

WildThing

Spring 2010

Volume 9, Issue 1

WildCare Keeps Them Covered



Photo by Susan Berg Davis

Lack of odor as well as their spots help fawns stay hidden and safe. Their mothers only come to nurse them well after sundown, so we always advise Finders not to assume they are orphaned.

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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July 26-30
from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Students entering grades 3-5 will learn how to share the world with their wild neighbors.

Enrollment is limited to 10.

Applications online at www.wildcareinc.org.

THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTERS

WildCare could not help area wildlife without the financial support of the following:

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WHY I WADE THROUGH OUR HAYFIELDS

By Sue Wunder

While Charlie cut the field for hay this week, I walked well ahead of the sickle bar mower, parting the grasses with my arms, scanning the ground. We knew it was likely that somewhere in the thickly grown field east of the farm house, a newborn fawn lay hidden. It might be old enough to sprint away from the racket on its own, but bittersweet experience had taught us that we couldn't be sure.

This is a precarious time of year for fawns. In late May and well into June, deer bed their babies down in long sheltering grasses and join them in their nests each night to nurse them and sleep. By day though, as the doe browses and feeds in the area, her fawn will lie absolutely alone and still in its hiding place. After its first few weeks of life it knows to move away from an unfamiliar noise, but until that instinct kicks in it is supremely vulnerable, and all too easy to approach.

Years ago, while cutting hay, Charlie and I injured a fawn, so we've worked hard to avoid another casualty.

And so for a few hours the other day I waded through a sea of purple clover, field daisies, and orchard grass, among swallowtails, dragonflies, and buzzing cicadas. A rabbit leapt from its lair, and no doubt a snake or two slithered off as I pioneered the swathing path of the approaching mower.

I came upon a half a dozen places the fawn and deer had lain - oval beds of flattened grass, inviting enough to curl up in myself were it not for the machine at my back. But there was no speckled newborn in any of them. The fawn we had seen earlier in the week must have moved with its mother to another part of the farm. I was tired, my arms itched from endlessly brushing the grass aside, and my legs were hot in their heavy protective jeans. I'd covered every inch of the field ahead of the tractor and, pretty as it was in all that flowery fecundity, it was no stroll through the park.

As Charlie began to mow the last area I'd just crisscrossed, I made a beeline toward the house for a cooling drink, no longer even looking for the fawn. And of course that is when I found it down by the spring in the field's tree-shaded periphery. There was no need to disturb it, this being a bower that the mower would not reach. I watched a while as the fawn slept, its ears swiveling softly in the breeze.

It was about the size of the fawn we'd heard late one afternoon last year crying in vain for its mother. We never knew what became of the doe, but after two days of listening to his little bleats, we took him to WildCare on Bloomington's west side so that they would rear him to yearling size along with other orphans and then reintroduce them to the wild in the fall.

There are plenty of reasons not to take such pains with deer. They are not an endangered species. They invade our gardens and can be a hazard to drivers. If the local population becomes too large for its shrinking habitat, some of the animals fare poorly. But when fawns are bedded in the grass, I find such reasoning flies out the door. And so I wade the hayfields ahead of the mower, looking for newborns who just might be sleeping and need a lift out of harm's way.

Note: This essay was adapted from one that appeared in the *Christian Science Monitor* June 23, 2004. Sue lives with Charlie Gaston in Bloomington on 80 acres of wildlife-friendly woods.



Photo by Susan Berg Davis

Very few fawns really need help. Exceptions would be apparent injuries, dogs in pursuit, or if it's wandering aimlessly crying for its mother. If it looks like this photo, we ask Finders to wait 24-48 hours before bringing it in. A fawn in distress lies on its side instead of the normal position, which is on its stomach with feet under or in front of it.



Photo by Fred Cate

Birth weight is from 4-8 pounds. At one week they can kick and jump. Sometimes they will wander a little. Their eyes start to turn brown from blue. At two weeks their eyes are brown, and they will drink water. They must be formula fed.



Photo by Susan Berg Davis

Wildlife Intern Joey Craig's checking on how the barbed wire injuries are healing is the only reason, other than feeding, that she would be with the fawns. They habituate easily to humans.



Photo by Fred Cate

Finding appropriate habitat for release has been one of our highest rehabilitation priorities. We have always released our yearlings on private land with permission away from populated areas. We always need more Monroe County release sites. Email info@wildcareinc.org if you can help.

THE MIRACLE BIRTH

By Finder Deb Conner

In the last hour before Memorial Day in Warrick County, I happened upon what appeared to be an accident. The emergency lights of the state police car only underscored the trooper with a flashlight when he cried, "Oh, no, God no."

