is recovering at the Shubenacadie Wildlife Park, where he had the amputation Feb. 14.

The Masuttis took pity on the bobcat when they saw him nosing around their farm for a meal — the snare on his paw made it hard for him to hunt in the woods.

So they began feeding him rabbits and chickens they'd raised.

"I'd go out there and call my husband and it would sit there. He wouldn't even run away, not unless you moved closer," said Mrs. Masutti, a 71-year-old retired nurse.

"It's sickening the things people do. It's not right to hurt animals;

they suffer so. The snare had to be up behind our property. I'm sure there's lots of them up there."

After four days, they finally rescued the bobcat in a live trap — a baited box with a door that falls down after the animal has entered.

Joe's recovery is going very well, says a wildlife official.

"He is stressed, and it's understandable. He lost a limb and is in a small enclosure until his injury is healed, then we'll try to rehabilitate him," said Bert Vissers, supervisor of the province's wildlife parks.

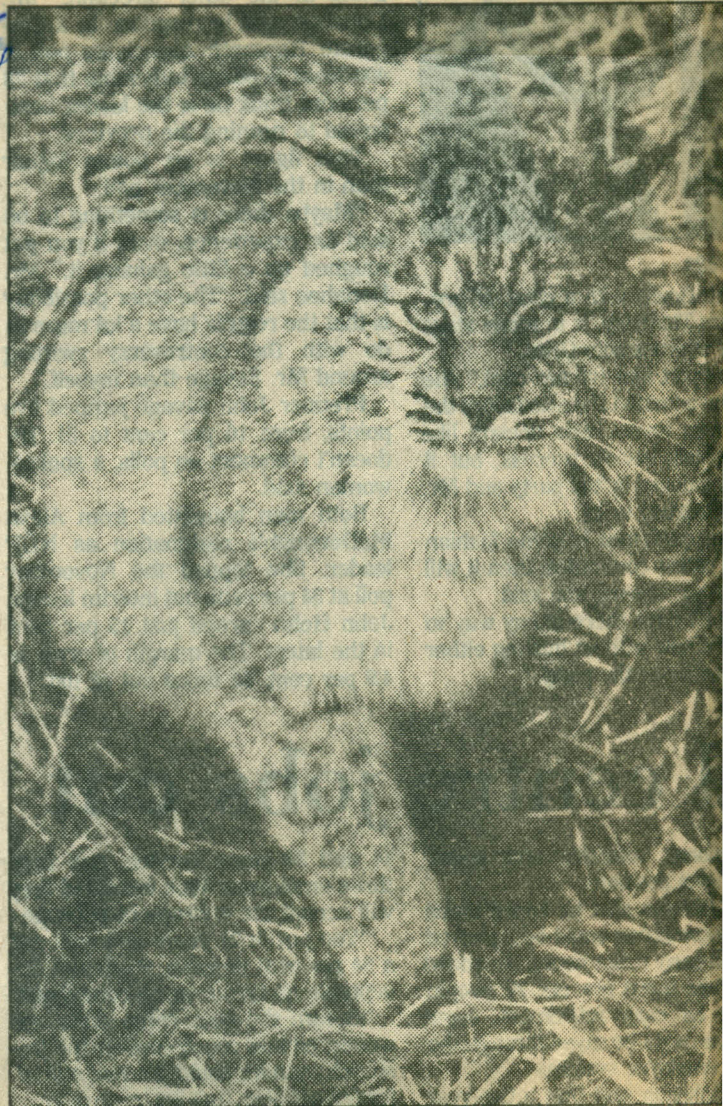
"When I first saw it, my opinion was to euthanize," Mr. Vissers said. "But we decided we should try to rehabilitate this animal."

Wildlife parks receive many injured animals and birds, but rarely because of snares, Mr. Vissers added. There's disagreement about whether a handicapped animal like Joe can survive in the wild again.

So when he's released, he'll be sporting a transmitter collar.

"There's nothing definite. But if this happens again we'll (know) ... whether or not we should be doing this," said Mr. Vissers.

Joe will be freed in May, giving him six months to adjust to his three-leggedness before next winter.



Mary-Ann Archibald
Joe, a wild bobcat, had his left front leg amputated at Shubenacadie Wildlife Park after he'd been trapped in a snare for weeks.

