

# WildThing

Fall 2011

Volume 10, Issue 2

## WILDCARE MAKES WAY FOR DUCKLINGS



*Photo by Susan Berg Davis*

Not only is McCormick's Creek rich in plants, crustaceans, and minnows, but the surrounding woods provide fall acorns, making it the perfect release site for these five orphaned wood ducks.

# WildCare Inc.

Providing professional care to sick, injured, and orphaned wildlife with the hope of returning them to the wild, as well as promoting a biodiverse planet through live animal programming.

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Direct comments to WildThing  
[info@wildcareinc.org](mailto:info@wildcareinc.org).

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The Emeritus Board is selected annually from retired members of the WildCare Board of Directors. These representatives continue to support the Center by contributing their expertise as well as advocacy of WildCare within our community.

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Amanda Holdman: Wildlife  
Jordan Howell: Wildlife  
William McCarthy: Wildlife  
Allie Praeuner: Wildlife  
Will Simmons: Wildlife

## HAPPY 10TH BIRTHDAY TO WILDCARE

As we complete our tenth year of helping area wildlife we reflect on the support of our volunteers, our donors, our interns, our professional and corporate partners, our team leaders, our underpaid part-time staff--and we are humbled. But, we also recognize we need to grow to the next level. Three acres is not enough to house fawns as well as coyotes, and foxes. We need mature trees, water, and fields that will provide natural barriers so these animals don't have to be in our backyards. We need to build a wildlife center complete with a visitor's section for non-releasable wildlife on display. We need full-time staff. We appreciate and support groups who observe and teach about birds, groups who care for gifts of land so that land will not be developed even though our displaced wild mammals and some birds are not welcome on those lands, but there is also a need to help wild animals that present themselves to us right now who are sick, injured, and orphaned. And we know you believe that as well because we are Ten Years Old. Thank you.  
The WildCare Family



President Gabe Hinds

# MAKING WAY FOR DUCKLINGS

By Susan Berg Davis and Amanda Wrigley

**A**corns in the fall is only one reason WildCare chose McCormick's Creek State Park as the release site for its five orphaned wood ducks. They also built nesting boxes.

Why nesting boxes?

"Wood ducks nest in tree cavities 8-16 feet off the ground, and since they have to use old nests that have been abandoned by other animals, they may nest as far as half a mile from a water source," according to Waterbird Team Leader Amanda Wrigley. Sometimes that means an urban area, which offers all kinds of challenges for the ducklings. Wood ducklings get 12-24 hours to dry off before the long jump out of the nest to follow mom to water. Because the primary diet of a newly-hatched duckling is protein-rich insects, it is easy for them to get distracted while following mom. "These treks often involve crossing roads where mothers can be killed by cars," says Wrigley.



Photo by Amanda Wrigley

*Wrigley cautions finders not to put ducklings into a tub of water. It can lead to death. Wood ducks do not produce the oils needed for waterproofing until they are several weeks old so they become chilled and die.*



Photo by Susan Berg Davis

*Before release, fish was added to the diet and because they were kept outside, they had access to a variety of insects.*

The first nine orphans were found by a family working in their garden. Only four of those survived, but the family came to the release to wish them well. The fifth was a singleton that had been washed over the spillway at a lake in Morgan County. No mom in sight. The ducklings that weighed 20 grams were considered critical care and did not survive, even though we did everything we could for them. Immediately after intake they were tube fed every hour 13 hours a day. Tube feeding slowly tapered off as they began to self-feed. Within 2½ weeks all the ducklings were self feeding. Dark greens and tiny live mealworms were supplemented, then largely supplanted, by the Mazuri Waterfowl starter. By four weeks they were eating more greens and learning how to catch crickets.

Wood ducklings are extremely difficult to rehabilitate because they are so sensitive to stress and often refuse to eat in a captive setting. Loud noises or even changes in temperature can cause them to quickly die. Our ducklings were raised off site to control many of these variables.

## THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTERS

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The Cat Care Centre in Spencer:  
Sue Whitman, D.V.M.  
Hillview Veterinary Clinic in Franklin:  
Jennifer Clarke, D.V.M.

# WILDCARE RECEIVES FIRST SORA

by Jan Turner and Amanda Wrigley

**W**ildCare received its first ever Sora rail in early fall, a juvenile female found on the ground in Clay County, just off the road in a wooded area.

