

WildThing

Fall 2009

Volume 8, Issue 2

WildCare is. . .



Photo by Susan Berg Davis

Days before their second chance, these Northern Rough-winged Swallows enjoy the fat worms provided by the Lane Vargas Mealworm Farm at WildCare. They are now back at Lake Griffy foraging on the wing.

For the Birds

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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These Tales are FOR THE BIRDS

By Susan Berg Davis

Tale of the Northern Rough-winged Swallows

If you saw a teen clutching a couple birds in his hands walking around near the informal dog park by Lake Griffy, what would you do—look the other way and hope for the best, or gently intervene and offer to help?

Fortunately, these Northern Rough-winged Swallows were transferred to a gentleman who took the time to ask the young man what he planned to do, and when the boy answered he didn't know, the gentleman asked if he could take them to WildCare.

"These birds came to us in a dehydrated and frightened state," recounted one of the Songbird Co-Team Leaders Mary Madore. "We rehydrated with fluids before starting them on tiny bits of wax worms. Forced feeding was mandatory since they didn't gape for us, and without food, they surely would have perished."

After several days, the birds finally started gaping and large quantities of mealworms and bird diet were consumed. Before long they were flying about in their 2'x4' cage so moved to WildCare's outside aviary as the last step before release.

The Sibley Field Guide to Birds of Eastern North America says these uncommon swallows nest singly in holes of cliffs; they aren't even listed in the *Birds of Indiana Field Guide*. But there are Northern Rough-winged Swallows at Lake Griffy, so on the day of release the orphans were canoed out to the site to rejoin the colony. Within seconds of opening the carrier, they took off using their strong, broad wings and short tails to guide them to a Sycamore branch.



Photo by Mary Madore

These Northern Rough-winged Swallow nestlings were found near Lake Griffy. Cold, frightened, and starving they were ultimately released back to the colony as healthy adults.

Continued on page 4



Photo by Tyler James

Joined by other Northern Rough-winged Swallows on a Sycamore branch over the water, the WildCare orphans take their place with the colony on release day.



Photo by Tyler James

Large, broad wings help this Northern Rough-winged Swallow move from the safety of WildCare to its natural place in the world.

Continued from page 3

Tale of the Whip-poor-will

“This nocturnal Whip-poor-will, with its large eyes and white neck strip, arrives in Indiana mid-April and starts to migrate south mid September,” says Co-Songbird Team Leader Mary Madore. “A small beak opens to a surprisingly large cavernous mouth, which helps the bird eat on the wing, both at dawn and dusk. Roosting in leaves on the ground makes this bird vulnerable to attack, and this one arrived without a tail.” At this writing it’s in recovery, eating nearly 100 mealworms and/or other insects a day. Anthony’s Pet Shop donated a couple dozen crickets, for example, when Songbird Co-Team Leader Gabe Hinds went to get them. According to *The Herald-Time* columnist Dawn Hewitt, the last day whip-poor-wills migrate from Bloomington is October 20th, so we’re all rooting for the tail to grow out, or we’ll have to hook him up with a ride south.

Update: The tail did grow out, the flight test was passed, and the whip-poor will was released to migrate with the others.



Photo by Susan Berg Davis

Whip-poor-wills migrate starting mid September, so WildCare is hoping its tail will grow long enough by October 20th, the last day they leave this area; otherwise, we’ll have to find a ride south for it.



Photo by Susan Berg Davis

American Robins were released at a Wings of Hope fundraiser for area boys burned in a tragic fire. WildCare has taken in roughly 88 a year since 2001 during In Season.

Tale of the American Robins

In April two area youngsters were seriously burned in a tragic accident. Ten-year-old Nicolas Decker of Bloomfield died at the end of May. He was in the fourth grade. The other 11-year-old boy, Joshua Merrit of Crane Village, was in the burn unit at Riley when the community held a Wings of Hope Fundraiser in June, but died a week later. Two of WildCare’s rehabilitated robins were released as part of the fundraising ceremony: one for each boy. It was a fitting bird of hope because American Robins are familiar, widespread, and beloved. They are often seen on lawns searching for earthworms and since 2001, Wildcare has averaged about 88 robin intakes each In Season. When they fledge, many become victims of cat attacks because the parents need to feed them on the ground for a couple days. Keeping cats indoors during these times is important. These robins were raised by volunteers who fed them with every timer alert from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., seven days a week. Hatchlings start at every 20 minutes, nestlings every 30 minutes to 2 hours depending on age and health. Finally, they are introduced to flying and foraging in the Aviary outside. WildCare hopes the inspiration of their second chance brought some measure of comfort to the families of the boys.

