

NEW YORK STATE



**WILDLIFE
REHABILITATION
COUNCIL**

RELEASES

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STATE WILDLIFE REHABILITATION COUNCIL, INC.

Important Dates:

NYSWRC Board Meetings-open to all, email:
kmartink@midtel.net for information.

April 5, June 29, Oct 25, Nov. 23, Dec. 14

NYSWRC Annual Seminar, October 23-26, 2008
Grand Island, (Niagara Falls area) N.Y.

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President's Report, by Kelly Martin

This article may read like one of our made-up ethical dilemmas, but, is in fact a real dilemma. A recent event involving an injured screech owl reminded me that at times we forget the basics. I am referring to a different set of basics than, say, forgetting to latch a cage door, or to remind yourself to look for more than the obvious when examining an animal. Experienced rehabilitators can forget the learning curve that all must go through as they care for wildlife. We are quick to criticize and question. After all, isn't it obvious what should be done in a given circumstance?

When I assist in teaching the Animal Basic Care course for NYSWRC I sometimes feel we 'beat a dead horse' with certain information. Some of it is common sense and so basic it seems like everyone should know the answers. But, there are some things that we all must go through, and even experienced rehabilitators must relearn. Euthanasia is one of those issues. When teaching the ABC course we cover euthanasia in depth and offer the benefit of our experience. The instructors know that new rehabilitators will try to save more than they can. They need to learn what is 'fixable' and what is not; what is worth the ol' college try, and what is not. We stress the need for a cooperating veterinarian knowing that most of us do not have the means to perform euthanasia. To some degree, we can feel less

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Our NYSWRC Mission:

NYSWRC, Inc. is a not for profit membership organization dedicated to the education of wildlife rehabilitators, improvement of the field of wildlife rehabilitation, and the protection and preservation of the environment.

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.

President's Report, continued

guilty by letting someone else be the minister of death. One thing we can not stress enough is that euthanasia is a sad and defeating part of what we do, but a very necessary one at the same time.

Knowing when to offer a humane death is one of the kindest services we can offer. Sometimes we immediately know that an animal is in pain, an injury beyond repair, and that euthanasia is necessary. Other times we may feel that repair is worth an attempt but find out later that the animal cannot be released. I find these circumstances harder to handle as more is invested - time, energy, money, the vet's assistance, and yes, our emotions. Finding homes for all the disabled birds is a difficult problem. The reality is that most of our birds are common and there are only so many homes for them. Add to that the federal restriction on amputations (nothing above the elbow is allowed) to allow for quality of life in captivity and we often have no choice but euthanasia. Euthanasia will never be easy, nor should it be. However, we should not shrink away from our responsibility to do the best thing for the animals at all times, even if that is to end its life.

The screech owl I referred to above broached many of these issues. My cooperating veterinarian was brought an injured screech owl by a relatively new rehabilitator (not federally licensed). A wing had an open old fracture, high in the shoulder, with a lot of soft tissue damage as well. The bird reacted as if in pain and the veterinarian said it clearly needed to be euthanized. The rehabilitator refused saying she wanted a second opinion. The veterinarian tried explaining all the relevant issues - a bad and painful injury with no hope of repair, full wing amputation the only choice to save the bird, full wing amputation not a viable legal option, the suffering and stress of the bird, and a common species. The veterinarian also explained that if the wing were not amputated there would no doubt be a lot of discomfort for the bird with arthritis a likely condition. Still the rehabilitator refused to euthanize the bird. I completely agree that a rehabilitator's opinion should be considered in such a serious decision. Many times we know better what is a viable option for wildlife. Just because a vet CAN fix something does not always mean that they SHOULD. The examining veterinarian had raptor training while in vet school, has been working with local rehabilitators for a few years, knows the laws, and knows the medical options and limitations, and she knows wildlife rehabilitation. We have made similar difficult decisions over the past few years and I trust her judgment. The rehabilitator did in fact take the bird to another avian veterinarian who agreed that the wing could not be saved. This vet felt though that it might be possible to get federal permission to amputate and maintain this bird in captivity. A third

veterinarian was involved and said that arthritis was not a problem in birds. The bird was maintained by another (different) rehabilitator, federally licensed though not for education, and while caring for the bird admitted to getting attached. After caring for the bird for well over a week, she finally decided that this bird was in pain and not improving. At this point, another experienced rehabilitator was involved to take it back to the original vet for euthanasia. She was already aware of the owl as the veterinarian was concerned and upset that this bird was not immediately euthanized and tried reaching this rehabilitator while the bird was still in her office to try to dissuade the person from leaving with the bird alive. Even at this time another (fourth) experienced raptor rehabilitator was consulted by phone in an attempt to solicit the desired opinion that this bird did not need to be euthanized. Mercifully, this bird was finally euthanized.