Shubenacadie Wildlife Park: an

By SHANNON BERRY
South Colchester
NEWS Writer

SHUBENACADIE — Only the woodchuck surrenders to a deep slumber during the cold winter months at the Nova Scotia Wildlife Park because when the doors close to the public in the fall for a seven-month hiatus, it's not a time to relax for staff.

The Shubenacadie park has been around since 1953 and is the largest and oldest wildlife park maintained by the province, said Bert Vissers, who supervises the province's four wildlife parks including the newest one in Goshen, Guysborough County.

"It was originally started to provide an opportunity for the public to bring orphaned animals, injured animals etcetera to one location," Mr. Vissers explained.



(Berry photo)

A white fox at the Nova Scotia Wildlife Park in Shubenacadie peers cautiously at unexpected onlooker who invades his quarters.

The park comprises 50 acres and is also surrounded by a 1,000-acre sanctuary which acts as a buffer zone. The supervisor said many people tend to think the park is smaller because of the large enclosures for such animals as white-tailed deer and moose.

"Of course this is the time of year that most of our maintenance is done," he said. Time is spent improving the animal enclosures and staff go into the woods to cut their own rails and posts.

There is also a great deal of work that can be carried out in warmer quarters including making crates, caging and gates.

"Even though the park is closed we still have staff on hand seven days a week because the animals still have to be fed and of course that's 365 days a year."

All of the animals remain in the park for the winter, but some are temporarily relocated to other homes.

"For example, we have winter quarters for our water fowl — some of our water fowl have to be kept in a heated section for the winter," Mr. Vissers said. Staff consider an animal's requirements and "if these are exotic birds then of course we have to provide adequate facilities for them in the winter time."



(Berry photo)

A pair of shaggy reindeer are quite at home in below zero winter temperatures, but other animals at the Shubenacadie Wildlife Park require special cold weather quarters.

animal refuge

Most of the wildlife in the park are native to North America and they feel right at home when the temperature dips for the season.

Still, more protection is given to these animals in the form of extra bedding and den openings — large in the warmer months partly to provide people with a better look at the animal homeowner — are closed in to cut down on drafts. In some cases, even spruce boughs are laid across the door to cut down on entering winds.

For the wildcats, raccoons, and black bears, "we also increase their diets to provide the animal with some fat to store for the winter."

Temperatures lately have been hard to predict — mild weather one day and bitterly cold the next, and this type of weather affects the park's occupants.

"But none of the animals that we have at the park — except the woodchuck is a true hibernator," Mr. Vissers said, noting a semi-hibernator like the black bear, will on occasion poke its nose out on mild days and will also produce young in the spring which doesn't normally happen with true hibernators.

When hibernating, a woodchuck's heartbeat may slow to eight beats a minute and breathing can be reduced to one or two breaths a minute and this death-like condition can fool many people.

Mr. Vissers recalled a staff member a few years ago who was cleaning out the woodchuck's pen one winter and believed the animal to be dead. He placed the woodchuck in a box and took it to a warmer location and shortly after the animal was resurrected.

The winter is a breeding time for some park occupants and last year there were young reindeer, sheep, waterfowl and also some cougar kittens.

"We have a fair number of young born here each year," he said, noting captivity doesn't deter reproduction. "I've heard many times that if the animals are content in captivity they will carry on their natural production."

Many of the park's wildlife are born and raised in captivity and are more at ease with people, but caution must still be exercised because their actions are not predictable.

Mr. Vissers said opening the park to the public during the winter months has been considered but such things as staffing, and ice and snow must be considered.

"All of these things present problems but if a certain group of people request entrance into the park we can make arrangements," he said, on staff terms.

A fair number of birds are brought to the park each winter for care — some emaciated from not getting enough food and other suffering from various injuries.

Right now, a relatively rare hawk owl discovered in Cape Breton is recuperating from a wing amputation at the park and is sure to be of interest to the public.

Mr. Vissers said some may question the rightness of the amputation, but notes at least the bird has a chance to live.

When it comes to medical treatment, most is done in-house or handled by area veterinarians. Mr. Vissers said the park maintains records of successful treatment and uses these for reference. Staff also draw knowledge from experts at the Calgary Zoo of Metropolitan Toronto Zoo.

"There's always communication between the parks and the zoos in case the need is there."

Mr. Vissers said there are no plans to expand the park but a number of improvements are in place including changes to the cages and enclosures.

The park has remained a popular visiting spot for both locals and tourists and the changes will allow for better animal viewing.