The Sora is a small, migratory marsh bird with a slate grey body, a short yellow bill and strong legs. It is 8-10 inches long and weighs only 1.7 to 4 ounces. It is the most common and widely-distributed rail in North America. Its distinctive descending “whinny” call can be easily heard from the depths of the cattails, even though it is difficult to see among the marsh grasses. The Sora’s peak nesting season is May to early July, and it typically lays a clutch of 8-13 eggs which are incubated by both parents. The incubation period is 19 days. The youngsters are precocial and able to walk and swim short distances when they are only a day old and fly within a month. The Sora is a fairly common bird, despite a decrease in suitable habitat in recent years.

For a juvenile without a lot of flight experience, the first big migration is a substantial amount of flight time and shoulder injuries are common. This bird had a soft tissue injury to one shoulder and was unable to use that wing. She also had an upper respiratory infection, which could have come first or could have been a result of being grounded. Volunteers treated the infection with antibiotics and kept the bird closely confined to rest the injured shoulder. Sometimes this type of shoulder injury requires a wing wrap, depending on the severity of the injury; fortunately, a wrap was not required for the little Sora.

The Sora was also a little underweight from being downed, so volunteers increased the fat content in her diet during her two weeks of rehabilitation. A diet of seeds, worms, and minnows helped her to gain weight while at the Center. Minnows are not normally a substantial part of the Sora’s diet, but WildCare doesn’t have access to the high protein crustaceans the bird would eat in the wild. Waterbird Team Leader Amanda Wrigley tried substituting minnows, which are also high in fat and protein. The bird loved them, and this dietary substitution was an important step in readying her for release.



Photo by Susan Berg Davis

*Soras don’t spend a lot of time flying; they tend to run to avoid predators. Even when flushed they usually fly only a short distance to good cover; then land and run to hide.*



Photo by Danny Hofstadter

*Normally, Soras would have been out of Indiana for several weeks by the time the youngster was healthy enough for release; however, this year’s migration was running two to three weeks behind the usual schedule. Volunteers were able to safely release the bird at Goose Pond to make its own way south.*

# MAMMA DID WHAT MAMMAS DO

By Susan Berg Davis

Every year WildCare rears close to 200 Virginia opossum orphans. They don't come in singly or in twos or threes, they come in whole batches. Too often their moms are hit and killed by cars, but they remain alive in her pouch until some kind soul sees them emerging and gets them to us. But one day last spring we also got a live Mama.

She had been grazed by a tire to the point where one eye was bulging way out of socket and her face was bloodied, but her 11 joeys were still nursing away in the pouch. We decided she was in good enough condition to save and if we supported her, she could continue to raise her young family. Further, it would be quite a treat to watch a wild opossum mother raise her brood. Twice a day we applied ocular ointment to her bulging eye so it would not dry out and possibly return to the socket when the swelling subsided, which it eventually did. We cleaned her face. This writer remembers it well. As Raccoon Team Leader it was clear to me how different adult opossums were than raccoons. No way could you clean off the face of an adult raccoon without leather Kevlar gloves. Disposable latex gloves were all that was required. She was very patient with repeated trips to the sink for more clean hot water, and she gratefully accepted the warm electrolyte fluids offered slowly in a syringe.

A visit to the vet confirmed no broken bones, just head trauma. She was kept at home with the team leader and fed a diet high in protein and calcium. Date in she only weighed 6.5 lbs. Today she weighs 11. All her energy was being funneled to her babies.

Ever wonder if opossum moms get a break? The answer is—yes. When the joeys got big enough to leave alone, she would stand and shake her belly to get them to drop. Then she would walk around the house to sniff and eat. Virginia opossums have wonderful noses and use them to snuffle along and explore. The joeys would stay put in their bed until she returned. As they grew, her pouch would almost touch the floor and their tails would hang down out of it as she moved. When they could no longer all get inside, they would sleep right next to her. We don't know if opossums can count, but they do know if one is missing and in distress. One night Mama woke her sleeping guardian Greta Dickerhoof to rescue one curious joey who had become stuck under the refrigerator. When Mama wanted them to go with her, they would ride around on her back pointing their noses toward her spine. When her back was full, at least one could jump on top of her tail and cling to her rump. When the joeys reached 200 grams, they were put in pre-release cages and now are back in the wild. Mama, however, is blind, so is being cared for in a home she knows. Her whiskers tell her when she will bump into something, she uses a litter box, and she has the run of the house. But she did not abandon her babies, and all 11 survived. Mama did what mamas do.



