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THE QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF THE NEW YORK

Important Dates:

NYSWRC Board Meetings are open to everyone. E-mail Kelly Martin, President (kmartink@midtel.net) to join us.

Seminar 2010: In Grand Island, NY (Niagara Falls) October 22-24, 2010 Registration flyer will come in mail to all members. Email: nisseq@aol.com

October 15-17, 2010, **Wild in Vermont, Inc.** in Dixville Notch, NH Email: ncarey12@me.com or call 802-899-1027

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Back issues of *Release* are available on line.

The Lame Duck's Latest, by Barb Cole, NYSWRC

Some of you who, have attended Seminar, have picked up the emergency wallet cards that you can carry to warn medical personnel that you may have been exposed to zoonotic diseases. It is a good idea to have one of these, because many physicians do not consider zoonotics in their differential diagnosis when you report a physical problem. I recently encountered a health problem that was related to my work as a rehabilitator, and was misdiagnosed until it got quite serious. Although I am uncomfortable talking (or typing, in this case) about myself in *Release*, I think it is important to share this cautionary tale with other rehabilitators.

Late last spring I started finding myself short of breath. However, I am pudgy (to put it mildly,) 58 and out of shape, so at first it was pretty easy to attribute any problems to "my own darn fault." It got worse over the summer until I was getting out of breath just talking to people, and for me, having kissed the Blarney Stone twice, this was a major disaster! In early fall I went out of town for almost two weeks and felt better, hiking etc. But at home again symptoms reoccurred, so I went to the doctor. He diagnosed allergy induced asthma, which was a reasonable diagnosis, because it cleared up when I had been away from home and my cats/dogs, etc.

Continues next page

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 NYSWRC, PO Box 62, Newcomb, NY 12852.

Illustrations by Arleen Santonas

The Lamé Duck's Latest, *continued*

He prescribed an inhaler and over the counter allergy medication. I got worse. He sent me for tests and put me on prescription allergy medicine, but I got worse. My tests were coming back normal and he was starting to look at me like I was a middle-aged hypochondriac! I was ticked off and short of breath! After a really bad weekend, I went in, and because my doctor wasn't there, I saw another in the practice. When he started to tell me that my tests looked fine, I must have gotten an expression on my face that said, "I am going to leap from this table and grab you by the throat" because he sent me for a CAT scan. On my next visit to my physician, he looked at the CAT scan results, left the room and made an appointment for me with a pulmonologist who pretty much diagnosed me over the phone with "hypersensitivity pneumonitis." The following day in the pulmonologist's office a simple oximeter reading (why my doctor didn't do this is the big question) had the nurse asking me if I was on oxygen. This was delivered that day to my house. Ask me if I was in shock about that! To make a long story short, I spent a month and a half on supplemental oxygen and took prednisone. I am totally recovered—except for one major problem; I am not supposed to have any contact with birds unless I am wearing a particle respirator. This is not one of the most desirable of spring fashion accessories.

So how does this happen? Hypersensitivity pneumonitis is also known as "bird fancier's disease" or "pigeon breeder's disease." It is a severe reaction to particulates associated with birds. It is not a zoonotic in the classic sense; it is not caused by a virus or bacteria carried by animals and transmitted to humans. The hygienic practices that good rehabilitators use: gloves, hand washing, no eating or drinking around the animals, etc. do not protect you from this disease. I had read that there were some health problems associated with long term exposure to birds, so I took what I thought were reasonable precautions. There is, for instance, some suggestion of accelerated lung cancer rates for people who own birds. I ran air filters in my rehab areas, but sporadically; every time I needed new filters the store didn't carry that brand any longer. My last attempt was a BOSE electrostatic collecting plate design, (around 300 dollars) which lasted approximately 4 months. So I was back to misting the cages with a dilute cleaning solution before changing cage papers, and wearing a surgical mask. But (confession time here) I was not wearing a mask when feeding, and I now realize that every time a bird flapped I was getting a faceful of particulates. After 26 years of rehabilitating, there were consequences.

It is necessary to let people know that there is another, less obvious, health problem that should be considered if you are going to rehabilitate wildlife. And just as rehabilitators care for sick mammals with proper precautions, we need to take care when accepting birds for help. Simple precautions like working in well ventilated areas and cleaning cages daily should cut risks. Getting birds into outside cages as soon as it is reasonably possible should help, too.

To end this cautionary tale, just please try to keep in mind that wildlife rehabilitation is an activity that has inherent risks. We can be physically injured; kicked by deer, slammed by geese, bitten by squirrels. And we risk zoonotic diseases: rabies, tularemia, leptospirosis. We take measures to help lessen those risks. Hypersensitivity pneumonitis is just another risk to be considered. It is not common. But if you have any kind of problem you must find a doctor who will listen to you and consider all possibilities that can affect rehabilitators. So, carry those cards, keep all our various risks in mind, and please stay safe and healthy. Our critter cases need you to take care of yourself, too.