Tale of the Barn Swallow

Once or twice each In Season (May through August) WildCare will do an intake on a bird covered with flies and fly trap glue, and such was the case for this little barn swallow. “Fortunately, the bird had been kept warm and was brought in promptly after discovery,” observed Co-Songbird Team Leader Mary Madore. A new surgical product, STR, was used to to remove the glue—and with the glue came the flies. The bird was fed lots of mealworms from WildCare’s farm and then released back to the Finder’s yard. Often birds that have been treated by Finders do not survive. The Songbird Team suspects it’s because the birds haven’t been kept warm in the process of glue removal and they are extremely weakened from the fight to escape. Because it’s in the best interest of birds to remain lean and light, struggling to escape can easily place it in an emaciated condition. “Also the vegetable oil, which some use to remove the sticky glue, coats the feathers and further complicates the issue of keeping warm,” cautions Madore.



Photo by Elizabeth Pollack

Cleaning fly trap glue from a barn swallow takes patience and a lot of time by Co-Songbird Team Leader Mary Madore.

Wild Again: Red Fox Release 2009

by Jan Turner

Saturday, September 12 dawned warm and sunny—a perfect day for a fox release. The six red fox kits that had lived for five months at the home of the team leader were now strong, healthy, and ready to take their places in the wild. Preparations were made days in advance: the makeshift den was removed from the pre-release cage and three large carriers were placed along one wall so that the kits could become accustomed to them prior to the trip to the release site.

The fox kits were from diverse backgrounds. The first to arrive was a male found in a front yard in Clay County. Within a few days he was joined by a little emaciated female seen wandering for several days near the T.C. Steele Memorial. Two kits were transferred to WildCare from other licensed facilities so that they could be raised with others. Babies continued to arrive over the next few weeks; each was integrated into the group of adopted siblings following quarantine. The group eventually numbered six: three males, three females. Perhaps the most noteworthy of the new arrivals was a tiny kit that came to be known as “Linus.”



Photo by Fred Cate

Landowner David Epeards helps Team Leader Jan Turner move the carriers with the foxes into position on his 100 acres of land with a spring-fed creek. The Epeards took all 6 of the red foxes into their woods and meadows. Our release site owners must promise to protect wildlife when they sign a consent form.

Animals in rehabilitation at WildCare are not given names; our goal is to keep them as wild as possible until they are ready for release. Individuals within a group are distinguished by various identifiers—pipe cleaner collars for the fawns, nail polish on the tails of opossum joeys, dots of nontoxic magic marker on the tummies of infant squirrels. Distinguishing marks are seldom necessary for fox kits as each individual is easily discernible. In any event, there would have been no mistaking “Linus” for one of the other kits.



Photo by Susan Berg Davis

The lost, frightened, and helpless look of our mammal orphans is universal; they can't understand why they are so cold, hungry, and alone, and they aren't sure what's going to happen next. Some deal with fear by becoming very quiet, but others, fight back, so it's always a good idea to wear gloves as Team Leader Jan Turner is doing.

In late April, fox team leader Jan Turner received a call from a facility in Iowa that had just received a tiny red fox. Logistics were discussed, and two volunteers from the Wildlife Lodge and Clinic transported him to Indiana. He was transferred to WildCare at 11pm on April 30 in the parking lot of a gas station in Greencastle. The newcomer, a tiny ball of traumatized fluff with needle-sharp teeth, was placed on a heating pad for the late-night drive back to Bloomington. His crate was outfitted with a carrier lined with soft underpads and the exhausted little kit was tucked in for the night, or so everyone thought. The remaining hours of darkness were filled with soulful wails as he let everyone know just how unhappy he was to be alone.

Early the next morning, crates were cleaned, meals prepared, water bowls freshened, and toys replaced. A soft baby blanket was added to each carrier and dirty laundry removed. The tiny newcomer played with the ball and the chew toy, but his favorite object was the blanket. No enticement could convince him to relinquish it. He dragged it around the crate like a child with a beloved stuffed toy and never let it out of his sight. It was a momentous day when his quarantine ended and the well-worn blanket was replaced by new playmates. In this rare case it was appropriate that a rehab animal be given a name.

During the weeks prior to release, the kits grew by leaps and bounds. They learned to share the toys and food (a trait that does not come naturally to a fox), and to depend on each other for support and companionship rather than the care giver. They now bore no resemblance to the terrified kits that had arrived in the spring. Each week they became more wild, and the release date was set.

Release days almost always present challenges. The animals sense that something is up and evade capture at all costs. Team leaders as well as animals are nearly exhausted by the time the carriers are filled and ready for transport to the release site; there was no reason to think that the fox release would deviate from the norm.

