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Mauled deer found near Bird's Creek Public School yard

By Sarah Sobanski

Hastings Prince Edward District School Board says ?student safety is a top priority? following suspicion that wolves are circling one of its school's yards.

The board confirms a mauled deer carcass was found near Bird's Creek Public School's property line. As a result the school restricted children's playground access and increased yard supervision, said board communications officer Kerry Donnell.

She said the school's principal contacted both the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry and the Bancroft OPP. A voicemail was also left for parents and a letter with tips on what to do if you spot a wolf went home with students.

?The letter included information from the MNR[F] about how to avoid conflicts with coyotes, wolves and foxes, and what to do if anyone encounters them,? said Donnell.

Concerned parents?' and local residents' comments? lit up social media as photos of the deer carcass were circulated. One post sharing the photos had more than 800 interactions. The school was clearly visible in the background of the images.

Some commenting on the? post shared stories of their own wolf/coyote sightings. Multiple sightings have been reported in North Hastings.

?We've seen quite a few sightings [of wolves] in our backyard here as well. I live right beside the High Falls road,? said Randy Fransky who forwarded the photos to *Bancroft This Week* explaining he was concerned for his two grandchildren who attend the school. ??I think it's just a matter of time that you're going to see an incident there too.?

He suggested wolf populations have increased and deer populations have decreased in the area.

Former Baptiste Lake resident Barry Bowers who lived in the area for 30 years, agreed. He suggested wolves/coyotes are ?eating themselves out of house and home? following area hunting bans that have allowed their populations to flourish. This is bringing them to people's backyards.

?I'd like to see them back in the woods where they belong,? Bowers told *This Week*. ?The Peterson Road used to be one of the roads where you could go for a drive in the evening and you could see 30 or 40 deer. Well, you'd be lucky to drive up there now and see deer tracks.?

The ministry confirmed it had received ?several reports in the past week of deer being predated by wolves or coyotes in Bird's Creek area.?

?Several of these occurred in residential areas ? the most recent was at the school,? said senior media relations officer for the ministry Jolanta Kowalski. ?We advised the school that if an animal poses a public safety risk such as wandering onto a school yard when school is under way, they should contact 911 or their local police who can respond immediately in an emergency.?

Kowalski said ?generally deer and wolf/coyote populations in the Bancroft area are stable.?

She also noted, ?Attacks on humans by either wolves or coyotes are extremely rare, although coyotes have been known to take small pets.?