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THE QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF THE NEW YORK  
STATE WILDLIFE REHABILITATION COUNCIL, INC.

**IMPORTANT DATES:**

March 4-8, 2008  
NWR Symposium in Cherry Hill, NJ  
(320) 230-9920

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**NYSWRC WEBSITE:** [www.NYSWRC.org](http://www.NYSWRC.org)

**A NEW LOOK FOR RELEASE**

You will notice that we are changing paper stock with this issue of *Release*. This change will be more cost effective and will enable us to work better within the new postal regulations.

**Editor's note:**

I welcome your articles, poems, information, questions and artwork. We are pleased to print articles from our members, but caution each reader that NYSWRC is not responsible for the accuracy of the content or information provided, and does not necessarily endorse the policies proposed. Submissions should be sent to: nisseq@aol.com or to PO Box 62, Newcomb, NY 12852.

**SEMINAR 2007 - A SUCCESS!**

By Steve Freiman, Seminar Chair

Wow--another terrific seminar is complete. Twenty seven years and running... NYSWRC was pleased to present 4 days of continuing education classes for rehabilitators, animal control officers, and anyone interested in wildlife rehabilitation. We had 184 participants, 38 speakers, our board members and vendors. Instructors taught 54 classes and labs, so there was lots of variety offered. Our speakers included the leading experts in all fields. We are so proud to be able to offer such quality programs. It is because of the generosity of our dedicated speakers that we can offer such a variety of classes each year. Thanks to you all!

I want to take this opportunity to thank all of those involved. What a great group of friendly, intelligent, and compatible people gathered together to enjoy the conference. The NYSWRC board members all worked very diligently to make the conference so successful. Each board member had a job for the weekend and did it well. It takes lots of willing hands to "pull off" a conference, and we were fortunate to have lots of helpers this year. I'd like to thank all of the seminar participants who also helped serve as room monitors, runners, AV specialists, etc. Many of you donated raffle items, and this allowed us to hold a very special fund-raising raffle and silent auction. In addition to the learning experience, there were bargains, networking and lots of laughter throughout the weekend. *article continues on p. 2*

**SEMINAR 2007, continued**

Major help came from the folks at Ravensbeard Wildlife Center. Ellen Kalish and Karen Marhafer organized a cadre of local volunteers who solicited raffle donations, baked cookies, provided cider and snacks, ran errands, etc. They even gave us airport pickup and delivery for our speakers. Denise Edelson pointed us in the right direction for local nature walks and a birding specialist. You can learn more about Ravensbeard at: <http://www.ravensbeard.org/> Thanks to you all for making our experience in your community a good one. We sure appreciate your help.

John Frink's musical entertainment was wonderful. It was a good way for us to relax and unwind after a busy day of classes. John's CDs can be purchased at: [www.crocodiletunes.com](http://www.crocodiletunes.com).

The Annual Meeting was held and the slate of officers elected. Thanks to our board members for agreeing to continue to serve NYSWRC. Now the planning will begin for next year's conference. Put the date on your calendar, as it is an experience you won't want to miss. We'll see you in Grand Island, NY (Niagara Falls) for the weekend of Oct. 24-26, 2008.

**SEVENTEEN SCHOLARSHIPS AWARDED**

NYSWRC was pleased to be able to award 17 scholarships to Seminar 2007. Funding was received from National Grid, Sally Sherman Foods and the High Peaks Audubon Society.



High Peaks Audubon Scholars:  
Camile Burns and S.E.H. Burns

**In Memoriam: Peter Berle**

It is with great sadness that I must tell you about the passing away of Peter Berle, an environmental champion. Peter served as DEC Commissioner from 1976-1979 and served three terms in the NYS Assembly, ending in 1974. He played a critical role in creating the Adirondack Park Agency and the statutes that the Agency implements in the Park. Peter was President and CEO of the National Audubon Society from 1985 to 1995. Peter was an author and a lobbyist for the environment and wildlife. We will miss him.



**In Memoriam: Gaby Crawford**

Gaby lost her battle with cancer this fall. Her friend Marlene Ring wrote to us, "The seminars meant everything to Gaby and the rides we took together were always filled with adventure and laughter. She especially had fond memories of the early days when the seminars were intimate and rustic.

"She named her kitten *Tridium*. (Among the fascinating things about Gaby was that she had studied nuclear physics.) In her creative way, Gaby carpeted high shelves and parts of the walls in her small apartment so that her cats would have the opportunity to climb.

"Her compassion extended to everything. Once when I was dropping something off to her outside her building she whispered, 'I have a mouse.' I thought she was telling me about something that was still in her apartment but then she whispered again, 'I have a mouse.' She was actually holding the mouse that she trapped in her apartment and was about to release it with a grape. She was whispering because surely that little guy would find his way back into the building to the chagrin of her neighbors. Even her mealworms had it good..."

We will miss her.

## REGGIE THE ALLIGATOR

By Jessica Spinelli

(Although the story takes place in California, I think it is a very clear example over the disaster that can occur when a person dumps an unwanted pet.)

Reggie, a 6½-foot American Alligator and an unlikely resident of Harbor City, California, has finally been caught after several years of successfully dodging eager captors.

For the past two years, Reggie has lived in the city's own Lake Machado at Ken Harbor Regional Park. He quickly became a local superstar after his first appearance in August of 2005. For the past two years, alligator wranglers from around the country came to Harbor Park attempting to catch Reggie, including several from Gatorland in Orlando Florida. It was rumored that the late Steve Irwin was even being called upon to come and capture the famous 'gator. But Reggie managed to give them the slip every time. He disappeared from sight for 18 months and efforts to catch him were put off during the winter season. Then in May, Reggie reappeared and was spotted basking along the bank. Several more sightings, along with more media frenzy, followed. Local park officials and wildlife experts met to devise a plan to definitively capture the malingering 'gator. Finally Reggie's luck ran out. It took three men to restrain Reggie and secure his jaws with duct tape, all while the large alligator thrashed about. He was then taken by firefighters and safely secured onto an animal control truck. Accompanied by police escorts, Reggie said farewell to the lake that had been his home for the past couple of years and was on his way to the Los Angeles Zoo.

