Introduction

We hope you find that our book tickles your fancy and is educational and edifying. We have spent many years studying the field of rewilding and much time in the field learning the practical ins and outs of how to renature Montreal.

Books covering renaturing can be written for :

1. The intelligentsia, the rich, the technocrats, the people in power and the list price of their books are very expensive, $75 to $300.
2. The middle and upper middle class and their book price is high, $15 to $75. The subject matter tends to be diluted and not comprehensive.
3. The poor, nobody writes for the poor. The poor have other priorities and means of getting information and practical skills.

For families making less than $50,000 a year, the book will be free. For families richer, we ask that when they download the book, they donate a total of $30 to Vermont Public Radio or either of 3 Verdun Non-profits.

1. The wildlife, the animals, and plants. No one writes for them, but we hope to write about them in a fiduciary manner. We will speak for the Chickadees, that used to cheer us up by swinging on our bird feeders as we put them up and took them down.

What we hope to do in our book is to address all 4 groups in a way that does not bore or is cute or condescending or confusing or too long.

Let us tell you a bit about ourselves. Joan in 73 years old. She is a former nurse. Oz is 78 years old and has been involved in the past in working with community groups. We are both bird watchers, going back about 40 years. We used to go to Summit Woods in Westmount and meet friends like Jim and Maurice and Gerard and Audrey and Peter, and Michel. Back 40 years ago we would walk up the slope from NDG and after about 2 hours we would have seen hundreds of individuals of about 20 warbler species. Then about 35 years ago, the number of species and the number of individual birds began to decline quite rapidly. So for the last 12 years we have not visited Summit Woods. We went to Mount Royal, the Botanical Gardens, Ile de la Visitation, the Technoparc, Boucherville, Chateauguay, St. Martine, but wherever we went in the Montreal area, the number of birds and the number of species dropped precipitously and then remained low. Other birders noted the same thing, no one knew why.

Over the last 50 years, the bird population in North America has dropped from 10 billion to 7 billion birds. 2/3 of bird species in NA are in danger of going extinct.

So we decided to investigate WHY.

Before we go further, we feel obligated to tell you tales about 2 indigenous women and 3 mallard ducks

Robin Wall Kimmerer is a 70-year-old Potawatomi botanist, a member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation. She has a doctorate in Botany from the U of Wisconsin-Madison. She teaches at SUNY-ESF in Syracuse New York. She has written 2 books, “Gathering Moss: A Natural and Cultural History of Mosses” in 2003, which won the hugely prestigious John Burroughs Medal, and “Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants” in 2013.” Braiding Sweet Grass “has sold well over 1,400,000 copies. In 2022, she won a MacArthur Fellowship worth $800,000.

She finds that the Potawatomi language is different from European languages. In English, you are a human or you are something else, an “IT”. The Potawatomi language does not make this distinction. It treats all creatures with respect, like humans. And humans are treated like all creatures with equal respect. All beings are like humans and not an “IT”. For you to call another human an “IT”, is insulting. It is arrogant to see everything other than another human as an “IT”. Similarly, a Potawatomi examens the world, in 4 ways, by following the medicine wheel: 1) the mind, intellect, 2) the body, senses 3) the emotions 4) the spiritual. The scientific method uses the intellect and the senses to describe a plant. In general science forgets the emotions and the spiritual. This is in many ways an arrogant way of treating others and the world. Indigenous people have a more balanced, realistic, kinder, hopeful way of seeing things. The average American knows fewer than 10 plants. An indigenous person knows hundreds. All things should be examined and spoken to and respected as individuals, rather than an IT to be exploited. Before collecting mosses, Robin Wall Kimmerer respectfully asks the moss for its permission to be examined by her university students, to teach the students about the world. After they are examined, they are not they not thrown in the garbage. They are kept in a glass jar until thanked and returned to their environment. Mosses do not have roots they have rhizoids that are easily reattached to the ground and are not injured when they are taken from the ground and returned to the ground.

In the Potawatomi creation myth, the first man, Nanabozho, was asked by the creator to name all creatures. He went to talk to all beings and talked and talked with them until they told him their names. He did not force a name on beings, but had beings tell him in their own time, their own personal names.

Similarly, there is the tradition of the honorable harvest. Guidelines include, showing restraint and honor. 1) never take the first one, to make sure there are enough of the plants to survive, the plants are giving you a gift and you should respect them. 2) Asking permission from the plant to share.3) show self-restraint and take as little as you can. 4) minimize harm, 5) share what you take with others 6) reciprocate and give back something to the plant.

Why do we not show respect for all living beings and harvest honorably our resources? Perhaps this is the real solution to climate change and renaturing Montreal.

An indigenous professor at Simon Fraser University in British Columbia, Chelsey Armstrong, is showing us a different way of looking at history. She studied 15 ancient abandoned, tribal villages in BC. With governments moving indigenous people off the land into reservations, residential schools, and starving people to force them to work in fish canning factories in Vancouver, the land was abandoned. But the indigenous people had “forest farmed” their lands for centuries and even after 100 years of abandonment, these areas around these 15 villages are the among their most food productive areas in British Columbia for wildlife, hunting, fishing, and mankind. Chelsey Armstrong has written academic papers and also popular articles in magazines such as Canadian Geographic on this topic.