Admission to the park will still not be charged in order to make it accessible to all.

Rug rodents rebuff call of the wild

June 1990

By Paul MacNeill

TRURO BUREAU

SHUBENACADIE

Burt and Karen Vissers know it's feeding time when they hear whimpers coming from their dining room or the eager scamper of tiny feet across the kitchen floor.

But the infants running to the kitchen are furry, the scampering feet undeniably webbed and the broad tail instantly recognizable to any Canadian.

Burt and Karen Vissers have adopted a pair of baby beavers.

Adopting wild animals is part of Mr. Vissers' job as supervisor of wildlife parks for the Department of Lands and Forests.

He has helped nurture everything from baby bears to baby hares at his home.

Several weeks ago, three tiny beavers from Oxford, Antigonish and Whycocomagh were dropped off at the Shubenacadie Wildlife Park.

Ranging in age from four to 10 days old, the newborn animals needed to be fed early in the morning and late at night.

Just as he has done with other wild animals, Mr. Vissers took the baby beavers home for some special attention. Eventually, all three will live at the park.

"If we don't have the staff at the park then it's really a necessity to do it this way. It's time-consuming, but worthwhile."

The two young beavers have adapted to being washed in a baby's bathtub several times a day.

Mr. Vissers said feeding the young beavers, all found floating in ponds or rivers, was difficult at first because they were not used to their new home.

"We were using a milk substitute and a rubber nipple and they were being picked up. There was a lot of stress."

At first it took an hour to feed each animal. Gradually, as they became used to people, the feeding process became easier. Now it only takes 10 minutes, with two to four feedings a day.

The oldest of the trio was recently transferred to the park.

Its transition has not been easy, and it still refuses to swim.

"The animal knew what its natural setting was and all of a sudden here it is among people. This is probably the reason why it's not taking to water," Mr. Vissers said.

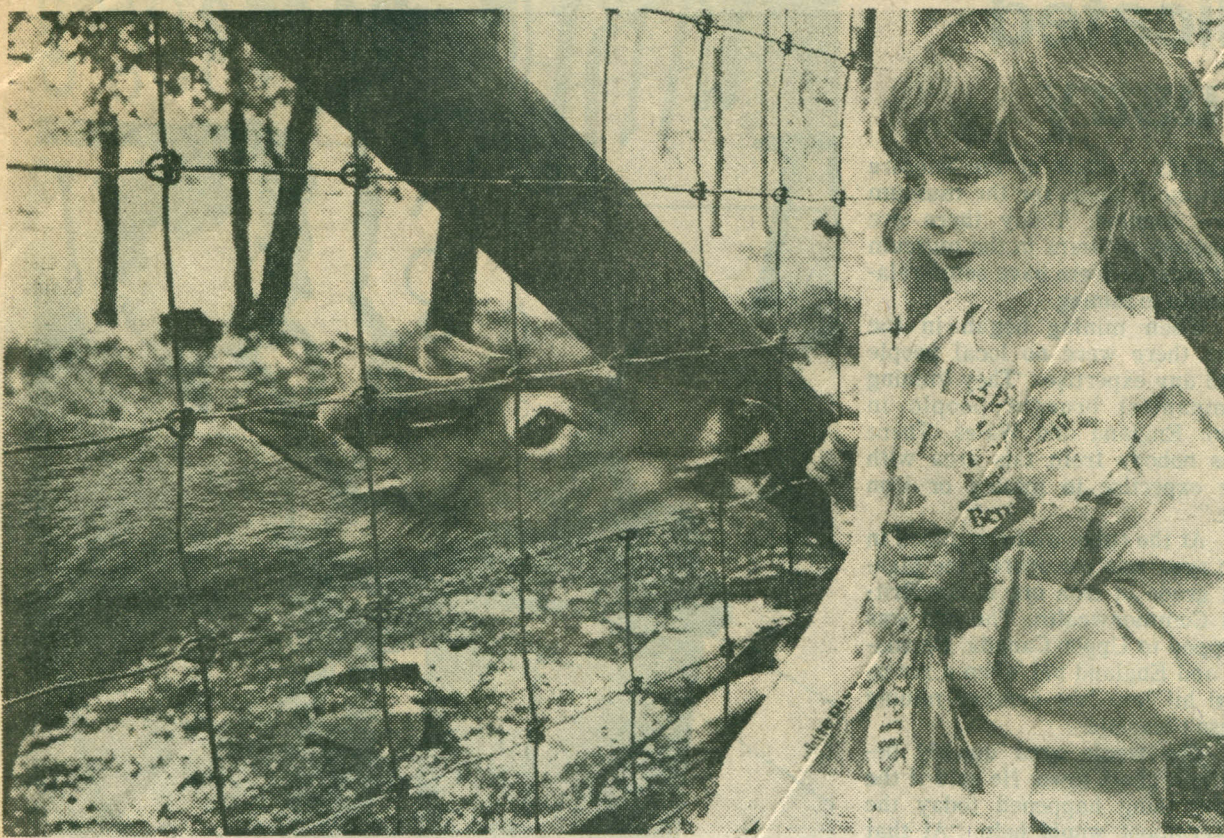
"It's not a problem. It's just a matter of time and instinct will take over. Eventually it will go for the water."

