

A Visit to Remember

By John E. Marriott



“Seeing those little cubs ripping apart logs to get at honey and bugs and then eating the berries off the branches we’d hung around the enclosure was really gratifying.”

Photos taken by John E. Marriott.

July 25th-27th, 2014, helping out with the bears, deer, moose, and any other animals in the shelter at the time.

When she found out she had won the contest via email, Hessmann was overjoyed.

“I couldn’t believe I had won, I was literally cheering when I found out,” she said. But it was nothing compared to how she felt when her and her best friend Mooney walked up towards the shelter’s black bear enclosure for the first time to privately observe the first night’s evening feeding.

“We got up to the bear enclosure and I was so excited I could barely breath,” exclaimed Mooney. “I stood there in total awe, it was just adorable to see the six little cubs that were in there racing about gorging on the fresh fruit and berries that had been set out for them to eat.”

Just eight hours earlier, I’d met Hessmann and Mooney at the Calgary airport to board our Central Mountain Air flight to Smithers that CMA had generously donated as part of the fundraiser. A few short hours later we were picking up our rental car in Smithers and preparing for the ladies’ first visit to the shelter on an acreage on the outskirts of town later that afternoon.

The first look told the entire story. Katie Mooney and Noriko Hessmann stood outside the bear enclosure in total rapture, mouths agape, looks of total glee on their faces. It was the moment both of them had been waiting for since May 2014 when Noriko learned she had won the grand prize in a fundraising contest for the Northern Lights Wildlife Shelter in Smithers, BC.

The fundraiser, run by myself and sponsored in part by Central Mountain Air and Hawkair, raised \$22,888 for the world’s only grizzly bear rehabilitation facility, a shelter that has released 13 grizzly bears and more than 300 black bears back into the wilds of British Columbia since Angelika and Peter Langen founded it in 1991.

Hessmann donated \$100 to the cause during the fundraiser, automatically making her eligible to win the grand prize: an all-expenses-paid trip for two to visit and volunteer at the shelter in Smithers for a weekend from



The shelter is closed to the public, so both Mooney and Hessmann knew that they were in for something special, but the first few hours blew them both away.

“When we went to visit Brock, the baby deer, my heart melted when he came bounding up to us for his bottle feeding that night,” said Hessmann. “He was just adorable.”

Although the women did not get to personally interact with the bears because of how the bears must be rehabbed to ensure they don’t get used to humans, they did get to interact directly with Brock again the next day, along with the two baby beavers in the shelter, Willow and Aspen.

“When Angelika asked us if we’d like to feed the baby deer, I think I might have let out a little squeal in my eagerness to say ‘Yes’,” laughed Mooney. “And holding those tiny beavers in my hands was an experience I’ll never forget, they were little brown bundles of cuteness.” The ladies got to move the beavers temporarily so that they could help set up a new cage with fresh willow branches for the youngsters to feed on and sleep under.

After spending the entire morning with Brock and the beavers, Hessmann and Mooney moved on to bear work that afternoon, setting up what the shelter calls ‘bear enrichment’ for the black bear cubs, and for Littlefoot, the one grizzly bear cub living at the shelter in July (Littlefoot has since been released back into the wild near Fernie, BC, and is doing well according to his gps collar, which lets the shelter track his movements).

Using real honeycombs that had been donated to the shelter earlier that week, the ladies worked together

with the staff to stuff the honeycombs and some bug larvae into rotted logs to mimic what a bear might find in the wild. They then helped collect wild berry branches, horsetail, and a variety of leaved branches before watching the shelter’s bear handler move the cubs from their main enclosure into a smaller adjoining enclosure so that the ladies could then go hide and place the logs and branches and so on throughout the enclosure, again trying to mimic what they bears might encounter in the wild.

“It was fascinating to see how the shelter feeds and manages the bears. I thought they would just be dumping a bunch of old chicken on the floor and letting them go at it, but it’s a much more structured process intended to give the bears a really good chance at survival once they’re released back into their home ranges throughout BC,” said Hessmann.