Initially I was made aware of this bird after it first went to the vet. I was upset that my veterinarian was questioned in this case. I value her opinion and greatly appreciate that she generously and graciously helps us with wildlife. As a rule, I strongly respect the right for a person to seek other opinions and have often done so myself under other circumstances. I felt angry that another veterinarian felt she had the "pull" to override federal regulations. I was confused that another veterinarian would say that birds do not suffer from arthritis. I do understand the difficulty in euthanizing beautiful creatures that we feel we can give good homes to. I even understand the emotional involvement. But, I could not accept the ordeal this bird went through for over a week, the number of hands examining a painful injury, the stress, and the inability to make the "right" choice. I did not understand the lack of consideration of the bird's immediate or future quality of life.

Back to my original point. I had to remind myself that there is no timetable for learning. I can lecture forever on the need for euthanasia, the need to make the decision as soon as possible, and the importance of putting our emotions aside to make good choices. What I can not force is the path or time it takes others to get to that point. I had to accept that this bird will serve as one of those necessary experiences from which we learn, a basic building block for those involved and that better decisions will be made in the future. I had to believe that the hearts and motivations of those involved were good. It is my hope that a basic premise will come to mind in similar future situations. That, though most of us are not medical doctors their oath applies to wildlife rehabilitators: First, do no harm.

Forum on Ethics and Wildlife Rehabilitation

By Maggie Ciarcia and Francis Belloni

In hopes of encouraging a dialog regarding ethical issues in wildlife rehabilitation, we are happy to respond to any questions or comments on this topic from readers of Release. We received the following question from a reader on the article that appeared in the last issue of Release on a case study, A Swan in distress.

A reader asked, "I have a list of birds that do not require a federal permit and now I realize I should add mute swans to that. (It wasn't covered specifically in the article but from my reading I take it that that's the case). One question on your scenario, just curious, why couldn't Vicky take the swan temporarily and make Catherine an assistant under her license? It doesn't take long, the DEC is quick with adding assistants."

To help clarify this question, we asked Chris Ray, Biologist, Special Licenses Unit of the DEC. for his input. Here is Chris's response.

"Vicky certainly could take the swan temporarily while she nominates Catherine as an assistant. Even if Vicky is not a Class II, she can apply for the upgrade and nominate Catherine at the same time. To be approved for the upgrade, Vicky must: 1) have been licensed as a Class I for two or more years, 2) submit to the Special Licenses Unit an outline and summary that details how she will train any assistants that will work under her. The "study guide" should include information on how to take calls, how to capture and handle different species, caging, and diet (at a minimum). We would review the documents from Vicky and upgrade her license if approved. Vicky would then receive a new, Class II license, and a copy of Catherine's Assistant class license. Catherine would also receive her own copy."

"Now, the reason for the difference between the State and Federal licenses: the Federal permit is only required for the rehabilitation of migratory birds, which the mute swan is not. For a few years, the mute swan was listed as a migratory bird (as a result of a lawsuit against the Fish and Wildlife Service), but it has since been taken off the list. Therefore, no federal license is needed to rehabilitate the mute swan - Just like a pigeon or European starling. However, it is still classified in New York State as an "unprotected wild bird." Even though it is non-native, a license is still needed to capture and rehabilitate mute swans. However, there is a specific set of license conditions aimed at mute swans, and all rehabilitators must follow them to prevent the spread of these birds to previously unoccupied bodies of water."

License Condition Changes for 2008; We have Come a Long Way ...

Hopefully all rehabilitators read the conditions upon receiving the state wildlife rehabilitators license or federal permit. It is a good idea to check to see if there is anything new and to familiarize ourselves with the conditions under which we operate. This year a letter announcing a change accompanied our state license. No longer are we required to notify the Endangered Species Unit (ESU) when presented with a threatened or endangered species. We are now asked to notify Special Licenses and they will determine the need for notifying ESU.