Apparently a very-pregnant doe had been killed shortly before along with one of her unborn twins, but the other twin was lying in the ditch unharmed. As soon as the trooper lowered me into the ditch to scoop up the fawn, she began bleating. We wrapped the little fawn in a blanket, and I headed for home with a baby on board. The next morning I took her to WildCare, where she was pronounced healthy and given deer colostrum. When I called to check a few days later, I was told that she was healthy and thriving.



Photo by Susan Berg Davis

TAKE TIME FOR TURTLES

By: Susan Berg Davis

I always watch for our turtle in the spring hoping to see egg laying, but instead it's always fall when it crosses my path in the driveway—male or female I don't know. Doug and our orange tabby Annie usually get the paper in the morning, but sometimes when I need to put a letter out, I'll make a special trip down the driveway myself, and that's when it happens. Among the fallen leaves and driveway gravel it will be steadily making its way from one side to the other with much purpose.

We always startle each other.

I exclaim and it will first stretch its neck to check out the noise and then start to tuck inside its shell, think better of it, and just wait me out. If I take the time, I'll watch until it finally decides to keep moving. If I don't and try to pass behind it, all legs and head are pulled inside the carapace, or upper shell, while the hinged plastron, or breast plate, allows a total lock down.

Eastern box turtles usually live between 30 and 50 years; we've been here 10. I think it's the same turtle, but I can never remember the distinctive coloration from year to year, so I could be wrong. They have a home range about the size of a football field, and we live on six acres. At first I took great comfort just knowing it was an Eastern box turtle since we are east of the Mississippi River, but I have since learned there are other things to know.

It only takes one trip to the Reptile Room at WildCare to see that.

Their shells are made of bone covered first by living vascularized tissue and then, a layer of keratin. When injured by cars or lawn mowers, the shell has the capacity to regenerate. Granular tissue slowly forms



Photo by Susan Berg Davis

This box turtle came in on September 19th from Low Gap Road with carapace fractures and right bridge abrasions. Even though the weight was good and the eyes clear, it was soon apparent it could have serious and permanent neurological damage. It couldn't use its hind legs and wouldn't eat. Volunteers must manually put it into a shallow pan of water to soak and then take it out each day. The hope is that the brain will heal enough for release, but only lots of time will tell.

and keratin slowly grows over the damage if infection or the flies don't interfere. However, the newly-grown shell will never be as hard as the original piece.

Of the seven turtles healing this winter at WildCare, four have shell issues. These four have had their shells cleaned with diluted Betadine and one or two have had a surgical dressing Tegaderm applied to hold the shell in place as it heals. They have had the benefit of antibiotics, and lots of rest in a clean, warm, and humid environment. Most of them will be released. Instead of hibernating under as much as two feet of loose soil, they instead bask under an ultraviolet light, soak in clean shallow water, and burrow under little newspaper tents. Our rehab turtles don't have to limit their activity to compensate for lack of food, a neat trick warm-blooded animals can't use. Their metabolism doesn't drive their appetite.

More than you would think come to us with ear infections that sometimes prevent their being able to retract their heads. Some have neurological damage from various traumas and some seem to have respiratory illnesses. WildCare tries to give them every opportunity

to heal, as turtles are as slow doing that as they are at living.

Some are shy, some are indifferent, and some are downright curious. The turtle that came to us in July from Garrison Chapel Road is such a one. "Any time someone goes into the room, he pokes his head out and stares, moving his head or body to keep you in his sights," says Reptile Team Leader Amelia Reuter. And some are very particular about what they eat. In the wild it's earthworms, snails, slugs, grubs, beetles, caterpillars, grasses, fallen fruit, etc. They are opportunistic omnivores.

Because they are slow growing (only 1.25 inches long when it hatches from the 3-6 eggs laid each spring), have delayed sexual maturity (between 7 and 10 years old and 5-6 inches in length), and suffer from habitat fragmentation, Indiana law now protects our Eastern box turtles. Their strong homing instinct and strong neural map of their home range mean they will try to return crossing the roads and houses that have chopped up their territory. Reducing their range also means fewer turtles will survive and, thus, the long-range genetic pool suffers. So take time for turtles. Check your lawn before you mow, watch for them along the side of the road and when it's safe, move them in the direction they are headed out of harm's way.



Photo by Susan Berg Davis

With no teeth and only a horny beak, this turtle chunks down its food relying on salivary glands to assist swallowing.

A NATURAL CONNECTION

Anyone wanting to schedule an educational program with one of our animal ambassadors may do so. One third-grade teacher at a private school asks her parents in August each year to sponsor a different animal each month, and she has more checks than she knows what to do with. Each month that child sponsor gets a photo taken beside the animal, and that classroom gets up close and personal with a wild animal. It might be our de-scented striped skunk, Stinker; our American crow, DaVinci; or our Broad-winged Hawk, Hawkeye. It takes science to a whole new level.