When they wrapped up the bear enrichment, the ladies got to watch as the bears rushed in and tackled their new food supply.



Story Continued on page 14



“Seeing those little cubs ripping apart logs to get at honey and bugs and then eating the berries off the branches we’d hung around the enclosure was really gratifying, it made the afternoon toiling away with our hands covered in honey seem so worthwhile,” said Mooney.

As their final volunteer duty of the weekend, the ladies got a little surprise from the Langens and the shelter when Angelika asked them if they’d like to take part in the release of four fox pups that were now big enough to go back into the wild on their own.

“We drove up a little dirt road into the mountains above the shelter and set the fox cages out in a field at dusk and then we got to raise up the doors and watch the four little foxes race back into the wild,” said Hessmann. “It was surreal to be a part of something so special.”

“I’d like to thank Central Mountain Air and Hawkair for donating our flights to and from Smithers,” concluded Hessmann. “And I can’t say enough good things about the Northern Lights Wildlife Shelter, it was the experience-of-a-lifetime, I wish everyone could see how hard they work and how much good they do for the wildlife of British Columbia.”

John E. Marriott is a professional wildlife photographer based in Canmore, Alberta. He has been volunteering and fundraising for the Northern Lights Wildlife Shelter since May 2013.

The Northern Lights Wildlife Shelter is a non-profit charitable organization dedicated to the rehabilitation and release of orphaned wildlife in British Columbia. They specialize in black and grizzly bear rehabilitation and run entirely on donations from generous corporations like Central Mountain Air and from individuals like yourself. Visit their website for more information or to make a donation at www.wildlifeshelter.com



Official Broadcaster of:
 Canucks and BC Lions
 All Native Basketball
 Hobiye
 National Aboriginal Day
 Salmon Festival

92.1 Terrace-96 / Kitimat-96 / Prince Rupert
 www.ClassicRockCFNR.ca
 Ch 851 Shaw Direct - 853 City West

CFNR is YOUR advertising link
 Serving over 50 communities, CFNR reaches the remote areas of B.C.

1-866-833-2367

True Northern Luxury

CALL 1-800-830-8833 - ASK FOR THE "STELLER'S JAY PROMO" AND RECEIVE A SPECIAL HOTEL ROOM RATE!

The **Ramada Prince George** has the best Northern facilities for special events, conferences or meetings along with our famous hospitality! With 200 newly renovated rooms, Simmons® Beautyrest mattresses dressed in 300 thread count linens, 42" TV's, free wireless internet, fitness centre, indoor pool, jetted whirlpool and 24-hour valet service. Room choices range from Grand Presidential Suites, Jacuzzi® Rooms, Executive Suites with full kitchens for long term stays, Junior Suites, King Rooms and Queen Rooms with one or two beds! With over 8,000+ square feet of the city's best conference and event space, including a 4,400 square foot ballroom, a 2,300 square foot special event space, 3 Executive Boardrooms, Starbucks® and our friendly Coach's Corner Pub - we have it all! Book your rooms with us today!

RAMADA 444 George Street Prince George, BC
 1.800.830.8833 ramadaprincegeorge.com

WYNDHAM REWARDS

AMBLESIDE PARK

SMITHERS, BC:
The jewel of the Northern Corridor.

- New Building Lots
- Fully Serviced
- Premiere Subdivision
- Phase One 92% SOLD OUT
- Phase Two Coming Soon
- Builder's Terms Available

LEO LUBBERS, Personal Real Estate Corp. 250-847-1292
www.amblesidepark.ca

Everyday Solutions

to help speed your recovery

At MEDiChair we provide more than just mobility products and long-term solutions to increase independence and safety. We also carry a wide selection of braces, supports, canes and crutches to help you feel better and heal better from many medical procedures or injuries.

MEDiChair
 the home medical equipment specialists

4443 Keith Ave, Terrace • (250) 638-1301 • 1-866-638-1301
 sales • service • rentals www.medicchair.com