This welcome change allows rehabilitators the opportunity to work with their own cooperating veterinarians and to work with species few of us have been allowed to handle. In the early years in the development of wildlife rehabilitation in NY we fought the philosophical battle with DEC as to the value of wildlife rehabilitation. One of the token benefits that was allowed by those administering our program at the time, was that we could "practice" on common species and apply what we learned to the care of endangered species. It was the old 'value of the individual animal versus the population' argument. With endangered animals, the individuals matter. When presented with a sick, injured or orphaned animal it is a rehabilitation issue not a population issue that needs to be remedied. Since our goal is to return healthy animals to their natural environment, we share with the state biologists the goal of returning viable breeding individuals to a population. Up until this current change, we were directed where to take endangered species for veterinary care and had no voice in the rehabilitation of these animals. These animals, especially birds, were often sent out of state.

NYSWRC believes that we have many trained, experienced and qualified people with suitable caging to care for these species within New York. This is not to say that all wildlife rehabilitators are equal in their skills in all species. We hope that NY rehabilitators will make good choices with endangered species. If you are new or inexperienced, or if your expertise lies not with a particular species, we hope that the animal in need will be placed with someone who can give it the best care and the best caging.

NYSWRC thanks Special Licenses for this change allowing us to care for all the species within NY in need of rehabilitation and for recognizing that we have people capable of doing so. Thanks also for providing us with a list of those species in NY currently listed as threatened and endangered. Rehabilitators please note that those of us licensed federally to care for migratory birds must also read the conditions listed on our permits issued by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

Case Study 2:

How much wood would a woodchuck chuck ...

By Maggie Ciarcia and Francis Belloni

We'd like to give the readers an opportunity to think about their response to this situation, and you can submit your ideas to us at: maggie119mae@yahoo.com. Frank and I will write up an Ethical review for this topic in the next issue of Release.

Ruth is asked by Linda, another rehabber, to accept transfer of a pair of woodchucks. Linda had received the woodchucks as orphaned babies several months before and they were now large enough to be moved to outdoor caging. Ruth has outdoor caging that would be ideal for allowing the woodchucks to acclimatize to outdoor conditions before their release, and she agrees to take the animals.

When Ruth arrives at Linda's house to pick up the woodchucks, she is shocked to find them in rather poor condition. Their fur is ragged, they seem to have rashes around their mouth and nose, and it appears that there are open sores on their feet and underbellies. The woodchucks are housed in a very small cage only slightly larger than a standard cat carrier, and the cage reeks of urine and feces.

Linda expresses her thanks to Ruth for taking the animals, saying that she has been feeling a bit overwhelmed lately. She has a large inventory of animals under her care, including several squirrels and rabbits, a clutch of baby bluebirds, and a family of three feral cats. On top of all that, one of her four children has had the chicken pox, and she has also been helping her parents move into a new apartment in a senior residence.

Ruth doesn't comment on the animals' condition, and instead of putting them into her outside cage, she keeps them indoors in a larger cage than they were in at Linda's. Both woodchucks are examined by Ruth's wildlife veterinarian and treated for severe urine burns. After a couple of weeks of care, including daily cage cleaning and an appropriate diet, the woodchucks' condition is much improved. Ruth moves them outside and, after a period of time, releases them successfully.

1. Should Ruth have said anything to Linda when she saw the poor conditions the woodchucks were kept in? Should she say anything now?
2. Should Ruth take any other actions regarding Linda? If so, what actions?
3. Should Linda have accepted the woodchucks in the first place?

Let us know your thoughts on this situation.

Congratulations to NYSWRC member Eve Fertig!

Eve recently celebrated her 83rd birthday. Eve continues to work with the rehabilitation community and still manages her Enchanted Forest Wildlife Sanctuary.

What a Lady!

FYI: There is a new edition out now of **Raptors in Captivity: Guidelines for Care and Management.** by Lori Arent. This new 2007 edition of Care and Management of Captive Raptors has been greatly expanded and brought up-to-date. This book is probably the best of its kind. You can obtain the book through Buteo Books or Hancock House publishers, or by calling the Raptor Center at 612-624-4745. Cost is \$49.95.

The book is designed as a reader-friendly reference tool for individuals, zoos, and other organizations managing birds of prey for educational programs and display. Topics include:

- Permit requirements
- Bird selection
- Diet
- Housing
- Equipment
- Maintenance care
- Medical care
- Training
- Transport
- Recovering a lost bird

Lori R. Arent is the clinic manager at The Raptor Center, where she oversees the care and rehabilitation of more than 700 birds of prey each year. A master falconer, she has published numerous articles on raptor care and management and avian physiology.



Did You Know? We do!

