Burlington Post
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OWWWW-L! THAT SMARTS

Riziero Vertolli – Burlington Post

HOULISTON, WE HAVE A PROBLEM: When staff at Burlington's Fern Hill School discovered a Great-Horned Owl caught in one of the school's soccer nets, a call was made to Hamilton-based Humane Wildlife Control. Staff from the animal rescue service managed to free the bird of prey, but had some momentary difficulty returning it to the wild. Above, Jared Houliston was about to release the owl when it refused to let go of his protective coveralls. Houliston ultimately took the coveralls off and the bird eventually took flight. *For more on the story, see page 12.*

Fern Hill School 1, prowling owl nil

By Tim Whitnell
BURLINGTON POST STAFF

It was likely trying to score some mice during a night of hunting but instead the Great-Horned Owl ended up scoring on a soccer net.

Animal emergency response and removal handlers were called to a private school in Burlington on Monday morning for a report of an owl caught up in some netting on a soccer field.

Technicians with Humane Wildlife Control, a private animal removal company based in Hamilton, responded and had the bird of prey free within about 10 minutes.

"It was probably a young adult; it was uninjured. The technician cut the net and removed it carefully," said Sarah Farmer, a dispatcher with Humane Wildlife Control.

At one point, just before its release, the owl sunk its long, sharp talons into the pants of wildlife technician Jared Houliston, in a very vulnerable location. Fortunately, the bird soon let go and neither party appeared injured.

"It was probably a young adult; it was uninjured. The technician cut the net and removed it carefully."

Sarah Farmer, Humane Wildlife Control

"The technician was fine," said Farmer. "He had on (thick) raptor gloves. (An owl's talons) can break through if they want to, they can break a bone. The technician said it (owl) calmed right down and must have known we were there to help him."

The president of Humane Wildlife Control said the bird was likely exhausted as well.

"He was probably looking for mice in the night and didn't see the net," said Bill Dowd, guessing the owl was strung up all night. "He probably had been struggling for hours."

Dowd said they did the removal for free.

Fern Hill principal Mary Hissink said a student on the field to play soccer noticed the dangling bird. "I had a chat with the kids this morning and told them it came out well."

She said they would be leaving the nets up, which they do for the fall, after being told by wildlife personnel that it was a freak incident.

The only recent nearby owl removal Dowd could recall occurred a couple of years ago.

"There was a call to a factory in Dundas about two years ago for an adult, fully-sized Great-Horned Owl." The owl, about 50 per cent larger than the one retrieved at Fern Hill, flew back and forth before finally being captured with a net.

"It doesn't happen very often but there have been interesting calls like these with boas and llamas in Milton a few years ago."

For the most part Dowd said his company — which responds to calls from Montreal to southwestern Ontario, excluding the GTA — is called to homes to remove squirrels, skunks, raccoons, bats and birds.

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FREE BIRD: A Great-Horned Howl trapped in a soccer net provided some excitement at Burlington's Fern Hill School on Monday morning. Humane Wildlife Control was called in to rescue the entangled bird of prey. Above, rescuers Jared Houliston and Brent Tetlock hold the uninjured owl just before releasing it.