

Wildlife Tales

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Center News

2024 was one of our busiest years ever.

My volunteers and I made it through a very tough year with well over 600 wild animal patients admitted for care, and coping with hurricane Milton hitting us in October. Raccoons, Virginia opossums, eastern gray squirrels, southern flying squirrels, white tail deer, coyote, bobcat, cottontail and marsh rabbits, eastern moles, gopher tortoises, and too many species of birds to name them all were admitted for care. To save many lives otherwise doomed is reward in itself. We wish to thank Dr. David Jourdenais for his expert help with our most challenging cases. In addition, we appreciate our many members whose financial support enables us to provide this crucial, ongoing service for wildlife.



Dr. David Jourdenais of Geneva Oaks Animal Hospital examined and treated a baby bobcat for me when she developed a bad upper respiratory infection. He has kindly provided veterinary services for our wildlife in care for decades, and we are forever grateful.

Please visit us at our web site: www.wildlifecenterflorida.org

Hurricane

On the morning of October 10, I awoke at 4 AM to the sounds of howling winds and loud thumps which I feared were trees or limbs hitting the roof. Hurricane Milton was raging. After a futile attempt to return to sleep, I decided to get dressed and begin the morning feedings for the many baby squirrels which were already in care. Although the power was lost sometime during the morning, my Generac kicked on automatically and I never had to interrupt my routine.

Once the several hours of feedings were completed, I donned boots and proceeded to assess any damages outside. Debris from the many trees on the property was everywhere, but no trees came down and none had fallen on any structures. All of the raccoons and squirrels were safe and dry in their sturdy enclosures. Two weeks later, I paid a tree removal crew to haul all of the fallen debris to the side of the road where it was collected 6 weeks later by county contractors.

On October 10, I found that I was the only rehab available for many counties; and my land line phone rang continually as people left messages primarily regarding squirrel babies. Lindy Williams, a long-time friend of mine, arrived that evening to help me with the stressful work load. I personally worked 20 hours that day until past midnight but managed to return all of the calls and safely admit the many helpless infants. For the next days, people continued to find infant squirrels as they performed yard clean up. One of my volunteers, Esther Plummer, was able to help me with the enormous numbers which had flooded in. Esther is one of the volunteers listed on my wildlife permit who is legally allowed and trained to care for wildlife in her home. Terri White and Jennifer Odom, two more of my permitted volunteers, also were able to take babies. Thank goodness that I had these wonderful people to assist because there was no way that I could have cared for so many. Even so, at one point my squirrel feedings were totaling 12 hours per day; and for two months, I worked 14-16 hours per day, seven days per week. 2024 was a year that I will never forget! Although the demands and accompanying stress on me exacted a great toll, I have to say that it was well worth it to have saved hundreds of innocent lives.

Spotted Skunks

Two baby spotted skunks were found beside a dead mother skunk at a Ponce Inlet jetty. The kind person who rescued the little ones transported them all the way to me in Christmas. Upon examination, I found them to be in good condition, and I set up a nice cage for them providing food, water, and a fleece lined bed box. Once they were in care for another month, I moved them to a large outdoor enclosure which they loved. When I released them, they sprayed the bed box, and I am afraid that my van carried the reminder of that day for two weeks or so.



Eastern Gray Squirrels



Photo, left, of a neonate gray squirrel which was one of many received in the fall of 2024. Below is a group of 5 squirrels which were admitted when they were tiny babies without fur and eyes not yet opened. In this photo, two are deciding whether to climb out of the container before returning to their climbing cage.



I just had to take a photo of this crazy gray squirrel sound asleep and upside down in her hammock. As other squirrels in the cage ate snacks and moved about, she snoozed through the activities oblivious to her surroundings. I suppose that she felt safe in her home in order to sleep so soundly.

Raccoons



Here is a photo of Slider, a neonate raccoon baby boy who was admitted when only 108 grams in weight. He was found alone on a water park slide, thus his name.

When he was old enough to receive his vaccinations, three other juveniles his age joined him. Most wild animals benefit greatly by being raised with others of their species (called conspecifics). During their time together, the animals learn important socialization skills not provided by a human caregiver. They also are able to bond with their group and more easily sever existing ties to their human foster parent.

At our wildlife center, we nurse infant and young juvenile raccoons with Fox Valley raccoon formula. It comes in powder form which is reconstituted easily with bottled water, and the baby raccoons drink it readily.

In this photo, baby Slider demonstrates how well he enjoys feeding times as he drinks the last of his bottle. We try to weigh all of our infant and juvenile patients every few days, recording their weights each time. By doing so, we know that they are gaining appropriately, and we are able to determine how much formula to give them according to our feeding charts.