A Blackbird jet flying nearly 2,000 miles per hour covers 32 body lengths per second. But a common pigeon flying at 50 miles per hour covers 75. The roll rate of the aerobatic A-4 Skyhawk plane is about 720 degrees per second. The roll rate of a barn swallow exceeds 5,000 degrees per second.

Select military aircraft can withstand gravitational forces of 8-10 G. Many birds routinely experience positive G-forces greater than 10 G and up to 14 G.

Source: Science Daily

Cats vs Wildlife

The “Poacher Approach”: An Ethical-Hunting Argument for Keeping Cats Indoors

By Diane Winn & Marc Payne, Avian Haven, Freedom, ME

The difficulty of persuading some cat-owners to keep their pets indoors is familiar to all rehabilitators who regularly admit victims of cat predation. Organizations such as the American Bird Conservancy (www.abcbirds.org) and the Humane Society of the United States (www.hsus.org) publish pamphlets and other materials advising people of the dangers — both to wildlife and their pets — of allowing cats outside. We regularly hand such publications to folks bringing us cat-caught birds; however, judging from the number of “repeat offenders” we see in our practice, it is evident that not everyone is persuaded by arguments like those presented in ABC’s *Cats Indoors!* campaign.

Some months ago, Marc had a discussion about this issue with a group of people who were both avid hunters and in favor of letting cats outdoors. The impact of cat predation on songbird and other wildlife populations seemed unimportant to these individuals; they defended a cat’s right to hunt with the same fervent zeal they probably would use to advocate their own rights as hunters. But when Marc characterized cats’ hunting practices as “poaching,” the tenor of the discussion changed abruptly. And as the poaching theme developed in further conversation, these proud-to-be-ethical hunters finally acknowledged that cats should not be allowed outside, after all.

This incident inspired us to write the text for a different kind of keep-cats-indoors campaign. Our message portrays a hunting cat as an “unwitting game thief” and is explicit about its potential victims (e.g., mothers with dependent young, wounded animals that are left to starve). However, it places responsibility on the owner (“Your cat may not understand ethical hunting, but you do.”), rather than blaming the pet.

Two different visual themes were developed to accompany the text. One uses human hunter images to highlight the poaching keynote; it was created by graphic designer (and Avian Haven volunteer) Kim Mullen and is shown here. The other motif is shown to its left. Created by Susan Giglia on behalf of ReMaine Wild, it uses the same text, but the lead image is a cat with a bird in its paws, and it has a “softer look” than that of the hunter version.

Anyone who would like to use the “poacher approach” is welcome to do so. One or both of these designs could be printed as a mini-poster and distributed to people bringing in cat victims, posted in admission areas, etc. Different appeals will be more effective for different types of cat-owners, so one further idea is to have several kinds of materials available (including the ABC *Cats Indoors!* and HSUS *Safe Cats* pamphlets), deciding which one to present as a conversation develops with the particular individual whose cat injured the animal at hand.

DOWNLOAD THE POSTERS from
<http://www.remainewild.org/cats.htm>

WANTED
KEPT IN PROTECTIVE CUSTODY

ANY GAME THIEF WHO

- kills endangered species
- hunts out of season
- kills mothers caring for young
- ignores bag limits
- kills infant animals
- leaves wounded animals to starve

You wouldn't want this kind of hunting near your home.
But each time you let your cat outside,
you release an unwitting game thief into your neighborhood.

Your cat may not understand ethical hunting, but you do.

POSTED NO HUNTING

PLEASE HELP STOP POACHING
KEEP YOUR CAT INDOORS!
REWARD YOU'LL SAVE MORE LIVES THAN YOU MAY THINK

Outdoors, your cat may be hit by a car, attacked by another animal, exposed to diseases, ingest toxins, and contract parasites. Keeping your cat indoors is the best way to keep your pet safe and healthy, as well as protect the wildlife around your home.

ReMaine Wild P.O. Box 115 Newarrish, ME 04555 www.remainewild.org

POSTED NO HUNTING

WANTED
KEPT IN PROTECTIVE CUSTODY

ANY GAME THIEF WHO

- kills endangered species
- hunts on posted land
- hunts out of season
- ignores bag limits
- kills infant animals
- kills mothers caring for young
- leaves wounded animals to starve

You wouldn't want this kind of hunting near your home. But each time you let your cat outside, you release an unwitting game thief into your neighborhood.

Your cat may not understand ethical hunting, but you do.

