

Urban Wild

“Nature’s wonders are all around us, even in our major metropolitan centres,” says Michel Lamarche of Montreal

On this particularly superb spring day, with sunshine dancing through the treetops and providing wonderful natural lighting, I’ve been watching a playful pair of Canada geese on a secluded marsh for more than an hour. Lying sprawled on the ground and camouflaged to blend in with the surrounding scenery, I’m facing what I believe will be the birds’ flight path should they decide to take off for a new playground. On previous outings my attempts to photograph geese taking flight have failed for one reason or another—broken sightlines, inadequate lighting, bad angles or just plain bad luck—but this time, I think I’m ideally situated to capture the moment. As a hobby

photographer, I live for opportunities such as this: The combination of being at one with nature, observing and anticipating wildlife behaviour and improving my photography skills brings me a sense of fulfillment unlike any other.

Trying to remain calm and vigilant, I wait for the critical moment to arrive, but I can’t help imagining how spectacular this photo will be if everything goes as planned. My sense of anticipation builds as one of the geese, now about 50 metres away, rears up and flexes its wings. A quick final check of my camera’s settings and I’m good to go. Nothing can break my concentration now—my entire being is focused on that bird.

Liftoff!

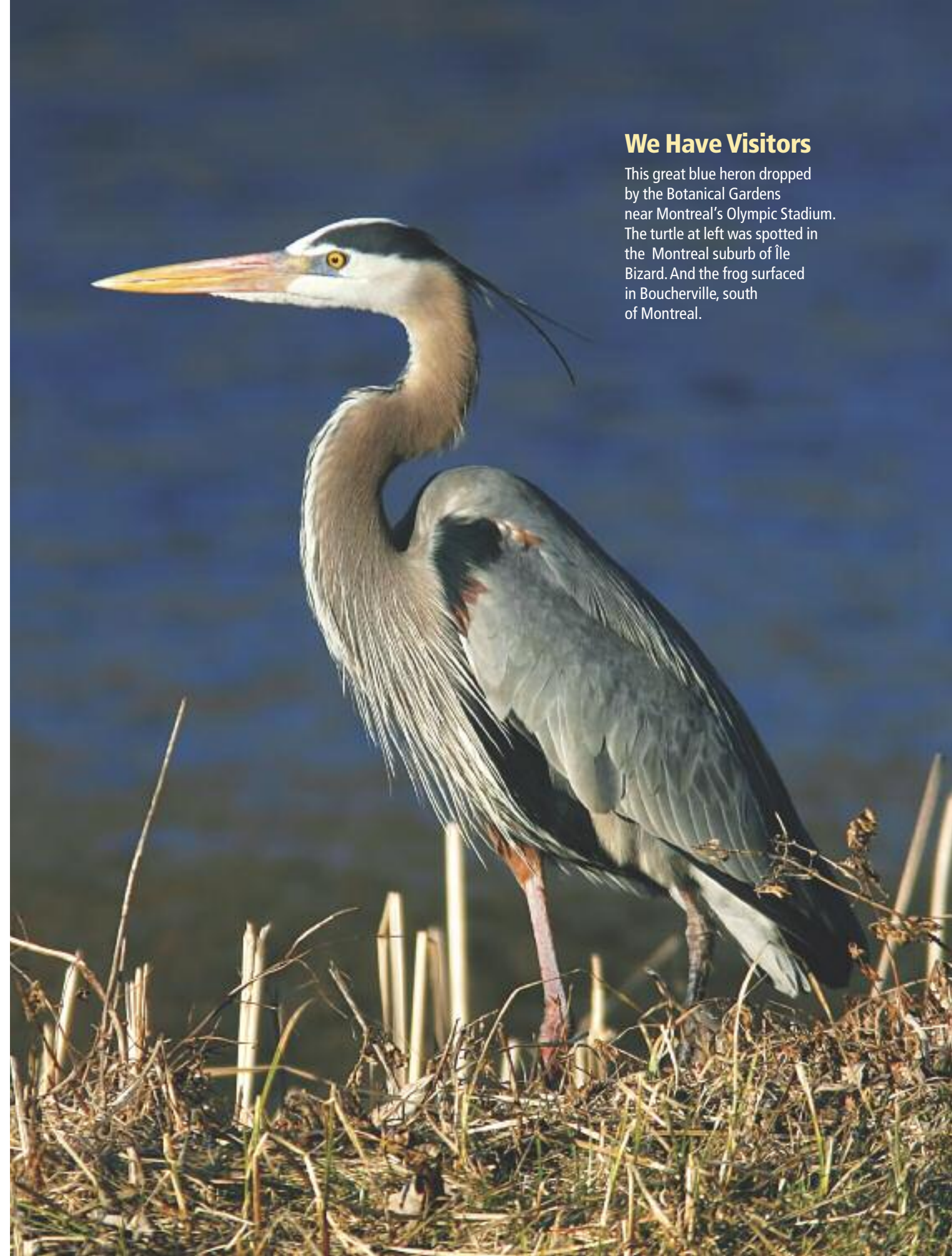
A Canada goose takes flight from a marsh located a few minutes drive from downtown Montreal.