During these past few years Reggie inspired the launching of variety of "Reggie" merchandise, spanning from T-shirts to burgers and mascots; he even had some songs and blogs dedicated to his honor. Visitors from around the country traveled to Harbor Park in hopes of catching a glimpse of this mysterious reptile. But despite the tourism he may have brought to the city, the Department of Parks and Recreation had to spend over \$155,000 in heightened security in the park area. Reggie had never attacked anyone, but it was better to be safe than sorry.

Although light was made of the situation, Reggie's origins bring to the forefront a sad fact. Reggie was illegally dumped by a Los Angeles police officer after the reptile had grown too big for him to keep. This posed a serious threat not only to the innocent alligator, but to the city's residents as well. The officer and an accomplice were arrested and are being criminally charged.

It is a known fact that alligators can grow very large. If you can't properly house a pet, whatever it may be, then don't get one. It is unfortunate, but all too often, especially with large reptiles, an owner is intrigued by an animal and the idea of owning it, but doesn't take into consideration the time, housing, and responsibilities that come attached with owning such a pet. Fortunately, Reggie's story had a happy ending. After a 60-day quarantine, he will be introduced to the other zoo alligators and given the proper space and care he deserves. But there are many other stories out there with a lot less-fortunate endings. Hopefully the arrest of the officer will serve as an example to all those who heartlessly, and *illegally*, dump their unwanted animals.

Sources

ABC news, Reptiles Magazine, KNBC.com

## UNSUNG HEROES

By Kathleen Britton

To Whom? From Whom? What For?  
Questions that I will try to answer.

Erie County SPCA and their competent wildlife staff, that is "to whom."  
"For What?" Help given to us to enhance and enable us in the rehabilitation of wildlife.  
"From Whom?" From me, Kathleen Britton and Wild Kritters of Niagara County.

I will mention only a few because they are the ones that I have had direct dealings with, but they have a wonderful bunch of volunteers too; Bev Jones, and Joel Thomas, and of course I would not forget Jean Alden.

The past couple of years have been financially hard for us with all the animals needing help and they have been there to lend a helping hand. We have had numerous x-rays, meds, and just plain old moral support when we have been down. Suck up? No way—let's give credit where credit is due. The folks at the SPCA have held out their hands to any rehabber that needs their facilities, and to my knowledge they have never refused a soul. They have a bigger pocketbook than most of us and do not hesitate to share it.

We have a Vet Award of the Year but need to recognize a rehabber or rehabbers that have gone out of their way to help another, Maybe this should be something we could think about for the future. I'd nominate the SPCA of Erie County.

## BOX TURTLE IRIDOVIRUS

By Kathy Michell

Wildlife rehabilitators who specialize in or accept turtles for care should be aware of an iridovirus recently identified in wild turtles. At the Eastern Box Turtle Conservation Workshop held at the Patuxent Research Refuge in Laurel, Maryland on September 28, 2004, Dr. April Johnson of the University of Florida presented information on the current research and testing for the virus. Prior to 2003, only a few isolated cases, primarily in captive tortoises, had been documented in the U.S. In 2003 and 2004 an iridovirus mortality event of 17 of 70 eastern box turtles occurred in a Pennsylvania box turtle population. It is unknown whether this is an emergent disease or may have been present and previously undetected. Several other past chelonian die-offs may have been due to undiagnosed iridovirus.

The iridovirus is an amphibian ranavirus. Considerable research has been conducted on ranaviruses in amphibians and they are considered major pathogens of wild amphibians worldwide. Less is known about the virus in reptiles. The iridoviruses can infect invertebrates and poikilothermic vertebrates. The disease progresses rapidly in turtles resulting in death within a matter of weeks.

Symptoms that the rehabilitator should be aware of include: signs of an upper respiratory infection, including respiratory distress and nasal discharge, oral ulcerations or plaques and lethargy. The turtles may be found basking in full sun due to the illness and not make an attempt to escape when approached. In July, 2006 a wild juvenile Blanding's turtle in New York State was found by Jude Holdsworth, basking, lethargic and with slight bubbling at the nose. At my suggestion she checked the mouth which contained the plaques, large areas of caseous yellowish/white material on the inside of the mouth and tongue. Jude had been involved with Dr. April Johnson's research at the Pennsylvania box turtle site and was aware of the testing program. A swab was sent to the University of Florida for PCR (polymerase chain reaction) testing which came back positive and the turtle, which died within days, was sent on ice to Dr. Alan Pessier in San Diego for necropsy which confirmed iridovirus. This was the first documented case in the U.S. in an aquatic species. In retrospect, researchers had reported finding several dead bog turtles sitting in natural basking positions on sedges in the same county the previous year. I can recall two cases, both eastern box turtles, from 1998 and 2003, which had severe plaques that did not respond to typical stomatitis therapy. Several other dead turtles with no evidence of injury have been reported in apparent basking positions from open areas.

The mode of transmission is as of yet unknown. Drs. April Johnson, Alan Pessier and Elliot Jacobson conducted a study on experimental transmission in box turtles and red eared sliders. Turtles which received intramuscular inoculation of the virus contracted the disease while those which received oral inoculation remained healthy. The disease may be arthropod borne. It appears that infected amphibians are the reservoir for the virus. The infected Pennsylvania box turtles, the New York Blanding's turtle and several other possible cases were all found in close proximity to a wetland.

A New York Blanding's turtle population is currently being observed closely for evidence of sick turtles. Earlier this year a massive tadpole die-off was confirmed to be the iridovirus and the turtles were observed feasting on the dead and dying tadpoles.