However, this capture was rather anticlimactic. When the fox and raptor team leaders entered the cage, four of the kits walked calmly into carriers and lay down. The remaining two were soon caught and placed in carriers, and the trip to the release site began.

Upon arrival at the site, the group attending the release waded across the creek to the meadow, set the carriers down, and opened the doors. The kits that had been so anxious for freedom now balked at leaving the relative safety of the carriers. Eventually they began to venture forth and explore their new home. Some splashed in the creek while others wandered through the meadow and adjacent wooded areas. After watching for a few minutes as the foxes rediscovered freedom, the group loaded the empty carriers into vehicles and left the area, happy to have witnessed the foxes' return to the wild. It is



Photo by Fred Cate

Transition from captivity is different for each fox. Some are hesitant to leave the carrier. Others, bolt to freedom. “Linus” paused for one last look at his human foster mom before returning to the wild.

these moments in every rehabber's life that make all of the work, the worry, and the occasional heartache worthwhile.

SOME WILDLIFE GET A SECOND CHANCE



WildCare held its 4th annual A Second Chance benefit this year with Honorary Chairs Bob Zaltsberg and Mary Catherine Carmichael as well as Honored Guest Mayor Mark Kruzan. The Spirit of this event and the mission of WildCare are captured by Co-Songbird Team Leader and longtime volunteer's following poem.

“The Rehabber’s Dream”

by: Natalie Oliphant McKamey

*Oh, wild ones,
Run free and roam!
Let hooves, paws, or wings,
Carry you home.*

*Be not afraid
To soar, climb, or scurry.
Time is a-wastin'—
Why are you not in a hurry?*

*A moment's pause—
Hush the hoof, calm the claws;
I'll stop for a moment
And be still, my paws.*

*A single, backward glance,
A knowing, bonding stare,
As if to accept a second chance,
And say “thank you” for your care.*

*A single moment's glance—
No language here is needed—
A shared experience,
And then your call is heeded.*

*You turn on tender, padded foot
And tiptoe into the brush;
A tear is gently falling
As the quiet brings its hush.*

*You know not your final destination,
Or even your direction.
With padded foot and a second chance,
Instinct now guides your intention.*

*Go forth, oh wild one,
And find your destination!
We wish you a safe journey,
Bittersweet our contemplation—
This moment our work's culmination!*

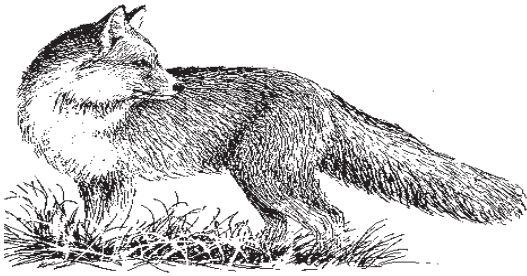
*Be free, oh wild one,
For with me you cannot stay.
This is nature's way!
A second chance,
A backward glance,
And you are on your way!*

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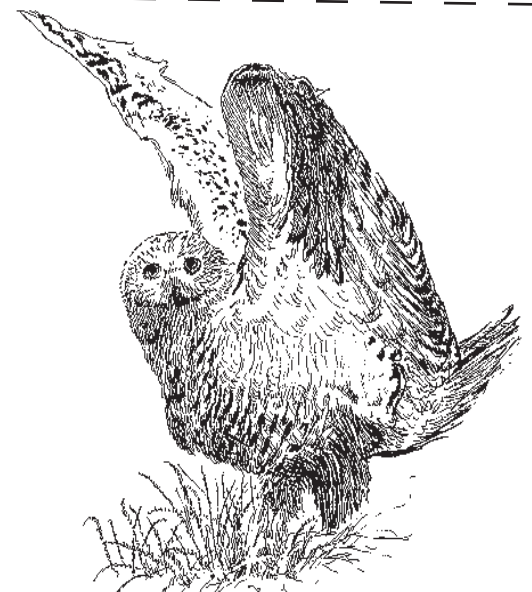
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“I give, devise, and bequeath to WildCare Inc., an Indiana nonprofit, 501 (c) (3) Corporation at 5970 West State Road 48, Bloomington, Indiana 47404, the sum of \$____(or specifically described property. . .)”

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



Robert Savannah, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

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Photo by Fred Cate

Rosie
March 2003 - October 2009

WildCare is sad to announce the death of our much-loved Eastern Screech Owl Ambassador "Rosie." For six years this nearly blind owl not only delighted audiences with her diminutive size and mighty spirit, but helped surrogate our other orphaned wild screech owlets. She enjoyed her own apartment in the Owlery with a skylight and 3 windows. She will be missed.