Indigenous people throughout the world in South America, Africa, Asia, Australia have always “forest farmed” their indigenous lands. Their lives depended on it, and they were in daily indigenous contact with the land and wildlife and quickly discovered fellow equal beings, and what worked and what did not. They were a community, a village who worked together. Europeans conquered the world, developing the concept of private property of land, individualism, and often still ignore or denigrate community. Europeans enslaved, killed, and put on reservations indigenous peoples all over the world. They still steal the land, fencing it off, for wildlife preserves or palm oil plantations or other “developments, improvements”. Throughout the world, we need to work together as a village or community to understand and “forest farm” our neighborhoods and parks and wildernesses. Verdun can be so much more beautiful and productive for food, for the people and for wildlife, if people worked together to rid ourselves of the FOOD DESERTS we have created. And make the land cleaner, healthier, more vibrant, productive, and full of colorful birds instead of just house sparrows and pigeons and starlings. Douglas Tallamy who we will introduce later, has already showed us this is possible and how to do it. We as a community need to decide if this is the vision, the dream we want. Do we want a visually beautiful, land, unstable, practically devoid of wildlife, a FOOD DESERT? Or do we want a truly beautiful land, a FOREST GARDEN, A FOOD GARDEN, full of healthy active wildlife?

According to Kirke Kickingbird, a Kiowa Tribe member and former member of the board of governors of the American. Bar Association, in 1142, the first democracy was created in the Iroquois Confederacy. In 1988, the U.S, senate recognized “the original framers of the American Constitution, most notably George Washington and Benjamin Franklin are known to have greatly admired the concepts of the Six Nations of the Iroquois Confederacy.” Many would argue that the American Constitution was based on not European, but the NA native models.

A tale of 3 ducks:

Lucille the mallard duck, we met her, when she wandered near our picnic table at the Grand Potager in Verdun and we not knowing any better threw her some French fries. We learned better and we later left her cracked corn. Without a husband, she built a nest and laid a clutch of eggs in the biodiversity area far away from any source of water, there was no bird bath in those days. She was fiercely protective of her nest but would leave it to eat cracked corn. Then one morning she was gone. Her nest was smashed, and the eggs broken and scattered. There are red foxes on the grounds of the Douglas Hospital in Verdun, and we assumed it was a red fox that attacked Lucille.

Around the same time, there was a staider conventional mallard couple, Mr. and Mrs. Mallard at a tiny pond just 10 by 20 feet in a small park in Mercier-Hochelaga-Maisonneuve. We have a dozen bird feeders at this park. 4 years ago, the pond was tiny maybe 5 or 6 feet in size. For 4 years every spring, the mallard couple had their eyes on the pond and in the spring, we would see them waddling across the parking lot to get to the pond from behind a Maxi store. Something in the night frightened the couple and they stayed overnight in the parking lot away from the pond. The park workers enlarged the rivulet to the pond, and it grew in size. We urged the park administration to fence off the pond, but they would not listen to us. There was an ice and wind storm this spring, downing many huge willow branches at the edge of the pond. Willow stakes were shoved into the ground around the pond. The previous year, we scattered millions of cattail seeds around the pond. We think this may have made them feel safer and they stayed on the pond, not the parking lot, and we would pass cracked corn to the couple. We had learned this trick from Lucille.

The male would come first to investigate but would not eat. He would wait until Mrs. Mallard came out from the reeds and ate and was satisfied enough to go get a drink of water. Only then would Mr. Mallard eat some of the cracked corn.

Finally, on July25, 2023, after a 4-year hiatus, Mr. and Mrs. Mallard finally raised a clutch of 9 ducklings. On July 26, Mr. Mallard was nowhere to be seen and only 6 ducklings remained beside Ms. Mallard. On July 27 and subsequently, no ducks were to be seen. One can only suppose that Mr. Mallard and 3 ducklings were killed on July 26 and that whatever killed Mr. Mallard killed all the remaining ducklings on July 27.

So, you had brave ducks, Mr. And Mrs. Mallard, following the rules, being cautious, prudent, conventional. You had Lucille recklessly breaking every rule. Both struck by tragedy. We suspect that Mrs. Mallard will return next spring with another prim and proper, polite, Mr. Mallard. We suspect that Lucille will return next spring as unconventional as always to raise another family in the biodiversity garden. The garden will have to change to accommodate Lucille and protect her when she arrives because it is the right and natural and decent thing to do. There is so much to learn from Douglas Tallamy, Elinor Ostrom and Isabella Tree, Charles Dowding, and other lovers of nature, but there is perhaps more to be learned from Mr. and Mrs. Mallard and Lucille. In the future we will quote from so many wildlife specialists such as Jane Goodall, and Laura Erickson about the brave, stubborn, full of life creatures they have gotten to know.

We did not see Mrs. Mallard again until September 20, 2023. She was hungry. There was no male. Joan had only, bread, bananas, and apples. Mrs. Mallard only ate the bread which she did voraciously. And as luck would have it, a mother, and a child of 5 or 6 passed by. The child threw a rock into the pond, and this frightened Mrs. Mallard. Joan explained to the adult and the child the sad story of Mr. and Mrs. Mallard and their doomed family. Mrs. Mallard warily stared at the child and did not eat until the child was gone completely.

On March 19, 2024, we met Mrs. Mallard again with her new husband Mr. Mallard 2. Mr. Mallard looked at us warily, as we approached the pond he stood back. Mrs. Mallard recognized us right away and swam to us, we threw cracked corn into the water and she put her head underwater and gorged on the corn, Mr. Mallard 2, stayed back and watched for 5 or 6 minute before he timidly moved closer and began to eat the corn as well. What a difference between Mr. Mallard and Mr. Mallard 2, one so polite and courteous and brave and the other timid and afraid.

Lucy has still not returned, but we hope to see her soon in the biodiversity garden,

At the end of February, we put up bird feeders and a suet feeder. They will help the birds a little, but to really help them, we need to “plant a bird”. I.E, we need to plant native wildflowers, shrubs, and trees to feed them all year. These feeders are more for the humans than for the birds. We want people to get to know intimately, the birds coming to the feeders.