Veterinarian of the Year Award Recipients:

1997	Dr. Michael Bonda
1998	Dr. Alison Hazel
1999	Dr. Carl Tomasce
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
2008	Dr. Karen Moran
2009	Dr. Erica Miller

NYSWRC SEEKS VETERINARIAN OF YEAR FOR 2011

Nominate your Veterinarian to join this prestigious list! Send your letter today.

Award Selection Criteria

The “Veterinarian of the Year” award is presented to a veterinarian who has demonstrated outstanding qualities and skills that have contributed to a cooperative working relationship between the veterinary community and wildlife rehabilitators. When considering candidates for the “Veterinarian of the Year” award the Council recognizes and appreciates the efforts of all the veterinarians who have contributed their time and skills, frequently without charge, to wildlife rehabilitators across the state. The selection of the “Veterinarian of the Year” is based on the following criteria:

Dedication and Commitment: The Council recognizes that veterinarians are highly skilled animal health care professionals who must also manage a small business. When considering the dedication and commitment of a veterinarian, we recognize:

- the willingness of a veterinarian to provide the time to work with a wildlife rehabilitator and to share his or her knowledge and skills to improve wildlife health care
- the sincere interest of the veterinarian to provide professional services for wildlife often without compensation
- the professional demeanor of the veterinarian that fosters open dialogue and respect between a veterinarian and a wildlife rehabilitator

Skills: The Council recognizes that veterinarians are professionals who possess the critical skills that are required to treat an injured or sick wild animal for eventual release to the wild. When considering the skills of a veterinarian we recognize:

- an ability by the veterinarian to apply their unique skills to wild patients
- a sincere desire by the veterinarian to listen to the wildlife rehabilitator and to learn about the wild patient so that he or she can render the best care
- a willingness by the veterinarian to share his or her knowledge with the wildlife rehabilitation community through participation as speakers in educational forums such as seminars and workshops
- a desire to learn more about wildlife and wildlife rehabilitation so that the veterinarian can enhance his or her skills

- contributions to the field of wildlife rehabilitation through the development of innovative wildlife health care techniques, by encouraging other veterinarians to ‘volunteer’ to support and work with local wildlife rehabilitators and by assisting with the professional development of wildlife rehabilitators

People Skills: The Council recognizes that veterinary skills alone do not define a professional. When considering the People Skills of a veterinarian, we recognize:

- the interaction between the veterinarian and his or her wild patient
- the confidence of the veterinarian that fosters a willingness to listen and learn
- the understanding by the veterinarian that he or she has a leadership role in the community and that this often entails acting for the ‘greater good’

The commitment to provide care to wildlife not only involves contributions of time, money or expertise. It involves a great deal of compassion and heart fueled by a genuine interest in and concern for the welfare of animals in need regardless of their species.

If you would like to nominate your special veterinarian, please send us a letter of support using the above criteria. You may also include information relevant to your veterinarian’s nomination such as: where they graduated from veterinary school, any wildlife experience obtained while in school, and any outside activities demonstrating an interest in wildlife. You may resubmit a letter from previous years. If selected, you will need to supply a photograph of the winner.

The **DEADLINE** for this year’s submissions is **Aug. 10, 2010**. We will notify the wildlife rehabilitator and veterinarian within a few weeks of the selection. An award will be presented at the Annual Seminar Banquet, Oct. 2011. The selected veterinarian will be welcome, as our guest, for the evening’s festivities and will also receive a one year free subscription to *Release*.

Please send your letters to the Council at: **NYSWRC, Attention Veterinary Committee, 1170 State Road, Webster, NY 14580**

If you have been to Seminar, you know what an honor this is for the award recipient. It only happens if you choose to nominate someone. Write your letter today.



Weird Woodchuck Syndrome, By Ginnie Frati

In late 2003, the Wildlife Rescue Center of the Hamptons started noticing woodchucks coming in with neurological symptoms – circling, head tilt; some were emaciated and dehydrated while others appeared to be in good flesh. All appeared to be blind. There was no pupil dilation or constriction in response to light.

There didn't seem to be any common thread. Locations of intake were scattered throughout the east end of Long Island from as far west at Shirley, NY to as far east as Flanders, NY, a distance of 17 miles. Some had awakened from hibernation; some came in during prime summer months.

Baylisascaris (raccoon roundworm) was suspected; however, eye examinations did not reveal the larval migrans.

Standard supportive care was administered to the compromised – subcutaneous fluids, warmth and the slow offering of food.

When it became apparent that there was a concern here, and the fact that rabies could not be overlooked, we decided to investigate this further with some outside help. We started referring to these cases as “weird woodchuck syndrome.” The very next woodchuck that died on 12/23/2004, was necropsied by our veterinarian Jonathan Turetsky, DVM of East Hampton, NY. The brain and liver were sent to Antech Diagnostics Laboratory in Lake Success, NY.