PLEASE HELP STOP POACHING
KEEP YOUR CAT INDOORS!
REWARD YOU'LL SAVE MORE LIVES THAN YOU THINK

Outdoors, your cat may be hit by a car, attacked by another animal, exposed to diseases, ingest toxins, and contract parasites. Keeping your cat indoors is the best way to keep your pet safe and healthy, as well as protect the wildlife around your home.

What We Don't Know CAN Hurt Us: The Value of Necropsy in Wildlife Rehabilitation

by Diane Winn and Marc Payne, Avian Haven, Freedom, ME

A familiar scenario in wildlife rehabilitation goes something like this: We admit an animal that has what appears to be only a minor injury – or perhaps has no apparent injury at all. Things seem fine for a day or two or three . . . and then suddenly we discover a corpse. The first impulse of many rehabilitators is to assume that a caregiver must have done something wrong – overlooked an injury or symptoms, fed improperly, over- or under-heated, etc. Why else would the animal have died? The only question may be whether we assign the blame to ourselves or a co-worker.

In our practice, Diane tends to blame herself, but Marc takes a more reasoned approach: rather than automatically assume human error, do a necropsy. Post-mortem exams do not always reveal causes of death, but even without taking tissue samples for laboratory analysis, a simple look inside can often be informative. We have been surprised at how often our necropsies reveal that the animal was hurt by something we could have neither detected nor treated.

One very common example in our practice involves cat predation of songbirds. Because cats' teeth are so small and sharp, finding punctures in skin covered by feathers is nearly impossible, even in cases where cat involvement is known or admitted. Interestingly, our necropsies of cat victims reveal perforated kidneys more often than a pocket of infection. In the former case, after feathers have been plucked, two tiny, tell-tale wounds will be found in the skin over the bird's lower back; beneath that skin are the damaged kidneys. Drugs would not have helped in these cases, so there is no point to counterfactual thoughts like "If only we had known the bird was cat-caught and given her antibiotics, she'd still be alive."

Various kinds of intestinal parasites are often encountered in any rehab practice; fecal samples can be checked for evidence of their presence, though of course a negative sample does not guarantee the absence of parasites. In a condition called visceral larval migrans, nematode (roundworm) larvae penetrate the intestinal tract and migrate to other parts of the body, leaving tissue damage in their wake. A well-known zoonotic example can occur after humans ingest eggs of the raccoon roundworm, *Baylisascaris procyonis*; however, tissue migration can occur in wildlife hosts as well. No evidence of roundworm had been found in a fecal sample from this Common Grackle, but as our necropsy revealed, this bird would not have lived "if only we had treated him for parasites."



Roundworms in Body Cavity of Common Grackle. Photo by Marc Payne.

A third example from our practice concerns a Great-horned Owl admitted in winter after killing a porcupine. The bird's mouth and feet were full of quills, and we removed numerous others from the skin on its abdomen as well. Although we continued to search through feathers for remaining quills, our focus was on the bird's extremely wasted body condition. It had been a hard winter, and she had probably gone for the porcupine out of desperation. We implemented an emaciation protocol, but the bird did not seem able to digest even simple liquid foods, and died a few days after admission. Diane's first thought was, "We ramped her up too fast; we should have stayed with fluids longer." But when Marc opened up the bird, he found quills that had penetrated the body cavity, impaling the heart, liver, and other organs. A more conservative emaciation treatment would have made no difference.



Porcupine Quills in Liver (left) and Heart (right) of Great-horned Owl. Photos by Marc Payne.

These examples illustrate that discovering what we didn't know can often help someone who would otherwise be hurt by unnecessary guilt. As Marc advises Diane and our staff members, "Blame yourself only if you really are to blame!" Once in a while, a necropsy may reveal a problem related to a caregiver's action or inaction; in these cases, we can pledge to learn from any mistake and not make it again. But we should never forget a truism for all health care professionals: in some situations, there is nothing we could have done to save the patient.

In conducting necropsies, always be mindful of human safety: wear gloves, goggles and masks; work in a well-ventilated environment, etc.). If unsure how to identify body organs or distinguish normal from abnormal appearances, ask your veterinarian for assistance and/or request a necropsy workshop at your next state conference.

Oldest Horseshoe Crab Fossil Found, 445 Million Years Old

Science Daily (Feb. 8, 2008)

Few modern animals are as deserving of the title “living fossil” as the lowly horseshoe crab. Seemingly unchanged since before the Age of Dinosaurs, these venerable sea creatures can now claim a history that reaches back almost half-a billion years.