Dr. April Johnson is no longer at the University of Florida. She holds a new position at the CDC in Atlanta. However, April Childress has taken over the iridovirus testing of samples sent to Florida. If you encounter a suspect turtle, please contact April at [ChildressA@vetmed.ufl.edu](mailto:ChildressA@vetmed.ufl.edu). She will e-mail a sample submission form. The cost is \$80 per sample. It is expensive but without testing of sick turtles there will be no way of knowing the extent of the disease. The oral swab needs to be placed in a sterile tube (like a red top) with no additives and shipped overnight on ice to: April Childress, University of Florida, 2015 SW 16<sup>th</sup> Ave, Building 1017, Room V2-238, Gainesville, FL 32608

If you have any questions regarding a sick turtle or the testing procedure, please feel free to contact Jude Holdsworth at [jjjeem@aol.com](mailto:jjjeem@aol.com) or 845-454-5748 or Kathy Michell at [kathy@nyturtlecenter.org](mailto:kathy@nyturtlecenter.org) or 845-252-3501. We can also e-mail the submission form and instructions to you. Thank you for your assistance.

### References

Johnson, AJ, Wellehan JFX, Pessier AP, Norton TM, Belzer WR, Brooks JW, Wagner R, Stedman NL, Spratt J, Jacobson ER: Iridovirus infections in turtles and tortoises. Proceedings of the American Association of Zoo Veterinarians, American Association of Wildlife Veterinarians, Wildlife Disease Association, Joint Conference, San Diego, CA, pp 11-12, 2004.

Johnson A.J, Pessier AP, Jacobson ER. Experimental transmission and induction of ranaviral disease in western ornate box turtles (*Terrapene ornata ornata*) and red-eared sliders (*Trachemys scripta elegans*). Vet Pathol 44:285-297, 2007

## DATA REQUEST

Aloha,

Can you help by participating in a head injury study? We have begun a data compilation of our head injury raptors in hopes to better understand the release verses euthanized and die ratios. Also do you know of any other rehab facilities (both in and out of the USA) who might be willing to help us by sharing data if we promise to provide the final totals once we are done? The idea is to see if the use of steroids, as we are doing in two doses, makes a significant improvement in survival.

What we hope to find out are a few questions:

1. How many raptors with head injuries total since you have been keeping data?
2. How many treated with steroids?
3. How many treated without steroids?
4. Type and number of doses each facility uses?
5. Number released of treated birds?
6. Number released of non-treated birds?
7. Number died of treated birds?
8. Number died of non-treated birds?
9. Number euthanized of treated birds?
10. Number euthanized of non-treated birds?

If it is easier for you to have us tabulate your data, you can send us a copy of the last two years of your Migratory bird reporting data. We will do the separating and math for you. We will write up the totals and share the final paper with all rehabbers.

Many Thanks,

Ann Goody, Curator  
 Three Ring Ranch Exotic Animal Sanctuary  
 Kona, Hawaii  
[www.threeringranch.org](http://www.threeringranch.org)

## The New York State P.E.T.S. Act became a law in September.

This new legislation provides for state and local disaster preparedness plans to address the needs of individuals with household pets and service animals following a disaster, with particular attention to means of evacuation, shelter and transportation options.

“This legislation codifies guidance that SEMO has long promoted to communities across the state. Governor Patacki’s signing into law provides the impetus for local governments to formally address the needs of owners of pets and service animals in preparedness plans.” – *Director John R. Gibb – State Emergency Management Office*

## SURROGATE OPOSSUM

By Beth Mowder,  
 Keeper of the Wild, Inc., Charleston/St. George, SC

While on the topic of nice things happening... How many of you use surrogate opossums when you're able or lucky enough to have one? I've had great luck in the past.

I took in a female this past weekend which had been caught by a dog. There were some wounds but not as bad as I've seen and lot's of slobbery matted fur. I noticed she had milk but no babies. I phoned the lady back but she had no idea how this little opossum ended up in her garage and she didn't have a dog. We looked but no babies were found.

She wasn't hurt that bad but seemed very depressed and only picked at her food This was Sat. morning and continued the same way through Sunday. She was pouring milk and I changed her blankets constantly. Monday AM early I had a call to go get two babies from a dead mom. Again, we looked for more but no luck. I brought them home, cleaned them up and got some fluids in them. Their eyes were just opened. I took them to my injured mom and placed them in her pouch. She was, as most, very shy so I kept her cage covered. I kept checking on them but she was just lying there. I left her alone and a few hours later I peeped in on her. All her food was gone, she had groomed her fur all nice and neat and the two little babies had more milk than they knew what to do with. She had rolled belly up to nurse them. These are the type things that happen which make rehab so fulfilling. Just wanted to share another nice story with a happy ending.

## REMINDER - HERPS CALLS

By Kathy Michell

It might be a good idea to remind rehabbers that when people have native herps that are being kept captive and they call a rehabber because they don't want it anymore, it is not legal or appropriate for the rehabber to accept the animal. The person should be given the phone number of the regional DEC wildlife office in their area. This is a wildlife issue. I have heard of several cases, and intervened in one involving box turtles, where someone wanted to get rid of captive herps and the rehabber said they would take them, hold them for a while and release them in a "safe" place. Numerous, well-documented studies have shown that adult box turtles do not relocate well and that they live in defined colonies. Now, in light of the iridovirus, it is especially important not to have people doing this relocation.

## ENVIRONMENTAL ENRICHMENT

*Managing the well-being of captive wild animals,*  
by Leah Filo

As wildlife rehabilitators, we are charged with providing professional care to sick, injured, and orphaned wild animals so they can ultimately be returned to their natural habitats. We all have our own special formulas, potions and voodoo dances that help us do just that...heal the physical body. But I think we need to challenge ourselves to look beyond the physical, and work towards a holistic approach to healing by incorporating environmental enrichment into our daily routines.

In my professional life, I take care of wild animals in a captive setting. These animals are ambassadors for their species, teaching the public to know and respect what is in their backyard. It was through this type of work that I first heard the term environmental enrichment.