Microscopic Findings by Stephen J. Engler, VMD, Antech Diagnostics indicated “the sections of liver are considered within expected histopathological limits. Inflammation is considered absent and there is no evidence of hepatocellular necrosis. Bile ducts are unremarkable. The multiple sections of the brain reveal random scattered individual small vessels cuffed by small clusters of lymphocytes and a random plasma

cell. These are seen in the cortex mid-brain and brain stem. Meningeal infiltrates are not demonstrated. There is no evidence of necrosis or gliosis.”

Dr. Engler further commented that “the changes in the brain suggests a viral encephalitis. No viral type inclusions were identified. Further evaluation would require more specialized testing on the paraffin embedded or formulin-fixed wet tissue.”

Hhhmmmmm, OK. Rather vague, but the best that we could do with the resources we had.

Woodchucks continued to come in with most mysteriously succumbing to their illness soon after. Calls to other local wildlife rehabilitators and centers in mid and western Long Island indicated little to no similar cases. Was this only an eastern Long Island problem?

When the next woodchuck deteriorated, it was euthanized on 10/25/2005. This time we decided to finance and send the entire woodchuck to the Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory in West Lafayette, IN. The cost was rather prohibitive, but our curiosity was peaked. The gross findings indicated that fat stores throughout were severely depleted. Histopathology of the brain indicated “necrotizing meningoencephalitis with perivascular lymphoplasmacytic cuffing and intralosomal protozoa.” Histopathology of the liver indicated “multifocal hepatic necrosis.” The rabies test was negative. Finally, the Immunohistochemistry of the protozoal cysts in the cerebrum demonstrated positive staining for *Neospora Canis* antigen and negative for *Toxoplasma gondii*.”

Aaahhhaa! *Neospora Canis*, could this be our culprit? According to Jay Georgi's Parasitology for Veterinarians, “*Neospora Canis* is an intracellular cyst-forming apicomplexan parasite of the neural and other tissues of the dog.” It is different from other cyst forming coccidians. Clinical signs present as neural and muscular dysfunction. It infects a large host of animals; the primary hosts are canines with the alternate hosts being deer. Could it be that these cysts are shed in dog or deer feces, and woodchucks may be inadvertently ingesting them?

Of the 25 affected woodchucks admitted since 2004, 13 died or were euthanized, 9 recovered enough for release, and 3 were sent to an educational institute, probably to be their own “Puxatawnee Phil.”

As previously mentioned, the cost for the testing, along with the cost of shipping the animals was prohibitive. With funding at a minimum, further testing is at a stand-still. It would be really interesting to have enough funding to find out if all these animals are infected with *Neospora Canis* and what the implications would be. Hopefully, funding will be forthcoming to do further research.

Food News:

A Note from Shirley and Allan Casey

WildAgain Wildlife Rehabilitation, Colorado

Some rehabbers saw GI and other problems with their wild mammal babies last summer and autumn after feeding formula made with Esbilac® powder - while other rehabbers didn't see any problems. We've spend much of the winter trying to identify causes and possible solutions before wildlife baby season. Help from rehabbers and lots of scientific tests provide the foundation for what we've learned -- and the resulting report.

Check out the new report on the changes in Esbilac® powder on www.ewildagain.org. It's got lots of photos and graphs. It can be read online with color photos - or a long or short version can be downloaded.

Some of the information in the report affects rehabbers making formula with any milk replace powder.

Also, PetAg changed their KMR® to the same manufacturing process as the 'new' Esbilac® powder -- so rehabbers using KMR® will especially want to learn about this info to help avoid possible problems.

Please help spread the word about the report to the various state rehab associations, rehab centers, individual rehabbers and others who will soon be feeding baby wild mammals.

New Mazuri Nestling Handfeeding formula for the upcoming baby bird season.

Mazuri has announced a new formula. The product comes in a powder, and just needs to be mixed with water to feed out. It was tested against the FoNS diet at TriState Bird Rescue last year. The results of that study were written up and submitted for presentation and the veterinary intern who worked on the study won the student competition and presented the paper at NWRA.

The product is now available and the cost is \$10.04 per kilogram of powder (shipping not included) from Mazuri: <http://www.mazuri.com/Home.asp?Products=1&Opening=7> I believe that Chris at Squirrel's and More will be carrying it, so that may make it easy to obtain for everyone in New York.

Karen C. Wright, Eastern Region Manager
Technical Support & Sales Mazuri Diets

Feeding Mealworms, By Linda Bowen

Food for approximately 2500 mealworms:

Oat bran
1 cup

Wheat bran
1 cup

Avi-Era™ bird vitamins *
½ cup

(Manufactured by Lafeber Company, Cornell, IL)

Calcium carbonate *
½ cup

Leafy greens (unchopped dandelion greens)
1 cup

Sweet potato and/or apple
1/2 piece, cut up

NOTE: Do not feed mwms to bats that contain morphed mwms (beetles). When receiving fresh mwms, discard bedding and make fresh to eliminate contamination with quinones. Feed mwms for at least 7 days prior to feeding to bats

*Both of these supplements are available through Chris Clark's, Squirrels and More online store (www.squirrelsandmore.com)



Nature's Clean up Crews!