Photo by Judy Beckner

Foster mom Judy Beckner said she tube fed her litter every five hours until they were old enough to lap from a shallow dish. And when you see the runt struggling, you just have to give it extra everything.



Photo by Susan Berg Davis

Virginia opossums are the only marsupial in all of North America. They are relatively unchanged from the time of the dinosaurs. The joeys emerge from the mother after only eleven days and make their way to the pouch, where they continue to develop.



Photo by Susan Berg Davis

WildCare supported Mama with food, medicine, and shelter. She raised her 11 joeys.

# ROUND AND AROUND THEY GO



*The entire footprint of the proposed Raptor Track is only 52X64 feet.*

What WildCare really needs is a place for our large raptors to get flight conditioning. Unlike the linear cages of old, or creance flying, this innovative design offers unlimited opportunities for bald eagles, red-tailed hawks, peregrine falcons, or black and turkey vultures. Three separate pre-release apartments in the center can allow periodic access to the flight track.

The Tony Stewart Foundation has already awarded WildCare 5 thousand dollars to get started. Tony is not only a friend of animals, but he understands the importance of proper conditioning. The blueprint has been purchased; Bloomington's Shelterwood has prepared a pro bono proposal. Please contact WildCare at [info@wildcareinc.org](mailto:info@wildcareinc.org) for a presentation, but please remember that we need our operating funds more than ever. Donations have fallen during the current economic climate, so don't dedicate monies you would normally pledge toward this project. It won't do us any good to have a Raptor Track if there is no WildCare.



*Banking and turning are usually not supported by the more traditional cages. The oval flyway of this Raptor Track is 12 feet in width; its height varies from 10 to 16 feet.*

## LET'S BUILD THIS TOGETHER

Donations toward this project will be honored on plaques secured to the track:

- Checkered Flags: \$5,000 or more
- Crew Chiefs: \$1,000 to \$4,999
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Please do not publish my name

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Email \_\_\_\_\_  Notify me of special events.

Mail to WildCare Inc. 198 N. Hartstrait Road, Bloomington, IN 47404

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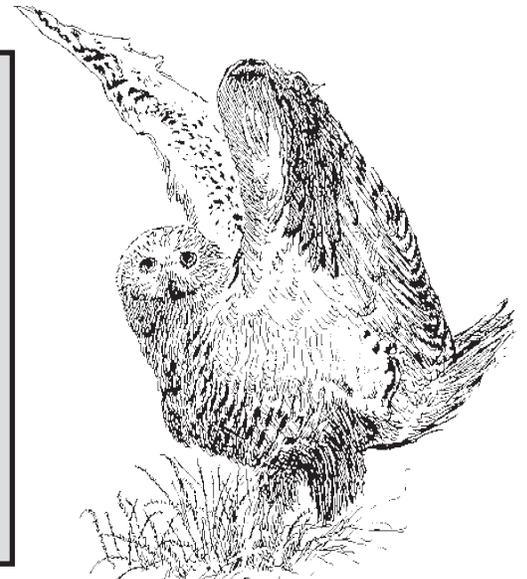
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WildCare Inc. welcomes any inquiries about bequests. Call (812) 323-1313.

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We have a standing order to sell the same day and direct deposit with our bank. It's a great way to save you capital gains and support us at the same time.



Robert Savannah, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

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Susan Klein & Bob Agranoff in honor of their friend Shirley Fitzgibbons

Beverly Etherington in honor of her grandson Austin Dickin, who interned with WildCare, graduated from IU in 2010, and just earned his masters in biomedical sciences at Colorado State University.

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*Photo by Susan Berg Davis*

*Much of the carapace has repaired since the injury, but the severity of the fracture and subsequent bruising and compression has caused significant nerve and tissue damage, so WildCare has a new Eastern Box Turtle Ambassador Tortuga. She cannot move her hind legs well enough to survive in the wild. Found in September 2009 by a PhD student in Purdue's Department of Forestry and Natural Resources, he held her shell together with his hands until they could get her to Bloomington. Check our website for outreach programs with this protected species.*