

FEATURE PARTIES



PARTY CENTRAL

BY CHELSEA NASH

Nature Ball stuns with sold-out inaugural ball



Nature Canada Ball chair Sheefra Brisbin, three-time Juno award winner Chantal Kreviazuk, ball patron Sophie Grégoire Trudeau, and author and environmental activist Margaret Atwood.

Photograph courtesy of Bente Nielsen

Nature Canada's first-ever Nature Ball on Friday sold out of the 300 tickets available and raised almost \$95,000 to help preserve Canada's natural land, and connect children with nature.

The gala put nature front and centre with an impressive grey-horned owl called **Darwin** greeting guests in one corner of the Chateau Laurier ballroom, many of whom were thrilled when he screeched at them. His handler said he was very accustomed to crowds, and was simply trying to call for other owls who might also happen to be in attendance at the ball. (Unfortunately, Darwin was without a fellow fowl for the evening.) The bird was there courtesy of Falcon Environmental Services.

Guests were served complimentary bar fare and hors d'oeuvres, which appeared to give a nod Canada's homegrown food, like wild-mushroom crostini, smoked salmon, and cubes of aged cheddar drizzled in honey. The main course of the dinner stayed on trend, with a salad featuring yellow beets and a creamy blue cheese to start, a main course of pickerel, and chocolate mousse for dessert. The wine kept flowing throughout the evening courtesy of Pillitteri Estates in Ontario's Niagara region.

Elsewhere at the reception, some guests took the dress code, which stipulated, "Black Tie/Nature Inspired," to heart. Edmonton Strathcona NDP MP

Linda Duncan was wearing a black dress featuring large, printed lilies on the front, though she was perhaps beat out for most environmentally-focused garb by **Susanna Carson**, who was decked out in a gown made almost entirely of compostable cups and plates, while a potted plant rested on the train, which was on wheels for easy manoeuvring. Ms. Carson is the CEO of BSI Biodegradable Solutions, the same company that makes the cups and plates incorporated into the fabric of her dress.

Even with some guests' funky fashion, it's safe to say that many were excited to see what guest of honour **Sophie Grégoire-Trudeau** would wear to the inaugural ball, where she was being honoured as the 100th member of Nature Canada's Women for Nature initiative. Nature Canada says it's Canada's oldest conservation charity, having been founded in 1939. Ms. Grégoire-Trudeau has been celebrated for her fashion choices ever since her husband, **Justin Trudeau**, became prime minister last October.

She didn't disappoint, with a floor-length, off-the-shoulder gown with a long cape and train behind her, in forest green. The colour was fitting as the room glowed with blue and green lights, while she delivered a speech emphasizing her own personal connection to nature while growing up, and the ways she tries to connect



Darwin the owl and his handler with a guest.



Some fashion from the evening was inspired by nature, like this dress made entirely of compostable dishware, worn by Susanna Carson.



A canoe with paddles signed by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and his spouse, Ms. Grégoire Trudeau, is auctioned off for \$4,600.



Margaret Atwood: Ms. Atwood discusses her graphic-novel series.

her children to nature. Photographs of the Trudeau family and their young children in nature played on a loop on large screens beside the stage throughout the evening.

The money raised was a result of the sold-out event, a silent auction, raffle, and live auction at the end of the evening. One of the prizes garnering the most attention was the namesake of a character in **Margaret Atwood's** forthcoming graphic novel, the third in a series about protagonist Angel Catbird, a superhero trying to save the planet. Guests were offered a copy of an earlier book in the series, which Ms. Atwood herself described as "bizarre," in their gift bags, along with a small pot of honey. To the excitement of many, sleeping bags were also handed out as party favours, courtesy of Canadian Tire.

Ms. Atwood was also a guest of honour at the event, and she delivered remarks too, most of which discussed the hilarity of her graphic-novel series, and the sheer number of cat puns that could be found within its pages, something she clearly took great delight in.

After Ms. Atwood spoke, three-time Juno award winner **Chantal Kreviazuk** took to the stage. She interacted with both Ms. Atwood and Ms. Grégoire-Trudeau during her performance, giving Ms. Atwood and her book, *Cat's Eye*, credit for the inspiration of her song "Surrounded," which she wrote

after being hospitalized after an accident in Italy, she told the crowd.

Finally, the live auction took place late into the night. Having a character named after you, and yourself visually depicted in Ms. Atwood's novel cost someone a cool \$11,000. But, as the auctioneer kept reminding guests, "it's for the children."

Though it was hosted on a Friday night, a few Members of Parliament stuck around Ottawa, rather than rushing to their ridings as is usually the case Thursdays, to make it to the event, including Liberal MPs **Deb Schulte** and **Stephen Fuhr**.

Some local Ottawans were present, including Environment Minister **Catherine McKenna**, who hurried out shortly after plugging free admission to national parks for Canada's 150th next year during her speech, Orleans Liberal MP **Andrew Leslie**, his daughter, **Erica Leslie**, (who was there accompanying Mr. Fuhr), and local Liberal MPP **Yasir Naqvi**. **Bruce** and **Vicki Heyman**, the U.S. ambassador and his spouse, were also there. It's no surprise that the American couple is interested in nature: they frequently post on social media about the gardens and beekeeping at Lornado, their official residence.

Organizers said they plan to make the Nature Ball an annual event.

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