

# OERS Dispatch

An aerial view from a helicopter cockpit, looking out over a large body of water. In the foreground, the side profile of a pilot wearing glasses is visible. The water below is filled with numerous small boats and a large marina with many docked sailboats. The shoreline is lined with green trees and some buildings. The sky is clear and blue.

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## OERS Participates in Helicopter Training Exercise With The United States Reserves *(See pg. 10)*

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**WARNING:** This article contains pictures that may be offensive to some people

## Not Just Another Nuisance Bird

It started off as another routine phone call to help with another seagull who needed help. Another seagull or as some animal humane groups call them nuisance birds. Birds like seagulls who don't deserve a second chance and are quickly put down....euthanised...immediately forgotten about. There are plenty of other birds out there just like them- robins, wrens, starlings, pigeons- all in the same situation. Not something sensational like an eagle or an endangered peregrine falcon...species that make the headlines in the newspapers or gets a 60 second blurb on the television....no, 'just' a seagull....



Hungry Joe-another injured seagull  
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So let me get back to the phone call that I received. I was in Comeauville, Nova Scotia getting the OERS facility ready for future OERS events. So I listened to the caring woman at the other end of the phone who was asking for our help...pleading...worried that if the bird was taken to her local animal shelter or a veterinarian that it would be killed. Being so far away I gave her Carin Wittnich's phone number who is our OERS veterinarian. Carin took an unexpected interest in this bird as his story was a bit different from the usual calls. The bird had been found on the side of the road unable to move his legs properly. Not the usual broken wing story. He had been picked up, made comfortable and given food and water. Arrangements were made to pick him up and brought to the OERS facility for a full examination. As per tradition, the people finding the animal were given the privilege of naming him. Since he ate almost everything that was offered to him, Hungry Joe seemed to be an appropriate name.

Hungry Joe. Carin felt that something different about Joe. While examining him she had found a small gash on his back, over his pelvic area. She thought that he might have been hit by a car or possibly an object such as a stick. She cleaned the wound and gave him some antibiotics. Carin also realized that some kind of therapy might help Hungry Joe's recovery so she started him on hydrotherapy where he would float in water and used his feet to paddle his way around the tub of water. For the next few weeks she could see him using his feet more and more and each push of his legs became stronger and stronger. Then suddenly after such a session, he was found dead, floating in the water with his head resting against the top of the tub. He had died so suddenly that it was a huge shock. One moment he was there, the next he was gone. CPR was performed to resuscitate him but it was futile. Hungry Joe was dead. There was no explanation except to speculate that he had suffered a stroke or heart attack, possibly due to a blood clot.



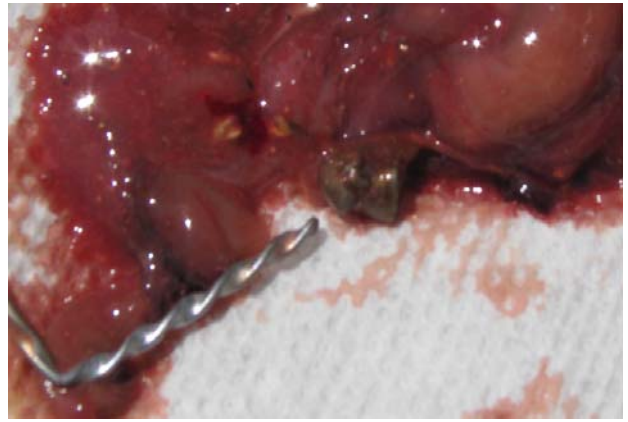
Injury on Hungry Joe's back OERS 2009



Hydrotherapy for Joe

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As per OERS standard operating procedures, an autopsy was performed on Hungry Joe. I had returned from Nova Scotia by this time and I assisted Carin to perform this sad and depressing procedure. The first thing we saw was that there was a small hole on his back at the same place where Carin had found the original gash. Inside his abdomen we found a pellet from an air rifle...someone had shot Hungry Joe. What possible reason was there to shoot a seagull? A senseless act of cruelty? An irresponsible act of stupidity? Why would a parent allow their child to have a weapon to kill wildlife? Was it an 'intelligent' human proving their superiority over a 'dumb' bird? So many questions with no answers to any of them.



Probe pointing to pellet found in Hungry Joe's abdomen  
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Asked why she had picked up an injured seagull (Scully) and called OERS for help after receiving the usual story from her local humane society of it being killed as a nuisance bird, another caring individual said: "He did not choose to be a seagull. So why shouldn't he get help." Did Hungry Joe choose or deserve to die in such a manner? I don't think so. Hungry Joe...just another seagull being at the wrong place at the wrong time? A case of cruelty? Will anyone ever investigate his death? I doubt it. It will not get enough headlines for the authorities to get involved.