Environmental enrichment, also called behavioral enrichment, refers to the practice of providing animals under managed care with environmental stimuli. The goal of enrichment is to improve an animal's quality of life by increasing physical activity, stimulating natural behaviors, allowing choices and preventing or reducing stereotypical behaviors. Zoos have done the most research in this field and many of their techniques can be applied to the rehab setting.

In order to implement a successful enrichment program, you must first know the natural history of each species under your care. Do they climb trees, dig burrows, bask in the sun, live in social communities? All of this information will help you decide how best to enrich that particular animal. Some of the simplest measure can greatly affect the health of your patients.

One of the easiest ways to provide enrichment is by manipulating the physical environment. Most likely, you already do this to some degree. Some examples of physical enrichment are:

- pools for swimming;
- live and artificial plants for shade or visual barriers;
- furniture (ropes, branches, etc.) moved, added or removed from an exhibit to create new pathways and encourage exploratory behaviors
- a variety of substrates for tactile stimulation or digging opportunities
- warmer/cooler spots for basking and shade

Another easy way to provide enrichment is through your daily husbandry routine. Some examples of husbandry enrichment are:

- food scattered, frozen and hidden throughout a cage;
- increasing the handling time of food items (e.g. whole food versus chopped food);
- timing of food delivery: varied, random or triggered by a behavior or event;
- puzzle feeders that offer animals a challenging and time-consuming method of obtaining their diet (i.e. tubes with holes drilled throughout and stuffed with small food, food placed in a box.)

Allowing for social interactions can also be a valuable enrichment technique. Permitting animals to groom, play, mate and socialize with other members of their species in a manner similar to wild populations can have impressive health benefits.

- housing social animals with appropriate members of their species;
- adding visual barriers (vegetation, furniture) to the cage to allow animals to retreat from both conspecifics and public; creating mixed species exhibits that may provide symbiotic or complementary activities between the species, or merely provide diversion



River otter exploring a snowman stuffed with treats  
at The Wild Center.

**ENVIRONMENTAL ENRICHMENT, *continued***

Wild animals rely on their senses to find food, shelter and mates. Stimulating their senses in captivity is an important part of managing their well-being. Some examples of sensory stimulation are:

- spices, herbs, perfumes and animal scents (lure, feces, skins) applied around a cage to add an olfactory dimension;
- playing recordings of vocalizations from conspecifics, predators or other naturally encountered sounds to elicit natural behavioral responses;
- placing elevated platforms and perches to allow visual access to other cages, animals and activities;

Imagine having the injured animal you are rehabbing step onto a scale to be weighed without stress or handling. How about having an aggressive animal move into a crate so that its cage can be cleaned without injury! Believe it or not these feats can be accomplished through a little training. Training is one of the most valuable enrichment tools, reducing handling time, allowing for better health observations and making husbandry a little easier.

While this article can only scratch the surface of enrichment, there are many resources online that can help you decide where/when and how to use enrichment. Also, I love talking about enrichment and welcome any comments or questions at [LFilo@wildcenter.org](mailto:LFilo@wildcenter.org).

**Additional Resources:**

- [www.enrichmentonline.org](http://www.enrichmentonline.org) (great searchable database)
- [www.animalenrichment.org](http://www.animalenrichment.org)
- [www.aazk.org/committees/enrichment/comm\\_enrichment\\_title.php](http://www.aazk.org/committees/enrichment/comm_enrichment_title.php)
- [www.enrichment.org](http://www.enrichment.org)



Target training a porcupine at The Wild Center

**DEC NAMES NEW FISH, WILDLIFE AND MARINE RESOURCES DIRECTOR  
Renowned Conservation Biologist Patricia Riexinger Named,  
First Woman to Hold the Post**

A nationally certified wildlife biologist with extensive success in biodiversity conservation has been selected as the new Director of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation's (DEC) Division of Fish, Wildlife, and Marine Resources, Commissioner Pete Grannis announced today.

Patricia Riexinger, who has over three decades of experience working in DEC's natural resource management and protection programs, will be the first woman to head the Division.

Ms. Riexinger began her career with DEC in the Waterfowl Unit, and then spent four years as the reptile and amphibian specialist in the Endangered Species Unit. In 1983, she became the Division's freshwater wetlands program manager, helping to create and develop the program, which at that time, was new to the Division. Her accomplishments include helping complete all the freshwater wetlands maps outside the Adirondack Park, launching an Interagency Wetlands group with federal and state officials, assisting with the National Governor's Association Wetlands Policy and the White House Interagency Wetlands Policy initiatives, securing and administering more than \$1 million in federal wetlands grants to support research and management projects, and preparing the state Wetland Conservation Plan, for which she received national recognition. For the last six years, Ms. Riexinger has also served as Section Head for the Division's Landscape Conservation Section, where she has overseen the watershed conservation; freshwater wetlands; Wild, Scenic and Recreational Rivers; and aquatic habitat protection programs.

Ms. Riexinger received a Bachelor of Science in wildlife biology from Cornell University's College of Agriculture and Life Science, and a Masters of Science in biodiversity, conservation and policy from the University at Albany. She has also taken graduate-level courses from the Rockefeller College of Public Administration. She is an avid birdwatcher and nature enthusiast, loves to travel and cook, and is committed to Girl Scouting.

NYSWRC would like to extend our congratulations and a hearty welcome to Ms. Riexinger. We look forward to working with you.

# NYSWRC SEM





# MINAR 2007



**2007 VETERINARIAN OF THE YEAR  
Award Presented by NYSWRC and ACES**

***Congratulations to Dr. Brian Hall***

Brian Hall is a 1968 graduate of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Cornell University and a 1971 graduate of the New York State Veterinary College at Cornell. In 1982 he became a Diplomate of the American Board of Veterinary Practitioners with a specialty in Canine and Feline Practice. He has subsequently recertified in 1992 and 2002. In 1980 Brian and his wife, Jean, built and opened Fairport Animal Hospital with Jean taking care of the business aspects of the practice and Brian concentrating on medicine. His areas of interest include surgery, cardiology and avian and exotic medicine.