We all know the value of vultures, crows and other scavengers as

they clean up our human messes. But, this one was a surprise. Thanks to Merritt Clifton's article Nature's Animal Control Officers published in the California Council for Wildlife Rehabilitators newsletter for this "food for thought."

"Coyotes, like other wildlife and perhaps most dog-keepers, ignore poop-scooper laws. Yet coyotes consume far more poop than they leave behind, voraciously devouring the nutrient-rich turds left in accessible places by well-fed domestic dogs. Even if coyotes recycle only 1% of the estimated 46 million tons per year left at large by domestic dogs and cats, that would still be 46,000 tons, enough to fill 4,000 dump trucks."

Illustration by Arleen Santonas

DEC REPORTS: Record Setting Year For Peregrine Falcons

2009 proved to be a record-setting year for peregrine falcons. DEC surveys found that there were 73 territorial pairs of state endangered peregrine falcons present in the state in 2009, with 42 pairs recorded upstate. That's a slight increase from 2008, when 67 pairs were recorded statewide. Also in 2009, 61 pairs bred and produced 132 young, also slightly up from 2008. New York State has the largest population of peregrines in the eastern United States.

Peregrines raise one to five young in nests located mainly on cliffs, bridges and buildings. They are known for their high speed - over 200 mph - dives on their bird prey.

These birds had disappeared as nesting birds from the eastern United States by the early 1960's due to pesticide (DDT) residues which caused eggshell thinning. Once DDT use was banned in the United States, an experimental restoration program began involving widespread releases of captive raised birds from the Peregrine Fund, a global non-profit organization focused on conserving birds of prey. Through this program, 169 young peregrines were released in New York State, from the mid -1970's through the late 1980's.

In 1983, the first new pairs nested at two bridges in New York City, and in 1985 two pairs returned to nest on Adirondack cliffs. The population has grown steadily since then. There are now about 20 pairs in the metro New York area and 27 in the Adirondacks, a pair at every major bridge between New York City and Albany, and about 10 pairs scattered through the rest of the state.

At many of the urban nest locations, wooden nest trays have been placed to increase the falcons' productivity. Peregrine falcons do not build nests of sticks like most raptors, but instead lay their brownish eggs in whatever substrate is available. Protection and management is necessary to continue this species' success in New York, which means working with building and bridge authorities so that whenever possible their work is done in a way that does not negatively impact nesting peregrine falcons.

In the Capital Region, a pair of nesting birds can be seen at the Dunn Memorial Bridge during the spring and summer seasons. A webcam operates during the nesting season at this site and several others in New York State. For links to these sites and other information, including a link to view the new 2009 peregrine falcon report in full text, visit the DEC website at: www.dec.ny.gov/animals/7059.html.

Eagle Count Poised to Set New Record: Preliminary Results Indicate Strong and Growing Population

New York has conducted annual surveys since 1979 and the highest official winter count occurred in 2008 with 573 bald eagles spotted. DEC's preliminary results for 2010 indicate that sightings may exceed this number as regions of the state continue to provide favorable wintering habitat for both New York resident eagles and for Canadian visitors. As of Jan. 31, 459 eagles had been sighted, a pace well ahead of the 2008 record. New York's survey efforts are part of a national initiative that monitors the locations and numbers of bald eagles wintering in the lower 48 states.

For the past several years, as many as 15,000 bald eagles annually were counted across the nation, with the Northeast region seeing the greatest increase in overall numbers of wintering eagles since 1986. The 2010 survey was especially important as it marked the next scheduled update for a comprehensive 25-year national and regional trend analysis.

The good news in winter eagle numbers comes on the heels of another record-breaking breeding season for bald eagles in New York. In 2009, 173 breeding pairs were confirmed to have successfully raised (fledged) 223 young.

DEC: Bear Harvest Totals for 2009 were Second Highest In State's History

Statewide, hunters took 1,487 black bears in 2009—a 15 percent increase from the 1,295 taken in 2008. In 2003, 1,864 bears were harvested statewide. The 2009 bear harvests by county, town, and Wildlife Management Unit, with comparisons to previous years' bear harvests, are available on the DEC website: <http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/42232.html>.

DEC Survey Shows Bat Populations Down 90 Percent in Caves Impacted by "White Nose Syndrome"

Surveying 23 caves at the epicenter of the bat die-off in early 2009, researchers found an alarming decline - 91 percent on average -- in the number of hibernating bats. The study included 18 caves in eastern New York, four in western Massachusetts and one in Vermont.