The goose, making pre-flight preparations of its own, gracefully turns and heads up the marsh in my direction, building up the speed and power needed for take-off with each thrust of its wings. My index finger hovers over the shutter-release button and the countdown is on: My angle is good and the distance is perfect. Any second now, the goose will be airborne—and with one click, we have liftoff! I lock the shutter release into “burst” mode to capture a rapid-fire sequence of follow-up frames as the goose wings past. What a thrill!

Breathing a sigh of relief, I gradually return to Earth and gather up my gear, more than satisfied with the events of the day and the images I have “in the can.” A glance at my watch confirms that if I don’t hurry, I’ll be late for supper. Given my immediate surroundings, you’d think I was in one of the country’s remote hinterlands, but the barren marshland I’m in is within walking distance of my city house in Longueuil, di-



We Have Visitors

This great blue heron dropped by the Botanical Gardens near Montreal’s Olympic Stadium. The turtle at left was spotted in the Montreal suburb of Île Bizard. And the frog surfaced in Boucherville, south of Montreal.



Meet the Neighbours

Michel snapped the deer and grasshopper photos in the South Shore community of Boucherville. He spotted the red northern cardinal in Laval, north of Montreal, and caught sight of the eastern bluebird near his home in Longueuil.



FIND OUT MORE

For information about some of the environmental challenges we are facing here in Canada, as well as the many initiatives taking place around the country, check the following websites for starters:

- www.davidsuzuki.org
- www.planetfriendly.net
- www.ec.gc.ca/envirozine
- www.greenpeace.org/canada
- www.naturecanada.ca
- www.natureconservancy.ca
- www.wildernesscommittee.org
- www.findnature.com

If you have an environmental project you would like to tell your fellow Canadians about, visit ourcanada.ca to share your story and photos.