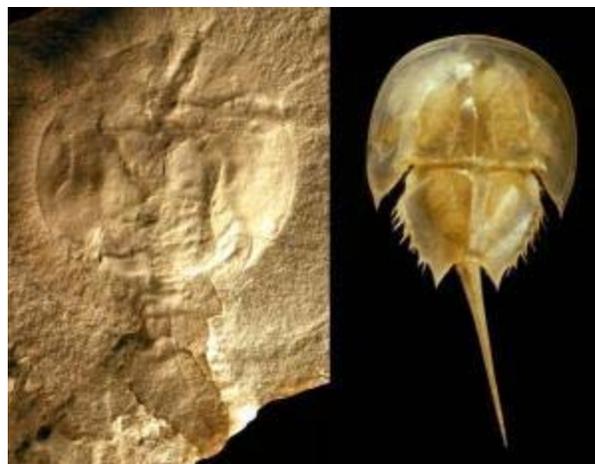
In a collaborative research article published recently in the British journal *Palaeontology*, a team of Canadian scientists revealed rare new horseshoe crab fossils from 445 million year-old Ordovician age rocks in central and northern Manitoba, which are about 100 million years older than any previously known forms.

Palaeontologist Dave Rudkin from the Royal Ontario Museum, with colleagues Dr. Graham Young of The Manitoba Museum (Winnipeg) and Dr. Godfrey Nowlan at the Geological Survey of Canada (Calgary), gave their remarkable new fossils the scientific name *Lunataspis aurora*, meaning literally “crescent moon shield of the dawn” in reference to their shape, geological age and northerly discovery sites. Although they are more “primitive” in several aspects than other known horseshoe crabs, their resemblance to living forms is unmistakable.

The fossil horseshoe crabs were recovered in the course of fieldwork studies on ancient tropical seashore deposits, providing yet another important link to their modern descendants that are today found along warmer seashores of the eastern United States and the Indian Ocean.

This is particularly significant, explains Rudkin. “Understanding how horseshoe crabs adapted to this ecological niche very early on, and then remained there through thick and thin, can give us insights into how ocean and shoreline ecosystems have developed through deep time.”

Today, marine shorelines worldwide are being threatened by human activity, and although some horseshoe crab populations are endangered, their enviably long record on Earth indicates that they



Lunataspis aurora - fossil paratype specimen (about 25 mm wide) beside the dried carapace of a young modern horseshoe crab. (Credit: Left image courtesy of G. Young, The Manitoba Museum; right, D. Rudkin, Royal Ontario Museum)

have successfully weathered many previous crises, including the mass extinction that saw the demise of the dinosaurs and many other life forms 65 million years ago.

“We do need to be concerned about horseshoe crabs and many of the other unusual life forms found on marine shores,” said Dr. Young. “Nevertheless, we can also be mildly optimistic that some of these things have demonstrated a toughness that may allow them to survive our abuse of these environments.” Living horseshoe crabs are extensively studied, especially in the fields of ecology and medical research. The exciting discovery of these unusual early fossil relatives adds a new introductory chapter to their remarkable story.

Editor’s Note: Horseshoe crabs will be gathering along the shores just as spring migration occurs. They lay eggs which become a vital food source for the migrating shore birds. The survival of the Red Knot is closely linked to the abundance of Horseshoe crab eggs available. Preservation of the Horseshoe crab is needed to ensure preservation of the Red Knot and many other birds.

Rehabilitators can learn from other rehabilitators, like Glenn Gauvry of ERDG. We can all do our part by educating the public about the importance of preserving Horseshoe crabs.

The Ecological Research & Development Group in DE has many excellent ideas for ways to help, including the “Just Flip Em” campaign. *To learn more, visit:* <http://www.horseshoecrab.org/misc/erdg.html>

Raising and Soft Release of Whitetail Deer by Pat Ferguson



We all become rehabilitators for different reasons; some of us are animal lovers, some are healers, and others have their personal reasons. My love of the whitetail deer began when a hungry, orphaned fawn approached me and I was unable to find a rehabilitator to assist her. Once I looked into those beautiful brown eyes, I was hooked, but where was I to turn for help when so few would rehab deer? So I purchased domestic deer, to learn how deer take care of their own. Reba and her two fawns were my first, followed shortly by Casper, my white buck. They were the best teachers, and I learned my lessons well. I watched Reba as she disciplined her daughters, while Casper would assure them with licks and undaunted attention. As I watched the girls grow, I began to use the lessons with my wild orphans that “Momma Deer” taught me.