"These steep declines are alarming and disheartening," Commissioner Grannis said. "Researchers from around the country are focusing on the bat die-off and DEC will continue to work with a wide range of partners to try to get to the heart of the problem."

Editor's Note: While Bonnie resides in Texas, NY DEC also allows rehabilitators to become nuisance control officers. Exams are offered regularly at conference.

A New Breed of Wildlife Control Operator

by Bonnie Bradshaw, Certified Wildlife Rehabilitator

A paradigm shift is occurring in cities throughout the United States – wildlife rehabilitators are becoming wildlife control operators. Because of their experiences and attitudes toward animals, rehabilitators solve urban wildlife problems using techniques that are completely different from the methods used by traditional wildlife control operators.

Why would a rehabilitator want to become a wildlife control operator?

1. To prevent animals from being killed, injured or orphaned
2. To educate a segment of the general public who otherwise wouldn't receive information on humane solutions for wildlife problems
3. To raise funds for wildlife rehabilitation

My husband and I began rehabilitating orphan raccoons in 2002. Our initiation was a litter of seven. They were pulled from a fireplace by a chimney sweep.

Like most raccoon rehabilitators, by our second year we were receiving almost daily calls during the birthing season from chimney sweeps and pest control operators looking for someone to take orphaned raccoons.

Patiently at first, but later with increasing levels of frustration, we tried to explain to the chimney sweeps and pest control operators that they could use a different method that keeps the family intact by allowing the mother raccoon to relocate her babies.

One pest control operator angrily responded, "Don't tell me how to run my business. Do you want these raccoons or not?"

Soon afterwards I learned that the Humane Society of the United States had created a business plan for rehabilitators interested in generating revenue and at the same time, preventing animals from being orphaned.

Because it can begin as a home-based business with a two-person staff (an office manager and one technician), a wildlife control service has minimal overhead and start-up costs. The technician just needs a truck, simple tools and basic home repair skills. The office manager just needs a phone, computer, Internet access and basic computer skills.

Using the HSUS business plan, I launched 911 Wildlife in 2006 as the first wildlife control company in Texas owned and operated by a wildlife rehabilitator. 911 Wildlife currently serves the Dallas-Fort Worth area and soon will open offices in Austin, Houston and San Antonio.

Thanks to the HSUS business plan, there now are wildlife control services operated by rehabilitators in California, Colorado, Connecticut, Indiana, Ohio, Wisconsin and the District of Columbia.

Rehabilitators are discovering that **"If we want wildlife control done right, we need to do it ourselves!"**

The rehabilitator's top priorities as a wildlife control operator are:

1. To solve the wildlife problem without injuring the animal.
2. To allow the animal to relocate itself within its home territory, instead of transporting it to an unfamiliar area. Instead of trapping and relocating animals, we use humane, proven effective eviction and exclusion techniques.
3. To keep the family unit intact if there is an adult animal with offspring.
4. To help the customer develop a positive attitude toward wildlife by allaying unwarranted fears and providing accurate natural history information. When someone is experiencing a problem with wildlife, it can be a priceless teachable moment.

To receive a copy of the business plan and more information, call me at 972-743-7737 or HSUS urban wildlife director John Hadidian at 301-258-3144

OWL

Owl

by X.J. Kennedy

The diet of the owl is not
For delicate digestions.
He goes out on a limb to hoot
Unanswerable questions



And just because he winks like men
Who utter sage advice,
We think him full of wisdom when
He's only full of mice.

Strangers Amongst Us, by Laurel A. Beechey

Excerpt reprinted with permission from *Animal News*, Spring, 2009. *Animal News* www.animalnewsmagazine.org is a non-profit publication of ORA-Organization for the Rescue of Animals www.orarescue.org.

Laurel is a Canadian Wildlife rehabilitator who is a NYSWRC member. Remember, skunks are a DEC regulated Rabies Vector Species and a special license is required. This article was written for the general public to explain how rehabilitators work with skunks.



Do you know one wild animal that does not run from confrontation? His distinctive white stripes are a warning, to humans and to all animals, that says, “You don’t want to mess with me!” But he is a gentleman and will not bother you unless you bother him, and he is quite willing to give you a second warning, if you get too close. That is when he stamps his front feet and spreads his tail like a Christmas tree, to get your attention, and if you are smart, you will stand very, very still. After a moment or two, when his tail comes down, he will either wander away or allow you to. However, if you scream and run for the hills, you will scare this little fellow, and he will be forced to protect himself by contorting his body into a horseshoe shape, so that he may aim with his eye and line up the shot from his butt and spray you. You have just had an encounter of the closest kind with Mr. Skunk.

Don’t bother with tomato juice, that just makes everything red. Here is an effective recipe: mix one quarter cup of baking soda with one teaspoon of dishwashing detergent (Dawn works the best) and one quart of Hydrogen Peroxide. The detergent breaks down the oil in the spray, the peroxide bubbles it up, and the released oxygen foams with the baking soda and neutralizes the thiols responsible for the odor.