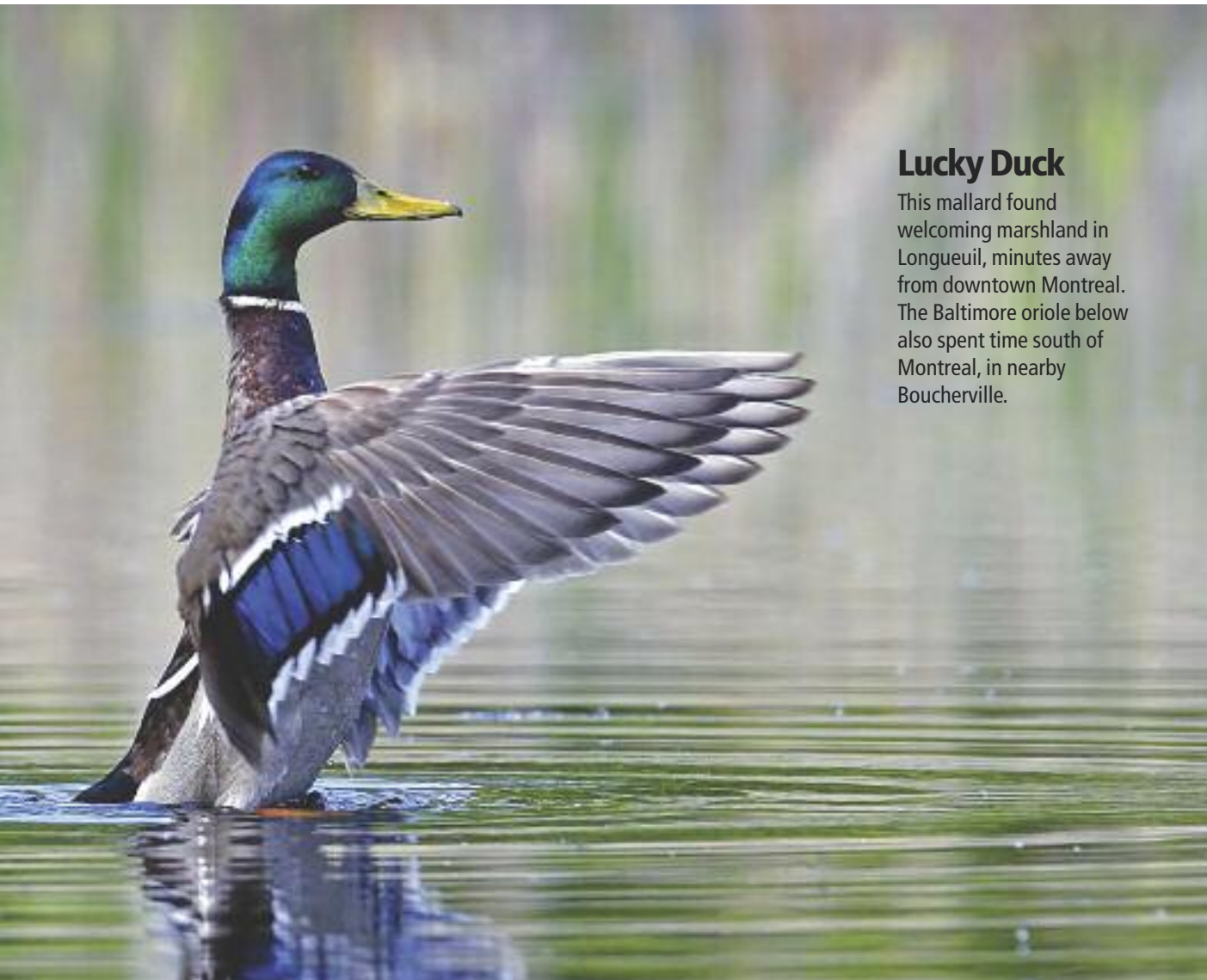
rectly across the river from the downtown core of Canada's second-largest city, Montreal.

In fact, all the photos accompanying this essay were taken in Montreal and its nearby communities. So you can count me among the many Canadians who are thankful there are still parklands, wooded areas, marshes and designated ecological zones within Canada's large urban centres in which wildlife can continue to survive. After all, it's not only birds, animals and vegetation that benefit from these green spaces: Everyone who enjoys being outdoors and discovering nature first-hand is enriched by having such areas within easy reach of their homes. But our ability to keep in touch with nature is constantly being threatened. While my neighbours and I still enjoy easy access to natural habitats, it's important to remember the amount of green space we have around us now is only a fraction of what it once was. And my community is sympto-

matic of what is happening in urban areas throughout the country and around the world: Green space is disappearing at an alarming rate.

While urban development has its place in our society, we have to ensure that it's carried out in a responsible manner that minimizes the damage to our natural environment. Thankfully, many voluntary associations dedicated to helping our ecosystems have taken root in recent years. For example, in my area, Nature Action Quebec works to protect forest corridors to the south of Montreal with the aim of sustaining the migration patterns of certain bird species. Also, the SOS Ecology Centre Fernand-Séguin and SOS Longueuil protect mature forests and swamps on Montreal's south shore, where many species of fauna and flora are endangered. There are similar associations across Canada.

On a personal level, my love of photography goes hand in hand with a commitment to helping the envi-



Lucky Duck

This mallard found welcoming marshland in Longueuil, minutes away from downtown Montreal. The Baltimore oriole below also spent time south of Montreal, in nearby Boucherville.

ronment. I am a volunteer Canadian correspondent for an international association dedicated to wildlife protection called the League ROC (www.roc.asso.fr), chaired by astrophysicist and environmentalist Hubert Reeves. Another of my admittedly modest contributions is capturing and sharing the beauty of biodiversity via digital photography and my website (www.findnature.com). My hope is that the more opportunities people have to see and appreciate nature's beauty, the more likely they will be to play a part in preserving our environment. Ensuring that nature's symphony will continue to warm our hearts and the hearts of our children and grandchildren is a worthwhile endeavour for people from all walks of life. If you take the time to stop and really observe your surroundings, you'll see there are natural treasures everywhere waiting to be discovered and cherished—even in the heart of our major urban centres. **n**