White tail deer

2024 was a notable year for the influx of white tail deer fawns. I received a total of 23 from March through June, and they really kept me busy. When they arrive at a very young age, weighing under 5 or 6 pounds, I house them indoors in a large, soft sided dog playpen. Twice per day, once they are stabilized, I give them some time outside in a safely fenced area under constant supervision. They are able to nibble on grass, leaves, and soil, which provides necessary gut flora for their digestion. The exercise and natural sunlight during these forays is also very beneficial. Once I am sure that they are stable and taking their bottles readily, I move them to the deer barn. When I arrive with their warm bottles of pasteurized goat milk four times per day, they run to me for the feedings. At this point in time, I begin to cut fresh browse daily consisting of wild grape leaves and tree branches. I also provide cut up fruits such as apples, peaches, plums, and melons. It takes hours of work to care for them properly. When the young deer are 10-12 pounds, we load them in carriers to transfer them to All Creatures Safe Place in Ft. Pierce for wildlife rehabilitator, Wynne Burns, to finish raising them. Volunteer, Esther Plummer, helps catch, load, and transport them to Wynne-a vital component in the process.



In the photo, left, a young fawn has just been placed in the deer barn where three others were already enjoying the area.



In the photo, right, I am interacting with the fawns after their bottle feeding.

Florida Bobcat



On June 6, 2024, Esther Plummer responded to a call that I had received concerning a baby bobcat in someone's garage. Esther was able to retrieve the little feline and transport her to me immediately. The kit was very thin and hungry, apparently separated from her mother for a few days. With a good appetite, her weight gain was excellent; and she became calmer in her new surroundings.

Within two weeks, she developed an upper respiratory infection, which was life threatening as the poor baby struggled to breathe. Late on a Saturday night, I conferred with long-time friend, Dr. Jane Leon, who gave me some suggestions to try and called in a prescription that I picked up the next day.

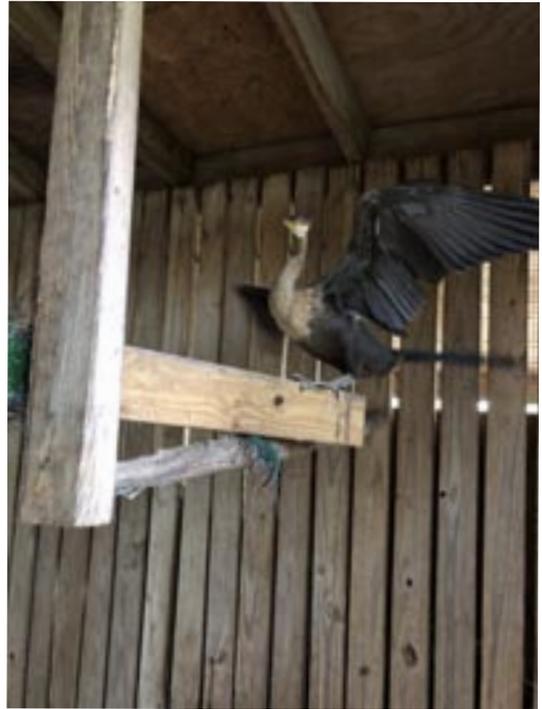
On the following Monday, I took the baby bobcat to Dr. David Jourdenais, who examined her and gave me the good news that she did not have pneumonia. He gave me some nasal drops for her breathing and an antiviral medication. The little kit improved gradually over the next two weeks and recovered from the infection. Unfortunately, after the baby recovered from the illness, she developed a syndrome, cerebellar hypoplasia, that I had previously observed in baby raccoons which had recovered from parvo virus. When the afflicted animals walk, their hind legs collapse intermittently. There is no treatment or cure, so this development was quite devastating. This bobcat would never be able to survive in the wild.



Florida Bobcat

Luckily, the first person whom I contacted regarding a permanent placement for the bobcat baby immediately responded that she would be happy to take her. C.A.R.E., located in Apopka, Florida, houses wild animals which need a permanent home. The director, Christin Burford, came to transport the little girl once we were approved for the placement. At the new facility, they named the bobcat Sassy Girl, and I have received many positive reports on her continuing progress. She is very content there, is loved, and has the great life that I dreamed she would have.

Birds



In 2024, we admitted almost 200 birds to our center, including the sandhill crane, anhinga, warbler, and the baby egret pictured here.



Southern Flying Squirrels

We received quite a few of the diminutive squirrels last fall. Volunteer, Terri White, agreed to take on a tiny boy weighing only 4 grams, the smallest for her to date. She successfully housed and fed him and in time, he joined five others in a climbing cage. Once they were weaned from the formula, she brought them to me to join three that I had raised. We placed the two groups in special flying squirrel bed boxes hung in an outdoor enclosure. Terri had named her little guy Bruce Wayne, and I am so proud of her for having done such a great job. Neonate flying squirrels are especially difficult to raise.