For most people their encounter with a skunk, or usually their dog’s encounter with a skunk, summarized their knowledge of the species. But there is much more to these animals than their foul odor. They are very happy

non-aggressive animals, usually living in your neighbourhood because their natural habitat has been destroyed to make way for new subdivisions. They can’t climb; so you will usually find them under your porch or shed in a nice dark, dry spot. They are also very smart and find accommodations close to a good food source, which is usually your pet’s outside food dish, your garbage or the grubs infesting your lawn.

Over the twenty-five years or so that I have rehabilitated orphaned wildlife, I have become known as “The Skunk Lady,” a name I proudly display on my license plate. Once past the fear of being sprayed I realized that these little creatures were one of the cutest and kindest ever created.

Most people, including wildlife rehabilitators, are very nervous around even baby skunks: there is no need. Walk slowly, talk softly and remember, if you don’t scare them, they don’t spray you. It is that simple.

Skunks normally reproduce only once a year, birthing their babies at the beginning of May, although unusual weather patterns have caused this time to fluctuate somewhat. They are furless when born but their skin is grayish from the underlying black hair, except for the position of the white strips, so they are usually recognizable from a very early age.

A normal litter of four to five babies will display a delightful array of varying stripes: some perfect, some horseshoes shaped and occasionally no stripes at all! Instead of by a name, Mother skunk identifies each baby by their different stripes.

Who ever said that skunks cannot spray until they are several months old? I had been told that tale when I hesitantly took in my first orphaned skunk; in fact, that is why I decided to take him in. That same evening while moving the hamster cage in which I had housed little Flower, the bottom fell out and down it went baby and all! That little baby skunk, with eyes still closed, stood up and sprayed. Granted it was not a major spray, but it packed the normal skunk spray stink! It turns out that they can spray from birth; however, an infant, especially with eyes closed, normally does not have the need to spray. I make sure I keep it that way too!

Like all animals, they grow very quickly, and their eyes open between three to four weeks of age. It is around five or six weeks old, when they are all fluffy and bouncing around playing with each other that the first stink happens. Puppies when playing with each other, are actually emulating dogs fighting. They growl and grab each other, sometimes even nipping without meaning any harm. Skunks are the same, except they stamp their feet and round their butts at their siblings pretending to spray. One day, one of the littermates will actually have a small poof of stink escape. They all stop and look at each other lie, “I didn’t do that! Did you?” It is quite hilarious to experience and because it isn’t an actual full blown spray, the smell is gone within minutes with a little spray of vinegar in the air.

Most people do not have the opportunity to see any baby wild animals unless they are in distress and needing help. Occasionally, especially with a raccoon or squirrel, a baby may have fallen out of its nest. If you can, place them back in their nest, (birds too!) or give their mother a chance to fetch them home. That requires 4-6 hours minimum with no activity in the area. The majority of 'orphans' rehabilitated are not really orphaned; we call them 'kidnapped' by well intentioned but misinformed people, as Mom is usually nearby but afraid to come back to the baby because of you.

Baby skunks are like any other baby animal, when orphaned and found by you, they need the same care. First of all, they need to be kept warm: put them in a box with a wrapped hot water bottle or electric heating pad on low and only half under the box so that the baby can move, if needed, to the unheated area, to cool down.

If the baby is really orphaned, it is normally dehydrated, and the best thing you can do is give him Pedialyte or Gatorade through a syringe (without the needle) or eye dropper. If it is too late to go to a pharmacy and if all else fails, water will do. Do not give milk, no condensed milk, no concoctions! If the babies are not dehydrated, they need a proper formula, either Espilac, a puppy replacement formula for skunks, opossums and squirrels or KMR a kitten milk replacement formula for raccoons and bunnies. They can be bought at pet stores or at veterinarian's clinics. Follow the directions. It is not cheap, but do not water it down or add anything else to it.

If the babies' eyes are closed, you will need to stimulate them to urinate and defecate by gently massaging in a downward motion. Please wear gloves, or at least wash your hands with antibacterial soap between each baby, for their sakes and yours. If they are severely dehydrated you might find they will not pee and poop until they get fluids back into their system, but they should within a twenty-four-hour period. After eating and eliminating, they do what all babies need to do: sleep.

Very often orphans have fleas, ticks or lice. If you have a mild flea powder, put a bit on the counter, dip your fingers in it then rub gently over the baby, keeping away from his face so he does not inhale any of the powder. You can usually treat a baby skunk the same as a baby cat. Follow the directions.

If their eyes are open, put a small container of clay litter in the cage with them. They, like raccoon and opossums, are very neat and like their own bathroom. Do not use clumping litter as the dust from it is inhaled and can cause lung problems.