The last picture of Hungry Joe  
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Will Hungry Joe be forgotten? Not while I am part of OERS or while OERS has its many volunteers who believe in helping ANY animal in distress. Emergency treatment of wildlife from accidents, disease or acts of cruelty should not be decided by the species of the animal or how much media attention it will get. It should be based upon the fact that humans supposedly have respect for life in general and that they are the most compassionate of any of the millions of species on this planet. Nice thought and words. Wonder if Hungry Joe would think it is true...?

Mike Belanger  
OERS Director of Operations

### *A New OERS Director!*

After having been recently promoted to the position of **OERS** volunteer coordinator, Luke Tan has accepted to become an **OERS** director. The Board of Directors had no reservations in asking Luke to join the board as his nomination was unanimously accepted by the Board.

Luke brings to the Board an astute mind that is capable of thinking quickly. He is not afraid to offer comments, propose ideas and has the talent to turn ideas into get actual reality. Above all, Luke is hard working, dependable and dedicated to **OERS**. He will be a great future asset to **OERS** in terms of being a leader and an example to others.



Luke at the recent large animal lifting training session in Holland, Mich  
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### *You Can Help OERS By Just Shopping Online!!*

Thanks to the efforts of Dr Carin Wittnich, **OERS** was recently added on the list of charities that the Shop and Share website will help donate a percentage of the amount spent with their online partners.

To quote their website- “This is how it works... When a purchase is made online through [www.shopandshare.ca](http://www.shopandshare.ca), we donate a portion of that sale to whichever charity or non-profit organization the customer chooses.” So if anyone goes online and makes a purchase with the stores listed on the Shop and Share website and when you choose **OERS** as your preferred charity, then a percentage gets donated to **OERS** from the Shop and Share group. Some of the companies that you can buy from include: The Home Depot, Expedia.ca, Sears, Dell, Canadian Tire,

**Ticketmaster, Chapters/Indigo and there are many many more!!! So the more that people buy through [www.shopandshare](http://www.shopandshare) website, the more **OERS** gets in donations!**

**So **OERS** is asking you to please remember to go to [www.shopandshare.ca](http://www.shopandshare.ca) when thinking of buying anything online and help **OERS** out with its many programs! Its as simple as 1, 2, 3...**

### ***Winner of the Carin Wittnich Summer Studentship Award (2009)!***

**OERS** is proud to announce that Ms Stacey Kerr from Mississauga was awarded the *Carin Wittnich Summer Studentship Award* for 2009. She received the award for her amazing artistic talent at drawing physiological specimens and love of marine mammals. Her studentship will contribute to the various **OERS** training programs (teaching, education) and research work by supplementing all of the various teaching/training materials with the insertion all of her drawings (skulls, teeth, bones, etc). Her drawings will also be used for ongoing and future projects.



Stacey at work

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Hard at work

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**Stacey had this to say about her summer experience-“I feel that it was a really valuable experience for me, and really brought home the idea that it is something I should pursue as a career, and that it is something I can potentially excel at. I hope that the works I created for you help with the course notes and are good for any other uses you have planned for them.” Thanks Stacey for a job well done!**

## ***The OERS Dispatch Needs You!***

The editors of the **OERS** Dispatch (OD) would like to hear from the readers of the OD and our **OERS** volunteers and members! We invite you to send any comments, articles, pictures or questions that you would like to see in print! This is your chance to be an author and get something published ! Just send your item to [getus@oers.ca](mailto:getus@oers.ca) and put oers dispatch in the message header.

## OERS Volunteer Section

In this volunteer section, Erica Longman describes her feelings and thoughts at participating in the latest exciting OERS event- helicopter airlifting large animals!

**A**s an **OERS-DRD** volunteer I have often been asked why I chose **OERS** over other ‘animal welfare’ organizations. My answer, up until now has always been that **OERS** just seems like a good fit for me. From now on that answer will be different.

**I**n late May I received an email from Mike Belanger, **OERS DO**, asking if I would like to participate in a training exercise involving the airlifting of large animals. My eyes just about bugged out of my head and without thinking, I quickly replied with a resounding YES!!! Maybe I should have taken a few moments to think. I spent the next month wondering and worrying about what I had gotten myself into. Could I really do this? Would I be help or a hindrance? In the end, I reminded myself that such a unique opportunity would likely never come along again so I packed my bags.