However, Mr. Vissers warned against taking wild animals out of their natural surroundings unless it's a matter of life and death.

Even then, trying to ensure they survive is no easy task.

"I would prefer if people left them there. Baby animals found in the woods are always soft, cuddly and cute, but most people don't realize that wild animals make very poor pets."

May 1990



Lee

Erin O'Reilly, 6, of Timberlea enjoys feeding a deer at the Shubenacadie Wildlife Park, the province's top tourist attraction for the past few years.

Shubenacadie Wildlife Park province's top tourist attraction

By Pat Lee
Truro Bureau

SHUBENACADIE — For a number of years the Shubenacadie Wildlife Park has been Nova Scotia's top tourist attraction. More than 300,000 visitors toured the province's only wildlife park last year.

"It's a great recreational tool," park superintendent Bert Vissers says of the site's success, and "you get to see animals that you'd never be able to see — and it's free."

The 50-acre park, located just outside Shubenacadie, includes a

20-acre picnic area and is home to 27 different types of animals and 55 species of birds.

Most animals and birds are native to Nova Scotia but some, like the cougar and badger, are not found in this region.

Mr. Vissers says in addition to what the public sees, staff also work behind the scenes assisting Dalhousie University with its wolf research project, breeding certain types of birds for release and nursing 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-tailed fawns are brought to the park.

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

Future plans for the park include a new enclosure for the lynx and bobcats and possibly a home for beaver.

"We like to improve and we like to expand" as much as government funding will allow, the superintendent said.