Raising a baby skunk is much like raising a feline kitten. They are so cute, but they are also very high maintenance, requiring vegetables, chicken, cottage cheese, fruit and a variety of supplements. No wet dog or cat food and only a small amount of kibble dog food should ever be used. They are not cats or dogs and their nutritional needs are different.

For a rehabilitator, the experience is heartwarming. These babies consider you as their Momma. As they grow, the hands on and loving time they require when they are babies is reduced. They are too busy playing with their siblings to play with you, and they become more wary of outsiders. By the time they are released, we are usually quite pleased to see them going as they are eating you out of house and home! Release day is always difficult as you are quite attached to all your animals, but it is also thrilling to know they are back into the wild where they are supposed to be.

Skunks, unlike raccoons, don't normally hang around the release site. They are off searching for more food. We, however, continue to put food out for them for several weeks until we are sure they have learned to find and catch their own dinners.

Rehabilitating orphaned skunks over the years has been a rewarding experience filled with amazement, tears and laughter.

Unfortunately, most veterinarians are not trained in wildlife care, and, the ones who are, do not want to help skunks. They are apprehensive. Their concern, however is quite unjustified. Baby skunks know when they need help. They will lie still, almost in a comatose state for hours as we pick maggots out of a wound, eyes or ears. Although we inevitably cause them pain during various procedures, they never spray and only rarely even emit a whimper. My vets are always amazed at how cooperative a skunk is.

At times, we receive a litter in terrible shape and work for days, rehydrating them, removing parasites and coaxing them to eat and live, trying not to get attached to them until we think they will make it. We try to remain detached because it hurts so much when they die. A few years ago, in one litter, all, but one, died, one at a time, over a three-week period. Just when I thought they were doing better, another one would pass away. But the one who lived, oh, what a joy that was! Imagine, the smallest, the runt of the litter, was the one that found the strength to fight off the lung infections which the others could not. More time was spent playing and loving that one because it had no siblings to play with, so, needless to say, releasing him was very difficult. Before heading off to the woods, he rubbed his body against my leg, almost to thank me: that was worth all the vet bills and all the tears.

Laughter and love are part of everyday caring for skunks. They are little escape artists, and when babies they manage to get in unimaginable places. Skunks like dark places, therefore, finding them is always a chore. They will win the coaxing battle every time and only come out when they are hungry enough. *Article continues on the next page*



Strangers Amongst Us, *continued*

Wild animals have many of the same health problems as humans. We have seen squirrels with Down's syndrome, raccoons and skunks with diabetes, epilepsy and all sorts of other problems. It took me a while, with one litter of skunk kittens to realize what was wrong with one of the babies. It was blind. It was difficult to tell because it followed the scent of the other babies, and they took very good care of him. However, when separated from the litter, he did not have any scent to follow or siblings to herd him in the right direction. Spitfire stood in one spot, desperately trying to smell or hear his litter mates. If we made a move or noise he would run to us. After a prolonged period of silence, Spitfire tried to find his way to the litter himself and invariably ran into objects.

The regulations we follow under the Ministry of Natural Resources state that unreleaseable wildlife must be put down. This does not sit well with rehabilitators so a great effort was made to find a wildlife facility that would be allowed to care for Spitfire. The Muskoka Wildlife Centre was finally granted permission by the Ministry of Natural Resources to accept Spitfire. Spitfire, renamed Oreo, became good company for their older resident skunk which had epilepsy. We love a happy ending!

The next time you see a skunk, young or old, remember to stand still and enjoy the opportunity. If you are lucky, the skunk will come right up to you. Sometimes they will even rub against you, like a cat, then saunter away; that is an encounter of the greatest kind.



Defensive Secretion:

Skunks have two walnut size glands, one on either side of the anus, that produce a mixture of sulfur containing chemicals, a yellow oil composed of thiols and thioacetate derivatives. At high concentrations, the secretion causes nausea and retching and will act like tear gas if it gets in the eyes. At lower concentrations, it just emanates a very foul odor. The odor is used to repel potential attackers, and, because of it, skunks have very few predators. Most predators, including bears, wolves and foxes, rarely attack skunks, probably for fear of being sprayed. Skunks' main predator is the Great Horned Owl, that like most birds, has a poor sense of smell. Thanks to the strong muscles, located close to the scent glands, skunks can spray with accuracy at their targets up to 15 feet away.

Apart from their distinctive black and white stripes that remind other animals of their spraying power, skunks will also engage in a warning ritual of hisses, foot stamping, and tail-high threat postures before resorting to spraying any threatening or perceived threatening animal. The reason is that skunks carry only enough chemical for five or six sprays, and it takes ten days for their glands to produce the lost chemical supply.