At seminars, I listened to other wildlife rehabilitators explain their methods for soft release, and it all seemed logical. It wasn't until a couple of years later I discovered that my approach wasn't the “standard” way to raise fawns. However, as I look into the fields around my compound, I recognize my babies years later, now adults surviving very well on their own. Each spring, tears come to my eyes, as I watch my fawns proudly strutting their young around the perimeters of the compound.

I have learned that there are many ways to rehab wildlife and that the best approach is what works for you and your schedule, but most importantly, gives wildlife the skills they need to survive on their own. My approach is simple and successful, although some rehabilitators may question my methods. My fawns are raised all summer with affection and discipline, and are bonded to the single, human caregiver. When they are two to three weeks old, they are moved into the larger pens with my non-releasable, adult deer. Throughout the summer they are bottle-fed by me, but disciplined by the adult deer. I am also disciplining them by not allowing butting, kicking, or disrespect.

By the end of September, they are no longer bottle-fed and I cease all physical contact. I go into the pens once a day to feed, do a general head count and check for problems. Short and sweet — in and out. Now the only lessons they are learning are ones I could never teach them.

When the spring grass begins to grow – it's time to say farewell. The fawns are separated into the soft release area and the outside gates are opened. The first ten to fifteen minutes, they are cautious and slow to move out. But one by one, their tails twitch and they disappear into the fields and woods. Every fawn leaves, but the following morning they are all back inside the soft release area waiting for breakfast. By the end of that first day, they have all left again. This soft release continues for the first week or so and by the end of the month the fawns no longer tolerate the feeling of enclosure. Now as I walk through the fields, they very politely wave good-bye with their beautiful white tails. You know you have done your job well, when the soft release area is empty.

In 2005, I went to a seminar on CWD in whitetail deer. The speaker, who was in charge of Wisconsin's Wildlife Department, was kind enough to speak to me one-on-one after the seminar. His extensive research found that the rehabilitation of whitetail deer is insignificant to the spread of CWD because, according to him, all fawns die within three months of release. His research, which consisted of 23 collared and released fawns, indicated that all the fawns had died within a three month period. All of these fawns had been raised behind solid walls, blind fed, and released by four months of age.

All of my theories and beliefs now came together. Why were all of my fawns doing so well years later, when we were told they would all die or be shot by hunters? Just as any human or animal, they need love, structure and discipline as youngsters, in order to adapt and adjust as adults. I rehabilitated them through the baby/child stage and released them in the spring as young adults ready and eager to take on the world. They are now ten to eleven months old, able to forage for food, recognize danger and react as deer should. They are not walking up to hunters or going into the neighbors' yard. I raised them with the affection every youngster needs to thrive, backed off when they felt confident, and successfully released them in the spring.

Whitetail fawns need to be raised together, with adult deer as teachers. The rehabilitator should take an active role in their development but know when to back off and let them be deer. I have found that it is also possible to successfully release an imprinted deer.



A few years ago, I received a call about a doe fawn raised in a house with a family and dogs. When she was admitted, she was housed with adult deer and other fawns her age. By the following week, she preferred the company of deer, and I was no longer able to approach her. In the spring she was successfully released and continues to live and raise her young on my compound.

My technique may not be for everyone, but it works for me and it worked for the hundreds of fawns I have successfully released. So the next time you receive a call about a fawn in trouble, please think twice before saying “no.” Tomorrow the fawn can be transferred to a rehabilitator with a pen, but tonight, that fawn needs YOU!



Pat Ferguson is a licensed WLR and a domestic deer farmer. Since the onset of CWD, she is no longer rehabilitating WTD but continues to be a mentor to many wildlife rehabilitators.



White Nose Syndrome Bat Video:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TUSnHJuJV1E> is the site to visit to watch a good video that explains the problem being faced by bats in the northeast.

NY Times article: http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/25/science/25bats.html?pagewanted=1&_r=1



Raising Young the “Cindy Crawford” Way By Terri Lee Murphy

Lori Updyke, my rehab buddy, received a call about an opossum lying in the caller’s yard with severe facial injuries. When Lori arrived on the scene, the female opossum was in dire shape with half of her face torn away and deep lacerations on her neck and back. She took the pathetic animal to her kindly vet and assumed euthanasia would be recommended, considering the extent of the injuries. When Lori removed the OP from the carrier, she discovered one tiny, dead prenatal opossum curled up in the corner of the carrier. It was bad enough this poor OP was suffering from such extreme injuries, but she was probably carrying a pouch full of babies who didn’t have a chance, considering their preemie size and the extent of their mother’s injuries. We assumed the OP would absorb the fetuses due to the savagery of the attack.