**O**n the morning of Friday, June 26, I eagerly made my way to the designated pick-up location. As I watched the **OERS** van pull up I took a deep breath and opened the door to my adventure of a lifetime. What I found inside that door were 5 of the most welcoming people I have ever met, as well as one life-sized articulating horse that we subsequently named ‘**OERS** the Horse’. As I settled into my seat I also settled in as the newest team member. It was that easy. I was given all the equipment and outfits required for the course and told to help myself to anything out of the well-stocked cooler. Everything had been thought of. Over the next several hours, as we made our way to Holland, Michigan, a collective sense of excitement grew with every passing mile. None of us knew what we were in for but it really didn’t matter. We were a team and together we would get through whatever challenges we faced.

**A**fter checking into our rooms we decided to take a run to the Tulip City Airport, where we would be getting our training over the next two days and where we would have to assemble the horse in the morning. As we surveyed the airport we heard the familiar flapping sound of an approaching helicopter. As it set down our Team Leader, Dr. Wittnich told us that it was Chief Richard Dyk, the renowned pilot in charge of training us. The chief took time for some introductions and gave us a quick run down of what we’d be doing and



Erica (far left) helping with the horse mannikin  
OERS 2009



where we'd be doing it. Once we knew where to set up our horse in the morning it was off for a quick dinner before settling down for the night.

Over the next two days we learned all about ground safety, weather and environmental reporting, loading and unloading aircraft, preparing a landing zone and sling loading large animals. The highlight for everyone was the helicopter ride. Even those who stepped on apprehensively stepped off thoroughly exhilarated! Throughout the exercises, team OERS proved it's self to be a well-oiled, cohesive machine. Through mutual respect and teamwork we quickly established ourselves as a highly competent, detail oriented unit...and I was part of it! If that weren't enough, on Sunday morning the Chief presented 'prizes' to the best team-The Canadians (as we had come to be know by then).



OERS the horse ready for his flight

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Perhaps that's what led to us being chosen as the team to demonstrate putting the sling onto OERS the Horse. Through the guidance of Hugh Briefman from the LA City DART (Department Air Rescue Team) we were not only able to get a hands-on experience, but also recorded a video of the exercise to use for future training. Next, the horse was taken outside for the long awaited airlift. We all stood in awed silence as we watched the helicopter lift the horse. This was amazing enough just to see, but there are no words to describe the feeling of knowing that you can actually contribute to pulling off such a miracle.

While I would have been totally thrilled to end the story here and come home with FAA certification as both ground and flight crew and a handful of new friends, it turns out that there was one more bit of business to take care of. Thanks to our insightful DO, we had another piece of equipment to load into the van. An Anderson sling! Not only would we be going home with a team trained to do airlifts, but also the equipment! OERS-DRD is FULLY prepared for air rescue.



Pre-flight preparations

OERS 2009

So, from now on, when people ask why I've chosen to be a member of OERS-DRD my reply will be, "Because I want to be with the BEST!" From the dedicated, professionalism of the team members, the genuine care and concern of the team leader and the forward thinking of the Directing Officer, OERS is unparalleled. I eagerly await my next deployment.

Erika Longman  
OERS-DRD member



Erica (second from right) and the OERS team plus flight crew

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## *Disaster Response & Rescue*

### **OERS Teams Up With the U S Army Reserves & HSUS For a Joint Military/Civilian Animal Rescue ASAT Training Course!**

The Aircraft Safety Awareness Training or ASAT is a Federal Aviation Administration accredited course which includes regulations for ground loading and handling procedures for both fixed and rotor winged aircraft in disaster situations. **OERS** was invited to send a team down to Holland, Michigan for ASAT training and bring the horse mannequin for use for the helicopter lifts. (See Erica's experiences on page 7). The course was well organized and done with a no nonsense army professionalism. Everyone on the OERS team enjoyed working with Captain Richard Dyk who has many years of experience flying in various types of aircraft. OERS appreciates the effort and time that Captain Dyk and his associates put into holding this course and for allowing our team to participate in this amazing opportunity.



Captain Dyk

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The team spent the first day learning all of the technical aspects of working around rotor wing (helicopter) aircraft including safety procedures, proper way of loading and unloading, assisting in landing and take off of the aircraft, and communication procedures. The second day was filled with doing the actual loading and unloading of a helicopter, choosing the right landing sites and the actual lifting of the OERS the horse off and getting him back safely to the ground.



