

To: Mayor and Members of Council  
From: Christy Lehman, Acting Supervisor, Licensing & Standards  
RE: Amendments to Markham's Animal Control By-law  
Date: June 21<sup>st</sup>, 2018

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At the June 18<sup>th</sup>, 2018 General Committee meeting, Chris Alexander, Acting Manager By-law and Regulatory Services, presented proposed amendments to Markham's Animal Control By-law No. 2005-254. At the conclusion of the meeting, Committee requested further information on the following:

1. Overview of Provincial legislation regulating the relocation of wildlife
2. Feeding of birds – why residents should not feed bread to ducks
3. Definition of a songbird
4. Lyme disease and rabies in foxes
5. Rats – how do we deal with these?
6. Exotic animals – why does the City prohibit exotic animals?
7. Public education and community outreach

### **1. Provincial Legislation Regulating Wildlife Relocation**

The *Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act 1997 S.O.* outlines regulations that are required when removing and relocating nuisance wildlife. Removal and relocation of wildlife is only permitted by a licenced and qualified professional that has received permission from the *Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry*. Licenced professionals are only permitted to relocate adult animals within a 1 kilometre radius of the removal site and are not permitted to relocate babies. It is considered inhumane to move an animal any farther away than 1 kilometre from its current home, as its food source, burrow or den, and habitat are usually within this distance. Relocating them any farther will likely result in death of the animal. Additionally, when one animal (family) is removed, the probability of another group relocating to the same area is high as the area is a suitable for the animal.

### **2. Feeding of Birds**

From a conservation perspective, it is not a good idea to feed wildlife in general - they become reliant on the food source and will lose their natural instinct to forage for food on their own. Once the human-provided food source stops, the animal will struggle to find food on its own – this may result in the animal dying. It is dangerous to feed bread to ducks and other birds as bread does not hold the nutrients that birds need to survive. They fill up on bread - because it tastes good - and neglect other, more nutritious forms of food that keep them healthy. Uneaten bread also leads to serious risks to all wildlife as it eventually rots/grows mould and increase the algae in bodies of waters - essentially contaminating it for use by the birds. This can once again lead to animals becoming seriously ill, or in some cases, dying.

### **3. Definition of Songbird**

Songbirds are defined as birds that produce sounds that are similar to that of a song. They are classified as perching birds. The idea of allowing the feeding of songbirds only is to ensure residents are not feeding birds of prey or those considered to be a nuisance (i.e., seagulls). Songbirds eat primarily seeds, berries, nectar, and fruit which require specific bird houses and minimal waste material that would attract further wildlife. Staff do not want birds of prey being fed by residents due to their diet (mainly rodents, dead animal carcasses). Defining songbirds as the only animal permitted to be fed should prevent this.

### **4. Lyme Disease and Rabies in Foxes**

Lyme disease cases are becoming more prevalent in humans as the population of ticks increases. The bacteria spirochete *Borrelia burgdorferi*, which causes Lyme disease in humans, is found in white-footed mice. Ticks feed on white-footed mouse blood, which causes the tick to become a carrier of the bacteria. Once a tick bites a human, the bacteria is spread to human blood, causing Lyme disease. A major component of a fox diet is small rodents such as white-footed mice. There is evidence that suggests areas with higher fox populations actually have a decrease in Lyme disease, as the foxes keep the mice populations down, therefore reducing the transmission of the bacteria from mice to ticks. Although foxes can transmit rabies, according to the most recent Provincial data (2016) there have been NO cases of fox rabies reported, therefore making its transmission highly unlikely. Additionally, if an outbreak were to occur, the Ministry of Natural Resources would act immediately, vaccinating foxes through a process known as baiting, and the City would be notified.

### **5. Rats**

Rat infestations are common in in-fill situations, properties littered with garbage, and where dumpsters are not being maintained properly (usually behind restaurants). City staff have been diligent in applying the Keep Markham Beautiful By-law in order to encourage property owners to remove all excess garbage, ensure garbage pick up is routinely scheduled, and store all garbage appropriately. By-law staff will lay charges where there is non-compliance and in extreme circumstances, the City will hire a licensed wildlife removal company to assist with removing the rats (with the service fees billed back to the property owner).

### **6. Exotic Animals**

The exotic animal trade often leads to suffering and death for exotic animals. These animals frequently suffer from malnutrition, loneliness, and overwhelming stress associated with confinement to an unnatural/uncomfortable environment. Exotic animals also pose a real threat to human safety as these animals could be poisonous, aggressive, carry disease, etc. As stated in the recent Staff presentation to General Committee, Markham is currently the only Ontario municipality that permits an individual to apply for a licence for a prohibited animal. Removing this permission from the by-law will bring the City into alignment with other municipalities and sends a strong message that we do not believe exotic animals should be pets.

## **7. Public Education and Community Outreach**

The City has worked with the Animal Care Committee to create a number of public education pieces, such as brochures. These materials are available at Markham's Cat Adoption and Education Centre as well as on the City's website. They are also used at all community outreach events. The City's wildlife services provider, Shades of Hope, has hosted 3 educational seminars for residents to attend. Additionally, in April, 2018, Markham staff arranged for a special training session (which was livestreamed) facilitated by Coyote Watch Canada on how to live harmoniously with coyotes. Another session will be scheduled for this fall. All materials received from the April session will be posted to the City's website and have been shared with Members of Council. In partnership with the Ontario SPCA, City staff are working on a school education program, where Officers will attend schools in the fall and educate students on wildlife. The hope is these children will in turn teach their parents. In addition to the above, Staff have been regularly distributing information on wildlife related issues through the City's social media channels as well as through the newspaper.

The presence of wildlife in our City is evidence of a healthy, sustainable community and something to be celebrated rather than feared. Public education and community outreach is critical to ensure all Markham residents understand the value wildlife brings to our daily life and role wildlife (and humans) play as part of an entire ecosystem. If you have any further questions about wildlife and how to mitigate human-wildlife conflict, please feel free to contact the undersigned.

Regards,

Christy Lehman, Acting Supervisor, Licensing & Standards