Brian and his caring, dedicated staff have been involved with wildlife from the beginning. Working with several rehabilitators in the area, they care for virtually any type of wild creature passing through their doors from sparrow to raptor, chipmunk to woodchuck, mallard to swan, and, those lucky enough to be RVS certified and sponsored by him, bat to raccoon.



**Veterinarian of the Year  
Award Recipients:**

- 1997 Dr. Michael Bonda**
- 1998 Dr. Alison Hazel**
- 1999 Dr. Carl Tomascke**
- 2000 Dr. Basil Tangredi**
- 2001 Dr. Wendi Westrom**
- 2002 Dr. Carl Eisenhard**
- 2003 Dr. James Robinson**
- 2004 Dr. Laura Wade**
- 2005 Dr. Victor J. Dasaro**
- 2006 Dr. Brian Landenberger**
- 2007 Dr. Brian Hall**

Fairport Animal Hospital is also extremely active in other aspects of the community. Among the many activities they sponsor are spay and neuter programs for Pet Pride, the Humane Society, and Habitat for Cats, and rabies clinics throughout the Rochester area. They also participate in high school internship programs offered at several of the local high schools which allow students who have an interest in the veterinary field to experience what life is like at an animal hospital.

Brian and Jean have one son, David, who is an architect in Arlington, Virginia. They live on a small farm in Victor with several horses, chickens, three goats, three dogs and two African Grey Parrots. When not at the hospital or working on the farm, Brian enjoys boating and his 1971 Olds convertible.

Brian was nominated by NYSWRC member Sue Korts.

NYSWRC thanks Bill Brothers of ACES (Animal Care Equipment Services of Boulder, CO) for his continued financial and dedicated support for this annual award.



## WOODCHUCK MEMORIES

By Deborah A. Sien  
(for "BRUISER", "LADY", "MADAME" and "LITTLE BRUISER")

JOURNAL ENTRY (6/16/07 1:30 p.m.)

It is one of those days. One that you want to memorize forever in your mind. They are 10 weeks old today I realize as I sit outside in my lawn chair sorting their photos, watching them playing in their pen. Occasionally, they will each take a turn from play to stand up, at frozen alert, to assess each new sound, ever watchful. They finally started digging outside yesterday. They'll be ready for release in a few weeks and this photo album and the memories will be all I'll have of their existence. I try to memorize each face and each sound, each new event, both happy and sad. It's mostly all I can concentrate on these last few wonderful weeks. Yes, those warm roly poly murmuring balls of fuzz with their flat little bear heads and bristle tails stole my heart, broke my heart, made me laugh and taught me so much more than books could ever. My first woodchucks, groundhogs, whistle pigs, *marmota monax*.

I wonder how they will get on. Will the girls survive to reproduce in their second Spring? Will Bruiser be big and strong enough to compete with the other males? Will they stay together in one area or disperse miles from each other? They seem so bonded these 3 siblings, 2 females and one male. Losing their brother still tears at my heart. I wonder if they've forgotten him already or just take death in stride and move on. I've saved the little guy's ashes so he can be "released" with his siblings into the wild.

Thinking back, I remember picking up the first tiny baby out of the bucket at the finder's home. They admitted that they relocated Mom to several towns away the week before, before they knew of any babies' existence. He still had his cloudy blue eyes, was about 3-4 weeks old and I also knew he must have siblings, at least 3, maybe even 5. The finders promised to watch for others. Eventually 3 more baby chucks appeared from under their patio. When their eyes finally opened, they probably came up looking for Mom and began nibbling grass. I thought of poor Mom frantically looking for her kids. I said a prayer for her survival.

Memories I'll treasure always... skipping lunch at work to feed these strong sucking babies, my fingers cramping as I physically held back on the syringe to prevent inhalation. Watching their tiny clawed "black gloved fingers" grabbing for syringes or holding onto my finger like a human infant. Then, weeks later, seeing these long clawed "fingers" climb, run and feverishly dig. Feeling warm little wet baby tongues licking and nibbling my arms. Watching the impatient grabbing of formula filled syringes out of the cup of warm water as if to infer "You're too slow Mom!"



Hearing the murmured chorus of greetings upon my arrival and their sneezy snorty response to lapping formula. Laughing at their content round faces with milky white chins and fat chubby bellies. Enjoying the warm greeting and mobbing around my feet as I put down their salad dinner. Being surprised at the circle of well-mannered munching adolescent chucks sitting around their fruit/veggie bowl picking out their broccoli, sweet potato and banana favorites first, their lips smacking in pleasure. Waiting to break up the inevitable loud squabble for the very last broccoli floret. Being on a first name basis with the produce guys at Hannaford who saw me and automatically pointed to the dandelion greens, apologies ready if they were out. Fighting their mob mentality at the hutch doorway "If we all rush her together, she won't be able to catch us all at the same time!" Surprised at their slow baby waddling and then unexpected quick darts of speed chasing each other and tumbling over in play wrestling matches. Later practicing my dexterity juggling their speedily climbing bodies up and over the outside pen before I could get the cover on. Hearing their loud whistles of warning, hence the name "whistle pig." Feeling them climbing up my pants leg as I removed one and another leapt aboard. Outside seeing flat bristled tails vibrating with emotion and slapping the ground in alarm. Forever remembering those warm round brown eyes boring into mine as they stared at me, radiating an intelligence we don't give them credit for. Observing their sleeping pose, flat on their back, legs spread; mouth wide open and their breaths coming so softly I had to move closer to check for actual breathing. Sometimes they slept sitting up, their heads rolled forward between hind legs in a round ball of snoozing fur. I would try to gently wake them, feeling that rising panic as I shook each one several times, and got no response. Finally, protesting, they would awake. Then feeling relief that everything was again content in our world.