Captain Dyk sharing his knowledge with the OERS team

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As usual our **OERS** team performed admirably! This is what Captain Dyk had to say about the **OERS** members:

“Your team is, to say the least...enthusiastic and to add an understatement, competent. They displayed a high degree of professionalism and worked very well within the joint US

Civilian/Military venture that has been started with the military helicopters and the animal rescue groups. We were, however, a bit puzzled as to what dance Dr. Wittnich performed after her second qualification ride in the UH1 (the type of helicopter they were using for the lifts). I guess it is a Canadian "I survived my helicopter ride" dance but we were not sure. She mumbled something about, "They do not let me out much" as she walked away and we let it go at that.

Please feel free to get in touch with me as we are more than eager to explore ways to start a similar program on your behalf. Call me at any time! Many thanks from your allies to the south”



Our proud OERS team

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## Education

### Internship Program Moves Along!!

#### Unique Hands-On Marine Mammal Anatomy Course Resounding Success!

Just this past May 2009, **OERS** once again held its ever popular marine mammal anatomy course (OERS F-500). This year was its third time and 11 students took advantage of this unique hands on experience held at the University of Toronto. It has been so highly regarded that the Department of Physiology has listed it as their first ever field course. This allows students to also register with the university and receive a recognized undergraduate course credit. This year the students had the privilege of examining a large adult male gray seal.

As it has been for each other course the students had their first week was filled with hands on opportunities. These included the conduct of complete measurements and the standard sample collections including vein punctures for blood and swabs for laboratory evaluation. As well the students, divided into their respective teams and performed much of the actual dissection that was required for the course and had the chance to touch and see for themselves the marvel of the adaptive anatomy of these magnificent creatures. Though it was hard work and long hours, it seemed to go by faster than anyone wanted! This year's group, as have the classes before them, commented



Recording the numbers and taking notes

OERS 2009

on the incredible experience this was and how they wished more of their university courses were as fantastic as this was.

As usual these courses would not be possible without our **OERS** veterinarian, Dr Carin Wittnich, who takes charge and makes sure that everything is done properly- THANKS Doc! And a BIG thank you to the **OERS** volunteers, Katie Blundell, Siavash Ganjbakhsh, Jennifer Lapierre and Stacie Kerr who helped throughout the week. As well, recognition to Nesime Askin and Luke Tan for taking time out from their own busy schedules to help make this course the success it is.



The class of 2009 and its teaching staff!

OERS 2009

And an extra big **THANK YOU** to the Departments of Physiology and Anatomy (Faculty of Medicine) at the University of Toronto for their support and giving **OERS** the opportunity to hold these courses! An excellent example of how collaborations can open new doors for students to enjoy and expand their knowledge!

**OERS** is planning on holding its next F-500 course in May 2010. For more details and information please visit the **OERS** website at [www.oers.ca](http://www.oers.ca) and follow links to courses and the F-500.

## **OERS Internships Reach New Heights of Popularity!**

For those not aware, **OERS** has been running a diverse Internship program for approximately 4 years now. These have consisted of 2 levels, the basic (40 hrs) and the Advanced (100 hrs). There are 3 streams: (a) Pre-veterinary career; (b) Marine mammal research; (c) Biomedical research. These internships exposure the participant to the diversity of each of these areas and prepare them for possible careers or training in these areas and are tailored to each individual scheduled to their needs. The individuals who have taken advantage of these have stated they were a turning point in their lives and greatly assisted them with their career development. For details please visit [www.oers.ca](http://www.oers.ca) and follow links to internships. The demand for these and more such opportunities continues to increase. **OERS** is therefore pleased to announce that a new stream has been established and will launch in May 2010 – the **OERS** Field Internships (see description below). These will be held at the **OERS** Field Station in Nova Scotia and provide real actual field experience. For details please visit our website or contact us at [getus@oers.ca](mailto:getus@oers.ca).

### **OERS Field Internships** (168 hours)

This program is intended for individuals interested in pursuing a career in marine biology and need field training/experience. These internships will be held at the **OERS** Field Station located on St Mary's Bay, Nova Scotia and provide a one week exposure to actual fieldwork. The interns will participate as a 6 person team under the supervision of a Field Team Leader and Assistant. Training/experience will be diverse to ensure a broad exposure of the intern to field work of many styles and may include but not limited to: on the water boat observations of marine mammals in their natural habitat (including whale-watching), shore-front research and sample collection; tide pool observations and visits to study and observe the local ecology. Living conditions at the station are dormitory style (air mattresses, sleeping bags) and as expected for fieldwork, rough. Basic essentials are provided but expect camping conditions. This 1 week experience will provide the individual an opportunity to experience field work and all that it entails. This internship is a more in depth opportunity to experience the diverse nature of this career path with a focus on exploring how to conduct effective field work including: (a) what to expect while living in the field, (b) the planning, execution and conclusion of a project utilizing a variety of data collection techniques. Daily field trips will be at times demanding and include inclement weather, water, uncomfortable temperatures etc. Field work will be supplemented with