After examining the animal, the vet decided that with good care, the OP had a decent chance at survival. Her face wasn’t stitched because the injuries were several days old and infection had set in. The vet said that eventually the bulbous injury on her face would shrink. If you look at the photos below you will notice that the OP looks as if she has a giant beauty mark/mole on the side of her face, so we decided to name her Cindy Crawford.



Cindy had an incredible will to survive and grew stronger each day. Lori and I concluded that her injuries, which included severe bites to the neck, back and face, were most likely the result of a mating encounter. Besides their aggression towards other males during breeding season, male OP’s have a tendency to be very rough during mating. (I will refrain from any editorializing at this point.)

About a month later, Lori mentioned that she noticed movement in Cindy’s pouch, and upon examination, she discovered a pouch full of tiny babies – ten babies. I was so excited. All the years I have rehabilitated the Virginia Opossum, the many times I have seen a pouch full of babies, it was always a dead mom. Even after the death of the mother, the babies will continue to nurse and die from sepsis. I asked Lori to transfer her to me so I could document their growth.

When she arrived, I put Cindy in an outdoor pen with a large nest box, which opened from the top for viewing. Summer was upon us, the weather was getting warm and Cindy would stretch out in her nest box and air out her pouch, exposing all ten beautiful babies. Every day I would watch the babies grow bigger and stronger. After a few more weeks, the babies were beginning to spend time out of the pouch and on her back. By this time, the weather was extremely hot – much too hot to be in a hutch outdoors, so I transferred them to a large cage in my cool basement. I put a nest box inside the cage, which gave her the privacy and security she needed. It wasn’t long before the babies began lapping up yogurt and munching on soft vegetables. Within a week or so, they were coming out of the nest box, feeding on Peter’s Food* and spending less time nursing. I filled the cage with branches and rocks and they began climbing and exploring.

I wish I could have kept a more scientific journal by weighing them on a daily basis, but Mom let me know there would be “no touching.” I continued to take pictures every few days, and only opened the cage for cleaning and feeding. Once they outgrew the cage, I transferred them to a very large pen with several nest boxes, branches to climb and shelves to sit on. Life was good.

Then one morning when I went into the pen to clean, I realized that Mom had “drawn the line in the sand.” Every one of the ten babies was sitting on the top shelf of the cage, wide-awake, and looking down at Mom in the nest box below. It was obvious to me that Cindy needed a break from rearing ten kids. By this time in the wild, while foraging for food with her kids on her back, – most of them would have fallen off and

would then be on their own. Mother OP's do not return to "fetch" their lost kids. I put Cindy back in the other cage to give her time to recuperate. Within minutes, all the babies climbed down from the shelf and settled into different nest boxes. Within a few days, the babies no longer called out to her. Mom was finished — finished with this litter anyway.

I learned a lot while watching Cindy raise her young. I never realized that OP's were such affectionate, caring mothers. When her babies would crawl too high up in the cage and cry for help, she would climb up and bring them down. She never ate until she was sure the babies had their fill. She nursed them, she cleaned them and she loved them. However, enough was enough. After spending a few more weeks in an outdoor cage and making sure all the babies weighed about two pounds, I released them. It was a wonderfully rewarding, yet sad moment. A moment, only another rehabilitator could understand.

* Weaning diet of the National Opossum Society:
1 part dry cat chow, 1 part mixed vegetables and
1/4-part yogurt.



POSSUM FACTS: The Virginia Opossum is an amazing creature, dating back 75 million years – older than the dinosaurs. They are often referred to as living fossils, because of their primitive characteristics. Possums are North America's only marsupial, characterized by pouches in which their young are nourished. Their relatives are kangaroos, koalas, wombats, gliders and bandicoots. Thirteen days after conception and smaller than honeybees, they immediately make their way to their mother's pouch, where they latch onto one of the 13 teats to which they will hold fast for two months. Possums have 50 teeth and have a natural immunity to rabies and rattle snake venom. When they find themselves threatened, they will pretend to die – the source of the expression "playing possum," and can remain in a catatonic state for many hours. An opossum can predetermine the sex of her offspring, often producing more females when she is ill or times are difficult. They are "loners" and prefer the company of other opossums only during breeding season.



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