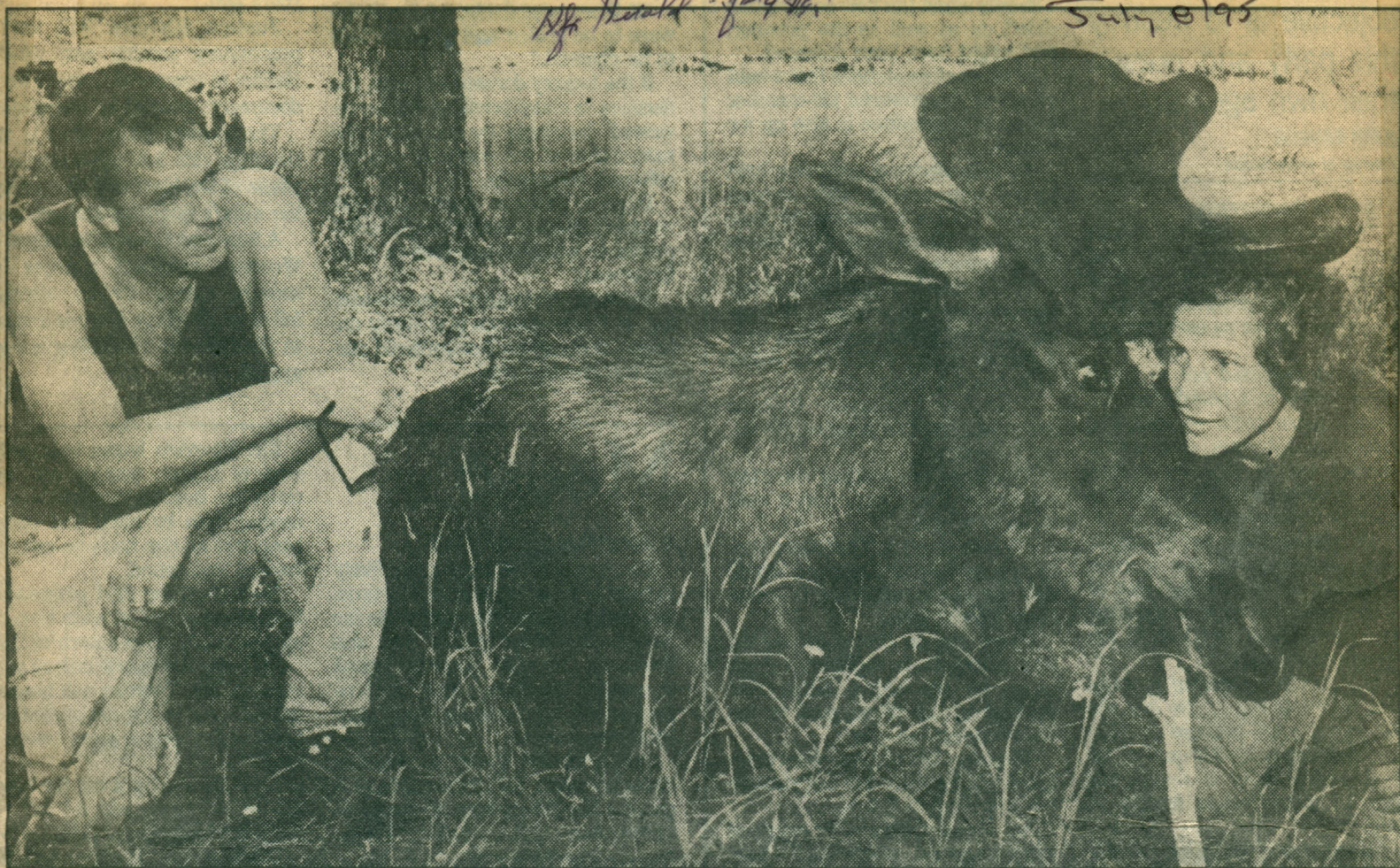
Games
to be held

May 1990

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Chronicle Herald
July 8/95

Ally Herald - July 8/95



Kerry Doubleday / Herald Photo

Veteran animal trainers Mark Watters of Los Angeles, and Gerry Therrien of Abbotsford, B.C., visit with their newest protege, a three-year-old bull moose living at the Shubenacadie Wildlife Park. Bill will make his feature film debut in the Canadian family movie *Salt Water Moose*.

Of moose and movies

Trainers fawn over actors with antlers

By **ANDREA NEMETZ**
Staff Reporter

Bill is about to make his big-screen debut and like many Hollywood stars, he's having a temper tantrum.

He refuses to eat the red apples, spitting out all but the exotic Granny Smith variety.

And Bill packs a lot of weight behind his demands — at least 540 kilograms.

Next week, camera crews will spend two days trying to film the fleeting moment when the three-

year-old bull moose gets up close and personal with the female of his dreams.

The scene is part of the climax to *Salt Water Moose*, a family film being shot in Ontario and on Nova Scotia's South Shore.

But for now, Bill is focusing on waylaying professional trainers Mark Watters and Gerry Therrien, who are heading into a grassy pasture to feed some maple leaves to Edna, Bill's two-year-old co-star and real-life mate.

The trainers have worked with

animals in movies such as *Bird on a Wire* and *Beastmaster 2* and television shows such as *The X-Files* and *Destiny Ridge*.

Mr. Therrien lives on an Abbotsford, B.C., ranch with a troupe of performers, including the jaguar and bear who appeared in the movie *The Jungle Book*.

He has spent six days learning Bill's idiosyncracies, while Mr. Watters, a Los Angeles native, arrived from the Ontario location a couple of days ago. "They (animals) are like people," Mr. Therrien says.

"Each is different. My moose, Zeus, likes red apples. Edna loves carrots. Bill will only eat maple leaves when he knows we're going to feed them to Edna."

Training is trial and error, particularly with "civilian animals" such as Bill and Edna, recruited from the Shubenacadie Wildlife Park for the \$3-million movie.

Because moose are most active when temperatures are cool, training takes place between 7 a.m. and 10 a.m. and for a couple of hours after 6:30 p.m.

"We work around their natural routine," Mr. Therrien says.

"There are certain times they chew their cud, certain times they go in the water. We watch them and delay until they are really ready to go."