Yes, they will be missed. The Chucker Chalet will sit empty, quiet and way too clean. Then the memories will again invade. I'll swear I hear an alarm whistle or a murmured chorus of greetings. I'll feel a tug on my pants leg and expect to look down and see those warm brown eyes saying "Come down here with us." It will all come flooding back, the joy, the pain, the laughter and the feeling of peace at a job well done. Spring will finally come around again and I'll wonder...can I go through this again?

*continues next page*

## **WOODCHUCK MEMORIES, continued**

I look up from my current written musings and the photo album I've just completed, at Bruiser, Lady and Madame, who most certainly would have died if I had not intervened. I smile at the 4 pound chubby adolescents they've become darting around in their pen, oblivious to the future world and dangers they'll face. Would their Mom be proud? Let them enjoy their peace for now. I, too, still have a few more weeks to treasure. Yes, I would do it all again, in a chucker heartbeat.

Post Script: Lady, Bruiser and Madame were released on 15 acres on a gorgeous morning in July. Our goodbyes already said, I didn't stay long. I left them in their ever-familiar circle eating their broccoli florets. I went back the following morning to find most of their food still there and some evidence of abandoned digging. They must have dispersed relatively quickly, obviously well fed, and more than ready to venture into their future. God Speed. Be Happy. Be Healthy. Beware!

(Special Thanks to Dave Larrow and Joy Lucas for their contributions to this event.)

## **WOODCHUCK FAQs**

By Debora Sein

- \* Woodchucks are sun-loving creatures active in the early morning and late afternoon.
- \* Woodchucks are not a threat to humans if they are left alone and will not fight with your pets unless cornered and desperate to get away.
- \* Woodchucks are agile climbers and swimmers.
- \* Adult woodchucks usually do not survive relocation as they are unable to find food, water and shelter and unable to avoid predators in a new area. When a woodchuck is removed from its natural habitat, you might as well put up a VACANCY sign for the next member of that species to move right in.
- \* Relocating lactating females means a painful dehydrating death to her litter of kits.
- \* Daylilies, lobelia, gaillardia and columbine do not appeal to the woodchuck's palate.
- \* Stressed, harassed or injured woodchucks can be quite mean and bite hard!

### Discouraging Woodchucks

Discourage woodchucks from gardens by planting wildflowers, grasses and beans a distance from your house. They will prefer to feed at the farther distance as they are fearful and cautious of humans. Depredations on garden plants will decrease. In combination with the above, making more frequent visits to your garden and adding a wind blowing object will discourage visits there. Spray areas being eaten with 2/3 water to 1/3 plain ammonia. This diluted spray is non-toxic and tastes terrible. Do not spray on

people food but around the border of food gardens. This combination spray acts as a fertilizer for many plants. Dogs living on the property also discourage woodchucks from moving in.

Install a 2 inch by 4 inch wire mesh fence around your garden three or four feet high and extend one foot below the ground for best results. Fold 6 inches of the underground portion outward to discourage persistent diggers.

Leave the top portion of the fence unattached to the fence posts and one foot extension of it bent outward at a 90 degree angle. A woodchuck does not like to climb an unstable fence.

Discouraging woodchucks from under buildings must wait until late summer after any young have been weaned. Some harassment techniques are to partially dig out the entrances to the burrow clearing away surrounding vegetation, place quantities of used kitty litter inside all burrow entrances, place a one-way door at the main entrance to the burrow which allows the animal to leave but not return and/or playing a radio near the burrow entrance.

After the woodchuck has left the burrow, pack the entrance lightly with hay. If it remains undisturbed for three to five days, you can assume the burrow is unoccupied. To permanently close the burrow, excavate the area around the entrance and bury a three-foot-square section of heavy-gauge welded wire (three-inch square) one foot deep across the entrance of the burrow.

### For Rehabbers

Woodchucks have a much stronger sucking reflex as opposed to other rodents and will aspirate more easily.

Woodchucks are very bright and will take advantage of any mistake you make. Show them anything once and they become experts!

Rabbit alfalfa pellets have been proven to be better than rodent block for their staple diet.

### Consideration

If your area is a natural habitat for this species, it will cause you much less stress to learn to live compatibly with this gentle creature. Once you start observing them as interesting personalities they are, with their comedic outdoor antics, especially when the babies emerge in early May, you may find they provide much enjoyment. Woodchucks are a link with the wild for people who spend more and more time in artificial surroundings. Just catching a fleeting glimpse from your car of one of these chubby mammals standing by its roadside burrow can be a much needed reminder of how satisfying it is to have wild animals around.

(Thank you to NWR, Inc., WR&R, CDEP, UMMZ and ILAR Journal 1997 for the above information.)

## GROUNDHOGS, A MYSTERY?

By Susan Shibley, DVM

### Introduction

Groundhogs are referred to by many names such as marmots, ground squirrels, whistle pigs, and varmints. While “ground squirrels”, “whistle pigs”, and “varmints” are nicknames used either affectionately or not so affectionately, there is a difference between groundhogs and marmots and two rehabilitators had better know whether they are talking about the same animal when discussing them. Marmots live west of the Rockies while groundhogs live east of the Rockies.

Marmots are colony animals whose offspring stay with the female until the following spring. In contrast, groundhogs are merely social animals. If a group of them appear to be living in close proximity, it is because the habitat is good. Their offspring do not usually stay with the females and disperse on their own or are driven off by the mother. This is due to the fact that the female must prepare herself for the coming winter and hibernation.

### Facts and Stats

Groundhogs are true hibernators who go into a dormant physiological state because of changes in temperature and length of day. The openings of their dens frequently face southward to catch any warmth and light available. The males emerge from hibernation before the females in early February and the breeding season starts. Births occur during March through May after a gestation of 30-33 days. The average birth weight is 27 grams in a litter size ranging from 2-4.

Groundhogs are mostly vegetarians but they also eat bugs, grasshoppers, and snails. Their favorite foods seem to be alfalfa and clover but they have a fondness for very large dandelion and plantain leaves. Many people don't realize that groundhogs can climb but foraging for the leaves of peach, Norway maple, and mulberry trees is a frequent activity. Included in their diet is a variety of nuts such as acorns and in-shell almonds.

