

## How meeting a Northern Saw-whet Owl changed my life...."

In the Autumn of 2015 I attended a local 'Walk and Talk' held at Metchosin Municipal Hall. The topic of the evening was 'Owls of the Area'. At the time I was an overwhelmed mother of young children, neck deep in the daily responsibilities parenthood brings. I hauled myself out of the house to the meet-up in an effort to carve out some much needed time to myself. Previously, I had grown an affinity to owls after experiencing many spontaneous encounters with prevalent species while out on nature walks with my family, but I wanted to learn more. The evening began as an informative lecture and then those in attendance were invited to join the 'walk' portion of the evening. I wrongly assumed we would hit the trails in search of some local species. Much to my surprise, we were given directions to the RPBO Pedder Bay banding station and we were invited to witness the banding station in action. I couldn't believe it! I was hooked the moment I saw a tiny Northern Saw-whet owl up close, in person. I wanted to know more about the organization who carried out this important work. I found myself asking, "Who are these people?! What do I need to do to be able to get involved?"

The first thing I needed to do was let my children grow a bit older and begin to sleep through the night! I was desperately sleep deprived and couldn't in good conscience sign up to lose even more sleep, given the nature of a nocturnal monitoring program. So I waited and I grew my young sons and when the time was right I applied to volunteer through the RPBO website. I ignored my own insecurities of my bird identification skills and lack of experience in the field of wildlife biology and hoped for the best.

To my delight I was welcomed by the most knowledgeable, dedicated, patient group of volunteers- willing and ready to teach me step by step how to do various crucial tasks that make the station run smoothly. Even though my own field of work (caring for adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder) lays entirely outside of the scope of RPBO's mandate and vision, I was mentored and trained to become a volunteer that can help gather and provide valuable data within the field of wildlife and habitat conservation. It's not only the owls that keep me coming back each year, it's because of RPBO's dedicated team of volunteers that welcome me and encourage me to challenge myself and learn new skills. It's a wonderful thing to be a part of this special work and... it's free! Many people invest mass amounts of money into hobbies that are not nearly as fulfilling.



Years later, I'm no longer that sleep deprived young mother to little ones. Volunteering with RPBO has allowed me to discover a part of myself that is separate from my children (though I love them more than life itself!) and my daily work of care. It is an absolute privilege to be a member and volunteer of this grassroots collective of folks who care and I look forward to many more years 'out in the field' learning and growing and working together towards a greater good.