■ See Moose / A2

Moose

■ continued from / A1

The two days of filming will likely yield 22 to 23 seconds of screen time, says Bruce McKenna, who wrote the "moose romance" movie that also features former James Bond Timothy Dalton and Lolita Davidovich, who was in *Blaze* with Paul Newman.

Produced by Toronto's Norstar Entertainment, *Salt Water Moose* is about a boy taken from his home in the city to a small town where he befriends a country girl.

The pair try to get a female moose to a lonely male moose stranded on an island.

The meeting of the moose is a made-for-movies moment.

"They rub their heads and do the greeting thing, then turn to leave," Mr. Therrien says.

"But moose aren't social animals, they don't hang out. So they'll be trying to figure out why they're so close to each other."

The trainers, who also do stunt work with and without animals, use hands-on methods.

"We train positive behavior, use food, be their friends," Mr. Therrien says. "We don't chase them with sticks."

"If we lose their trust, all the training is useless," says Mr. Watters, who has spent 17 years working with animals from dogs to tigers.

In this scene, Bill is to walk to a position under a tree — selected because of the camera angle — where Edna awaits.

Mr. Therrien began training Bill, who is bigger, heavier and more muscular than an Arabian horse, by feeding him by hand and using a beeper to let him know he would get food at that sound.

He moved the food progressively farther away and at each beep, the moose would go in search of food.

To make the moose look up at the camera, Mr. Therrien will beep and Bill will trot to the designated location but find only a small amount of food.

After he scoops it up, the beeper will sound again and Bill will look towards the beep for more.

Bill likes the attention he's been getting. In fact, he cries, making plaintive bleating sounds, when he thinks he's not being noticed.

"He's a very nice moose, and very pretty, but a bit spoiled," Mr. Therrien says.

"He does what he wants when he wants. She's much smarter and independent. She also shows real affection. He just likes to be close."

The giant creatures might seem gentle but they can be dangerous.

"A bull moose can kill, and if he went after someone, there would be nothing we could do about it. We set things up to be completely safe."

The trainers, who next head to Vancouver to film a lion in a shampoo commercial, have high praise for the Shubenacadie Wildlife Park.

"This is an unbelievably nice facility, and it's amazing how calm the animals are," Mr. Therrien says.

"They are conditioned to noise that should make them freak out. And they all have very nice personalities, so it must be something they do here."

Shubenacadie Wildlife Park bears move to new digs

*New enclosure
more like living
in the wild,
says park's
manager*

By LYNN CURWIN PORTEOUS
For The NEWS

SHUBENACADIE — Around noon on Wednesday the Shubenacadie Wildlife Park's bears moved into their new home. This recently erected enclosure consists of approximately one third of an acre with grass, sand, trees, the old, familiar rocks from their previous pen, and a pool.

"Within this enclosure the bears will be able to do what they would in the wild," says park manager, Bert Vissers. "They're being very cautious with the sand footing right now. It will take a couple of days to feel comfortable."

These two bears are brothers who were born in 1993 and have always been together.

"They came to us after they



This bear may think he's living in the wild now that he's moved into the new enclosure at the Shubenacadie Wildlife Park. The new accommodations for the bears was opened this week.

(Curwin Porteous photo)

were found as tiny cubs in the Shelburne area," Bert relates. "They were hand raised by my wife. When they were young they

showed her a lot of affection but now they just like people in general."

Most people in the Truro area

are familiar with the old bear enclosure, with its concrete footing and lack of privacy. A number of visitors to the park left remarks

critical of this pen in the park's comment book.

"We read the suggestions," adds Bert. "We've looked at the idea of a new enclosure for 3 or 4 years but the finances weren't in place. The Zoocheck report also made recommendations about the bear's living area. We're pleased with this enclosure. It's quite nice and it's one of the largest in the Maritimes. There are viewing areas where the public can watch the bears but the animals can also have an opportunity to get away from the public."

One of the bears lay on the grass in the sunshine Wednesday afternoon. He would occasionally get up to pull over a small tree and chew on it, or to walk around the large rocks. His brother wandered around the enclosure, looking at everything and smelling the trees. They both appeared quite content with their new home.

The Shubenacadie Wildlife Park will re-open to the public on May 15, when everyone will have a chance to see how the bears are settling in.

There will be plenty to see but, please, don't bring food for the animals. To ensure that the animals are eating a nutritionally balanced diet vending machines, filled with the proper food, will be placed around the park.