When rehabilitating infant groundhogs, Esbilac or Zoologic 33/40 is used. Weight gains of 20-30 grams per day are usual. The lower teeth emerge at 2-3 weeks of age while the eyes open and upper teeth emerge at 4 weeks of age. Whether the kit is male or female doesn't seem to matter in rehabilitation as penile sucking is not a problem as seen with tree squirrels. Weaning is frequently a trial as some kits just don't want to let go of the bottle, so sometimes it takes 7-10 weeks for the kit to become fully weaned. The goal for release is 14-16 weeks.

### Behavior Quirks

A syringe with Catac® nipple is used for feeding formula but hold on to it tightly. Groundhogs have a very strong suck reflex which can cause them to aspirate the formula and blow it out their noses right into your face! The secret is to watch for the toes to clench just prior to THE BIG SUCK. Watch your fingers as the kits grip hard and don't let go until they are finished eating. It can be particularly painful.

Bloating doesn't happen very often but there is no cause for alarm. Massage the belly or stimulate the anus to encourage defecation. Although defecations usually occur twice daily, kits frequently look like bloated road kill while sleeping.

Add a variety of greens to the cage at about five weeks of age or soon after the eyes open and the kits are moving around easily. They will not eat them initially but will soon start to nibble on them. The more they eat, the less frequently formula is fed.

One notable quirk of groundhogs is the personality difference. Kits are either very friendly and think you are wonderful because you are the source of their food, or they despise you and tolerate you only as long as you have the syringe of formula. Both types are fully releasable and have no problem in being wild once released. It is rare to have a groundhog be too habituated for release. As a last word on personality, kits are very vocal when play-fighting, so don't let them deceive you into thinking you need to referee.

### Housing and Release

The watchwords for groundhogs are “strong” and “secure”. Kits will climb whenever possible or try brute force to break out of their cages. When they are small, Sterilite® tubs with metal window screens secured on top with bungee cords make effective cages. Once they are older, pet taxis or stainless steel cages are preferred. When it is time for them to go into outside caging for acclimation, the cages must be of strong wire mesh. Groundhogs get along easily with squirrels and make great pen mates as long as the lids to the squirrel nest boxes are fastened so the groundhog can't get into them. Greens can be placed directly on the ground as kits tend to use food bowls in which to sleep whether they are empty or not.

Groundhogs need to be over six pounds of body weight for release. The reason for this is that they aren't very fast and the increased size adds to their safety. Although they are usually out of their dens at dawn and dusk, release them in the morning. The release site is very important. Other groundhogs don't have to be in the immediate area, but there should be meadow available near a forest with plenty of dead-fall. Release them at least thirty feet from any road and don't expect them to wave goodbye.

## BAT WORLD BOOT CAMP 2007

By Mary Frances Farrell  
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The strengths of wildlife rehabilitation are grounded in proper nutrition and feeding methods, appropriate caging/housing, and, creative enrichment. I have been told this in every workshop, by each person who has been a rehabilitator, and in every piece of information I have read. Never was it more apparent than at Bat World Sanctuary in Mineral Wells, Texas, where I was fortunate enough to spend one week learning and working with one of the foremost leaders in rescue, rehab and captive care of Insectivorous Bats. Amanda Lollar, Founder and President of Bat World Sanctuary, provides one week every year for persons in many fields of education, research and rehabilitation to attend a workshop on Insectivorous Bat Rehabilitation. The workshop naturally coincides with baby season. Why should the busiest time of the year be any different in bat rehab than in the lives of those who rescue, rehab, release all other wildlife? Every summer large numbers of bat babies are orphaned in Mineral Wells, Texas, just as birds and mammals are orphaned throughout the country.

There was more to remember that week than it seemed possible to absorb in such a short time. Class work and lessons included public protocol, species identification, anatomy, handling procedures for foliage roosting and crevice-dwelling bats, subcutaneous injections, stabilizing open and closed wing fractures, parasite control, euthanasia, feeding orphaned and injured bats, food preparation, trouble shooting and captive care requirements. All of this will take me a lifetime to practice.

I would like to focus on 3 special times which really touched me. The first story is about a nine week old female straw colored flying fox, born at Bat World shortly after her mother, Bianca, was seized from the illegal pet trade, and provided permanent sanctuary in a huge flight cage specially arranged for exotic bats, like the African flying fox, Jamaican fruit bat, and Egyptian fruit bat. As these bats are most commonly used in zoos, museums, and education programs, and can live up to 25 years, Bat World rescues as many as possible, to prevent them from euthanasia, which is very often the only choice for those facilities no longer choosing to keep a colony. Due to Bianca's skittishness, she abandoned Bootsana at birth in the fruit bat enclosure. Attempts were made to re-unite them but after a few hours, Bootsana was found lying cold, and with injured toes, probably from being dragged along the caging material as she desperately tried clinging to her mother. Amanda devised a means to protect the toes and over several weeks the toes began to heal. The new toenails are finally growing back and soon she will be able to hang upside down on her own,

climb around like a normal fruit bat, and will then be introduced to the fruit bat captive colony where she will eat, play and fly around with her companions. Bootsana's name came from the African name Busana, which means "Girl of the Night Moon". Upon my arrival at Bat World, Bootsana had already been weaned from a puppy sized nursing bottle to a three time a day feeding of a small dish of formula with colorful pieces of fruit floating about.. She would sit in her cheerfully decorated basket and eat heartily, she looked like a small puppy with those big black eyes shining, peacefully munching away. Afterward she would play with her toys and groom a bit, then wait expectantly for her pacifier to be popped back into her mouth. Before being carried off to a quiet place for a much needed nap, she is given a few moments of flapping exercises, being held upside down, flapping those beautiful hand-wings and, perhaps, in her imagination, dreaming she is flying in the night air.