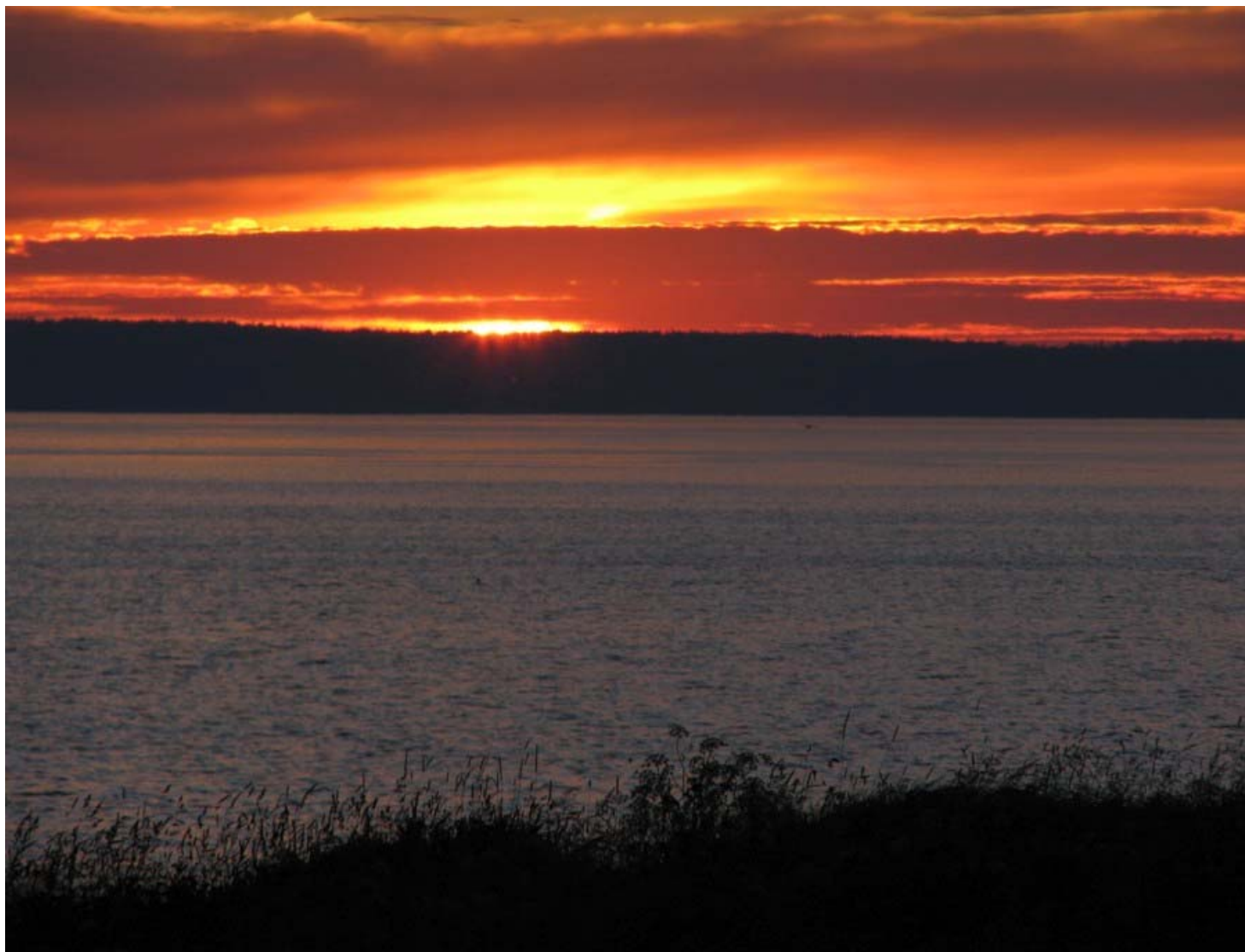
on site seminars and laboratory work. The skills gained by the intern include knowledge on the practical implementation of a field project, working in a research team which also consists of team data analysis and discussions of findings etc. The type of project will vary but will have a marine focus. There are two programs available depending on the individual's area of interest: *data collection techniques* or *project driven*. This Field Internship will be available on a first come-first-served basis and will run the last week in May on an annual basis. Others may be held on demand during the summer based on a full complement of 6 interns per session. One year complimentary OERS Membership included.

The are 3 different Field internship streams tailored to differing levels of maturity:

**Pre-university**

**University**

**Adult learning**



A St Mary's Bay sunset at Comeauville, Nova Scotia

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