



PHOTO COURTESY OF GILBERT RASHI

Thompson, one of four young raccoons rescued by a real-estate developer, before the animals were turned over to wildlife authorities.

Raccoons' rescuer says animals worse off at shelter

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THE GAZETTE

A real-estate developer who opened his home to four baby raccoons found at a construction project fears that wildlife officials who confiscated the animals can't care for them properly.

Gilbert Rashi, president of Vision en Vert – a property development company that aims to conserve wildlife – took in the raccoons after one of his workers discovered them trapped behind a newly erected wall of a house at Côte des Neiges Rd. and The Boulevard in Montreal.

The raccoons then lived for a month with Rashi and his partner, Endrée Villeneuve, at their home in Île Perrot.

"The conditions they were liv-

ing in with us were palatial for raccoons," Rashi said after the animals were taken from his home yesterday morning.

"They were being washed and fed, the whole nine yards," he said. "They were being treated like kings."

"Now they will be kept in tiny cages (at a rehabilitation centre). How is this rehabilitating them? Many people don't have the means to take care of these animals. We built them a shed, for God's sake."

But wildlife officials point out that keeping wild animals in captivity is simply against the law.

"Regulations concerning animals in captivity are quite clear: Nobody shall have a raccoon in Quebec," said Gilbert Vincent, a

Longueuil-based game warden for the Department of Natural Resources and Wildlife.

Rescuing a wild animal could do it more harm than good, Vincent said.

"When you feed a baby animal four or five times a day, he won't recognize you're a human and will think you're his mother," he said. The creature then runs the risk of being rejected later by its own mother, he explained.

"In rehabilitation centres, the people ... make sure the animal will go to nature and won't come back to humans," Vincent said.

Jean Cardinal works at Ciné Zoo, a company that trains animals for movies and often works with Vision en Vert. He said he was appalled to learn the raccoons had been confiscated.

"I agree with what (Rashi and Villeneuve) were doing. They were trying to help those animals," said Cardinal, who told the couple he would take the raccoons in September, once he had the facilities to care for them.

"Those guys are putting them in a cage, where they'll die because they need more than this. They need to be handled and fed well and re-introduced into nature," he said.

Although Cardinal has a permit to rescue and rehabilitate animals, Rashi and Villeneuve do not.

Rashi is hoping he can reclaim the raccoons and send them to Cardinal as soon as possible.

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