

GETTING TO KNOW WILDLIFE

Back to the Wild



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Last week we introduced you to the story of two orphaned river otters. We left off with the realization that we were going to make every effort possible to reintroduce them back into the wild. We gathered a great deal of information from others who had experience with river otters, from a captive breeding program in England to a reintroduction project in New York State.

It became clear the key would be finding the perfect release site with the right foster family, where the otters could transition back into the wild. It would be like looking for a needle in a haystack. Thanks to a newspaper story we had 55 calls from interested people. After going over the care requirements with potential foster families we were left with a handful of possible sites.

The next couple of weeks were spent visiting the potential sites from Val-des-Monts to White Lake, and although they sounded good on paper, none were proving to be a viable option. Our hopes were starting to fade.

One of the last sites we visited was outside of Perth, and as we drove down the road leading to the 250 acre property we could hardly contain our enthusiasm, this looked like a winner. Further exploration revealed the property's perfection. It consisted almost entirely of natural area, with ponds and creeks leading into Big Rideau Lake. We had found our needle!

Things fell into place quickly with the construction of an elaborate cage. It included two large chambers, one at the top of the embankment and another chamber in the water where the otters could swim and perfect their fishing skills. The two areas were attached with a 15ft tunnel.

In May of 1999, the otters made their big move from our Centre to their transitional cage. A month later the cage was opened for the first time and the otters were able to explore their environment. They left no stone unturned and were as curious as they were cautious. They remained close to their cage and to each other. Each day the time spent out of their cage was extended and they would be lured back in with food for the night. Eventually the cage was left open for them to come and go freely. They returned at night for a while until they moved their den site to a nearby riverbank.

Their return to the wild went better than we could have expected, the male would return occasionally but the female could only be seen from a distance with her new family. We were glad we did not listen to the advice of finding a captive situation. They were back in the wild, where they belonged.