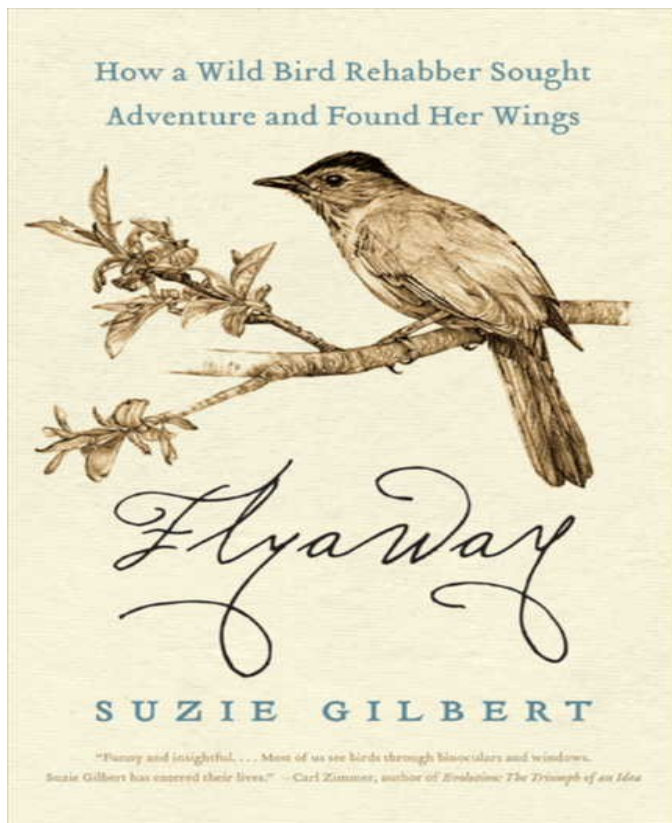


FLYAWAY, How a Wild Bird Rehabber Sought Adventure and Found Her Wings, by NYSWRC member and licensed rehabilitator, Suzie Gilbert

Reviewed by Maggie Ciarcia, a licensed State & Federal wildlife rehabilitator and friend of the author

FLYAWAY, How a Wild Bird Rehabber Sought Adventure and Found Her Wings, by Suzie Gilbert is a front row seat to the daily experiences and emotional trips we all take as wildlife rehabilitators. Like many rehabbers, from a young age Suzie was drawn to birds and eventually as her life unfolded found her calling rehabbing various types of birds, large, small and smelly! As I read Suzie's book, I laughed, cried and shook my head in agreement as her stories unfolded. Dealing with the public, other rehabbers and family is challenging to say the least, but dealing with the life and death of the creatures in our care can be painful. Suzie's personal stories of coping with life, death, letting go and family challenges are told with true feeling and great emotion, her words remind us of what we experience each day as wildlife rehabilitators. **FLYAWAY** is extremely entertaining and recommended reading for the new rehabber, those of us that have been rehabbing a long time or anyone who is involved with helping wildlife.

Suzie Gilbert lives and rehabs in Garrison, New York. She holds State and Federal licenses. Her book is available in hard cover or paperback. It's \$14.99, and you can order it from: <http://www.harpercollins.com/books/9780061563133/Flyaway/index.aspx>



Does Climate Change Affect Hibernating Animals?

Source: Audubon, February 2010

Spring's earlier onset is beginning to cause behavioral changes in some hibernating animals. Marmots and potentially woodchucks are waking up earlier from their winter snoozes, a change that can have fatal consequences.

"If you come out of hibernation and the plants aren't up, but you're up, you're going to starve to death," says Greg Florant, a biologist at Colorado State University who studies woodchucks' hibernation patterns. David Inouye, a University of Maryland biologist, found that marmots are emerging from their burrows about a month earlier than they used to. At least one of these early risers met its death by coyote, which Inouye attributes to the premature wakeup call: The rodent was caught in the open, and its escape burrows were still blocked by snow.

A number of other animals may be experiencing sleep disruptions, too, including bears, chipmunks, and ground squirrels. Some scientists also speculate that white-nose-syndrome, which has led to the death of a million bats, may be exacerbated by warmer climates because the mammals wake up before food is available, thus burning through fat stores and starving.

Although the evidence is preliminary, what scientists are finding provides yet another reason why fighting climate change may help us all sleep better.

Bat Die-off Could have Disastrous Effect on Ecology

By J Benson, The Day at The Day.com

Some of the most common bat species in the Northeast are on the verge of extinction. That's the grim assessment from wildlife biologist Jenny Dickson as White-Nose Syndrome continues into its fourth year of spreading its deadly reach further into hibernating bat populations. No sign of letup or antidote is in sight. The speed with which the disease is decimating bat populations that once numbered in the millions is without comparison to any other wildlife decline in recent memory, Dickson said, and is likely to cause ecological changes that could affect agriculture, forestry and other wildlife.

Notice:

A revised list of migratory birds protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (i.e., the 50 CFR Part 10.13 list) is now available at: [1007.http://www.thefederalregister.com/d.p/2010-03-01-2010-3294](http://www.thefederalregister.com/d.p/2010-03-01-2010-3294). The list has grown from 832 species to 1007, effective March 31, 2010.



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