Our mammal ambassadors live with licensed guardians. The following description of our Arctic fox one February by Guardian Jan Turner will tell you why.

I went home to make sure Skylar would be protected from freezing rain; I put her warm, fluffy bed into her dogloo, and moved the dogloo to the center so no wind or sleet could get to her. I warmed the ground turkey and hard boiled egg she gets with her dinner. And I put her food dish near the entrance to her dogloo so she could eat without getting wet. At 5 a.m. I got up to check on her. She had removed the bed from the dogloo so she could sleep in the middle of her covered cage and keep track of the back yard happenings. But since she doesn't like to get her dainty little toes wet, she put her warm, fluffy bed on top of her log and balanced there. She's worse than a young child who is told to keep her mittens and scarf on! Skylar now has another fox companion for company, but still loves to do programs. Whenever Jan puts the carrier in the cage, she runs into it and turns around as if to say, "Aren't we there yet?"



Photo by Susan Berg Davis



Photo by Susan Berg Davis

Hazel negotiates space by using his nose and his wonderful ears. He is much more assertive about exploring than Fiver, which is typical male behavior.

In the past year we have added three new ambassadors: a blind male raccoon, Rascal; two blind Eastern cottontails, Hazel and Fiver; and a male Virginia opossum, Jack.



Photo by Susan Berg Davis

Jack was hit by a car and couldn't even drag himself to the side of the road. A Finder brought him in and although he is much stronger now, his hind legs do not function well enough for him to be released. He lost part of one ear, but otherwise appears to enjoy star status at his Guardian's home; he has the run of the house and gets regular supervised outings.



Photo by Susan Berg Davis

Fiver may be blind but she has no trouble staying clean after a snack of lettuce and carrots.

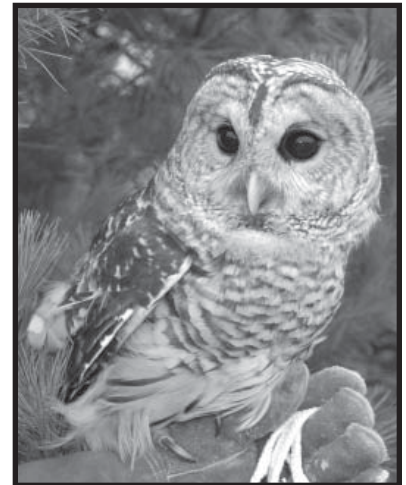


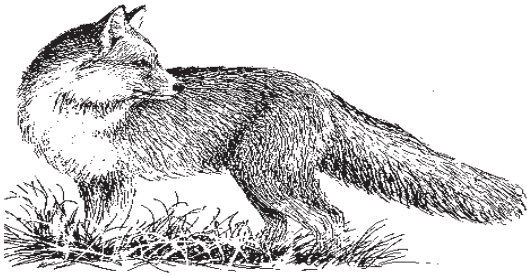
Photo by Susan Berg Davis

Rascal was born blind and became separated from his mother when the cubs started to forage with her. A Finder woke one morning to his screams in her yard. When mom didn't return, she brought him to us.

Ishta April 2007 - January 2010

WildCare is sad to announce the death of our wonderful barred owl. An accident resulting in a wing break was exacerbated by the fact she would not leave the wing wrap alone. She died during surgery. In the time she was an ambassador for her species, she delighted all audiences with her gentle vocalizations and large dark eyes. A cousin of the endangered western spotted owl, barred owls are one of Indiana's medium-sized owls and often seen hunting during late afternoon.





Robert Savannah, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

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To those friends and supporters of WildCare Inc. who wish to help us by means of a provision in their will, the following general form of bequest is suggested.

“I give, devise, and bequeath to WildCare Inc., an Indiana nonprofit, 501 (c) (3) Corporation at 5970 West State Road 48, Bloomington, Indiana 47404, the sum of \$____(or specifically described property. . .)”

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

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THROUGH STOCK TRANSFERS

Call Adam Estes at Hilliard Lyons (812) 332-6333 or (800) 790-6333 and ask for the DTC# to have stock transferred to WildCare Inc. directly from your broker to ours.

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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Photo by Susan Berg Davis

Secretive and solitary describe the American Woodcock, which only visits Indiana for the summer. They stay hidden on damp ground under dense cover. This bird arrived at WildCare on Wednesday, February 24th with signs of neurological trouble and blood in the mouth. They are nocturnal and are never seen to mix with other shorebirds.