The second most interesting physical experience for me was entering the wild bat sanctuary. Amanda bought a building one block away from Bat World over ten years ago. The building already had a large colony of mostly Mexican free-tail bats. The building was to be sold and the bats excluded. The hope was to protect this natural roosting site, and over time the second floor has been improved, walls removed, safety measures designed and installed, and netting added for advantage of the maternity colony. During the summer months, when it is doubles as a maternity colony, there may be as many as 50,000 bats in residence. They migrate further south late in the year, and are gone for about six weeks, during which time Amanda and volunteers work to repair or improve the structure. Anyone who has ever gone into a cave remembers the twilight darkness, and the smells, which may be heavy and surprisingly strong, but not offensive. I walked through the screen door into an area that must have been 5 rooms with very high ceilings. The walls had been removed so it was a huge open space, the windows open 10 inches for ventilation, but mostly boarded up to create a semi-darkness. Just being in their "cave", with perhaps a thousand flying above my head was an immense thrill. Roosting took place high up in the rafters, walls, beams, and netting. We did have to "suit up" before entering. This was the bats' space and if we did not want guano droppings on us, well, we did not have to be there, did we? We wore plastic head coverings, booties over our shoes, shoulder coverings, if desired, and of course, vinyl gloves. Our purpose there was search and rescue of sick, injured or orphaned bats that may have fallen to the floor, or had isolated themselves from the colony. Three times a day the sanctuary is checked, and sometimes several bats are rescued, occasionally

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## BAT WORLD BOOT CAMP 2007, continued

none are found. The opposite side of the second floor was screened as a pre-release cage. Bats almost ready to be released in the wild sanctuary are given several days in the pre-flight enclosure. There they are captured, observed, and checked carefully twice a day. They are checked for things like their ability to forage for their own food, (insects easily entering through the mesh covered windows), and, to sustain flight for at least five minutes both crucial to the readiness of a juvenile.

The final piece which touched me was the focus Amanda has on enrichment. It's like a 3 legged stool. All 3 legs must work right, or the stool will hold nothing. If a rehabber fulfills nutritional and caging requirements with intent, purpose, and planning, but does not provide adequate enrichment, a bat (or any captive or non-releasable species) will feel stressed, bored or depressed. Much has been written lately about the emotional needs of captive species and it is certainly a challenge to rehabbers to provide necessary and adequate stimulation. Given the demands on rehabilitators, especially during baby season, the goal of optimum enrichment is sometimes quite difficult to meet.

Amanda Lollar and Barbara Schmidt-French have outlined "Enrichment" in great detail in the companion manual to their textbook. They have studied "behavioral changes and deterioration in physical condition which can occur if psychological needs are neglected". Fear and boredom "top the list of primary problems of captive animals".

In the classroom session the final day of boot camp, we were guided in an exercise of visual imagery. We were asked to close our eyes and "imagine you have been taken as a prisoner of war. You are placed in a small room about the size of a tiny bathroom, one which has no windows, a room that is totally empty - there is no toilet, or even a sink where you can get a drink of water. You can sit, or stand, or lie down, but you do not know if your captors will ever bring food or water, or even if the space will ever be cleaned. The only thing left in your power is to eliminate your own waste products. You are denied sights or sounds of the out of doors, books to read, enrichment material, any kind of stimulation to pass the time of day. Soon behaviors change as stress mounts." Amanda explained this may be what a bat feels in captivity. Our job is not to treat them as a prisoner, as a captive, even though because of injury or illness, this may be the way their life would be spent. It is important to provide food and water at regular times, so they do not feel the stress, the uncertainty, of wondering if there ever will be food. We are required to keep their space clean. Since the bat cannot move away from an

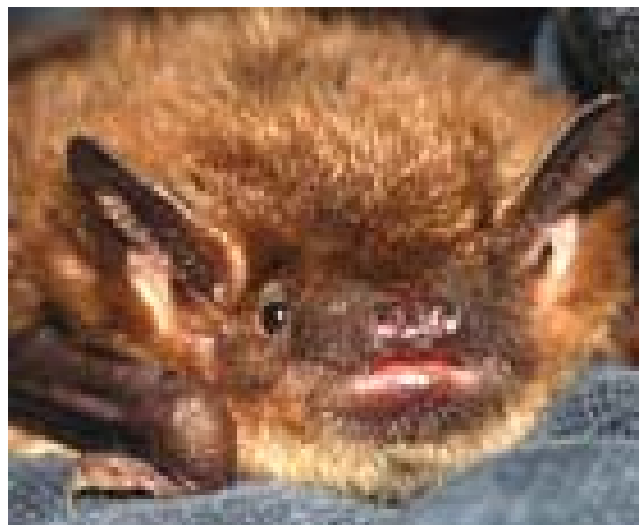
unclean environment, it too will become an unnecessary stressor. In order to reduce the stress level, enrichment becomes equally as important as nutrition and housing.

It is essential to provide food and toys in a variety of hiding places to stimulate the curiosity of the bats' nature to invent ways of seeking them out, much as they would do if they were in the wild. The week at "boot camp" ended much too soon. For the 11 "boot campers" it was an enjoyable and intensive experience of bat rehab, meeting others who share the desire to rescue and rehab bats, and to commit always to education and advocacy on behalf of our beautiful, furry, flying mammals.

### References:

1. Captive Care and Medical Reference for the Rehabilitation of the Insectivorous Bat, Amanda Lollar and Barbara Schmidt-French, Second Edition 2002
2. Diagnostic and Treatment Update for the Rehabilitation of Insectivorous Bats, Amanda Lollar and Barbara Schmidt-French, 2006
3. www.batworld.org

Editor's Note: We were privileged to have Leslie Sturgis, from Bat World, as a speaker at the recent NYSWRC seminar. Her in-depth session was extremely helpful to anyone considering rehabilitating bats. Thanks to Leslie for joining us!



*Sticky-crop, from Bat World's adoption program.*

**A VIDEO WORTH SHARING:** Spay and neuter your animals. Go to: <http://www.brightlion.com/InHope/InHope.aspx>, click on English and click on the movie.



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