The photo is of one that I was hand feeding.



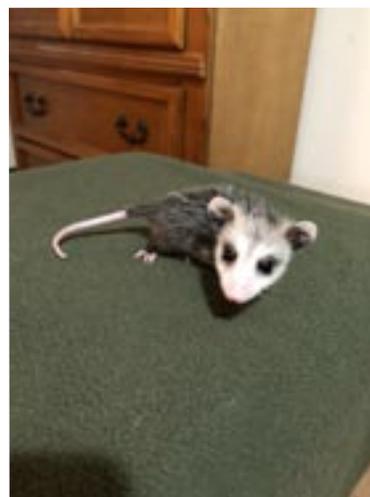
Coyotes



In June, 2024, poor little coyote pup, Nova, was found emaciated, dehydrated and waiting for certain death on the side of a road in Osceola county. The volunteer of a local wildlife rehabilitator rescued the youngster and brought her to the veterinarian they use. When contacted, I agreed to admit the pup for ongoing rehab. Nova recovered from her ordeal and was able to be released in late September in a remote area well away from cars and humans.

Virginia Opossums

In 2024, our center admitted more than 80 opossums, primarily infants and juveniles. We tube feed the small babies with a special formula that suits their needs and has proven to be successful for them. At a young age, the juveniles can lap formula from a shallow container, and begin to consume pate cat food and carnivore diet as well as fruits. When older, they continue care in outdoor cages.



In Memory, Always



Co-founder, wildlife rehabilitator, and my husband, Ron Hardee, passed away in 2023, and will always be remembered for his kind-hearted love for animals. He posed for this photo with his favorite dog, Scruffy, who lived to be almost 20.

Snowy, a white phase squirrel



These photos depict the development of a white squirrel which was admitted after the hurricane. He was brought to me at night after being found on the ground, alone and cold.

In 40 years of rehabilitation, this was only the third white squirrel that I had admitted for care. I decided to name him Snowy.

Albino animals have pinkish eyes and no pigment at all, while the leucistic phase have dark eyes and some colored fur, which is what Snowy had. Once Snowy was old enough to be housed in a wire climbing cage, I added three gray squirrels his size so that he could socialize and learn to be a squirrel. The lower photo was taken of Snowy in an outdoor enclosure where I house squirrels after they are weaned.

Thank You To The Following:

We thank the dedicated staff of Disney's Animal Kingdom- Hospital Manager, Leanne Blinco and all of the DAK animal keepers who assist the wildlife. Our friends at DAK have done so much to support the care of many injured and orphaned native wild animals and our Center.

We wish to thank dear friends of the wildlife, Wayne and Linda Boyd, for their generous support these many years. Their kind assistance has enabled us to provide the very best for our wildlife patients.

A thanks goes to Dr. David Jourdenais, Geneva Oaks Animal Hospital, who has assisted us for more than 25 years and Dr. Jane Fishman Leon for all of her help as well.

Also treating wildlife patients in 2024 were the veterinarians and staff of the Animal Hospital of Baldwin Park and The Integrative Animal Hospital of Central Florida.

Elizabeth Morse Genius Foundation, Knopf Family Foundation, Susan Stavros, Jim Yde are all thanked for their generous support.

Thank you, Johnny Metcalf and staff at Orlando International Airport for helping to release raccoons and coyotes on protected property far from humans and traffic hazards.

Wildlife Center Volunteers

Thank you, Marshal Wolfe, for allowing squirrel releases on his property.

My volunteers who are listed on my wildlife permits to provide care in their homes, have pre-exposure rabies vaccinations, and transport as needed: Jennifer Rosenfeldt, Terri White, Jennifer Fletcher Odom, Thressa Jones, Nathalie Barnhart, and Esther Plummer. Thanks!

I wish to thank my brother-in-law, Jack Hardee, for helping me with many hours of work on the website and the newsletter. He is also our IT guy for all computer repairs and problems that arise, seemingly on a continual basis.

WISH LIST

Foods: Dry Pedigree, Purina, or Science Diet Puppy food, unsalted, roasted peanuts, shelled and unshelled pecans, wild bird seed and striped sunflower seeds

General Supplies: Puppy pee pee pads, Charmin bath tissue, copy paper, Epson Ultra Premium, Glossy Photo Paper, Fox Valley squirrel and raccoon formulas which can be ordered on line at Henry's Pets

Cleaning supplies: laundry Tide pods, paper towels, especially Bounty and Viva brands, black, heavy duty trash bags with ties

Monetary Donations are always necessary to keep us stocked on formulas, meds, vaccines, and foods for the wild patients in our care.

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