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Sharing information and knowledge for the benefit of native wildlife

Fawn Rehabilitation Grows on the Coast

by Linda Bergman-Althouse



When William "Danny" Nicely isn't helping the staff at The Outer Banks Wildlife Shelter (OWLS) in Newport, NC release a Bald Eagle, he's tending to his 2010 herd of seventeen fawns. A thirty year veteran of the Marine Patrol for Coastal North Carolina, Danny decided two years ago to do something no one else was doing down east on the coast; rehabilitate fawns.

From 2006 to 2008 Dan was the man to call for triage and transport of fawns, but the success rate for those fawns turned out to be bleak to dismal with the majority dying within three weeks of delivery to a rehabber hours inland. Danny theorized at the time and has since come to believe the stress involved in traveling and switching caretakers hindered the fawns' survival. Encouraged by Herta Henderson, a staff member at OWLS, Danny decided to take the steps required by the NC Wildlife Resources Commission to obtain a primary fawn rehabilitation permit. Away from highways and down a white graveled lane deep in the woods, he had the room to oblige fawns on twelve acres adjacent the Croatan Forest. He was willing to build a barn and pen to accommodate them, definitely motivated and passionate enough to see this through, and his supportive wife, Margaret, was willing to accept this new rehab life and help if needed. During the WRNC 2008 Symposium, Danny took the Fawn Rehabilitation Course presented by WRNC Board Member, Beth Knapp-Tyner. His wildlife rehabilitation mentor, Herta, also took the course that day to obtain a secondary fawn rehab permit. Armed with recent accomplishment of the Fawn Rehab Course, an Associate's Degree in Fish & Wildlife Management from Wayne Community College, and his love for the animal, as well as the recognized rehabilitation need, he submitted the required paperwork and was subsequently granted a primary North Carolina Fawn Rehabilitation Permit. He immediately went to work. His first stop was a visit to his Veterinarian to let him know his permit was now a reality, and he was in business. Danny's new selfless mission inspired the Veterinarian who encouragingly agreed to provide medical treatment as necessary. Fortunately, taking a fawn to the vet is an easy drive of less than five miles from Danny's home. Danny waded shallowly into fawn rehab the first two permitted years with only 3 to 5 fawns a year, but in 2010 the number



shot up dramatically which could be due to a few reasons he states.



“Loss of habitat, mainly. All the development west of the beach areas causes more deer interaction with people, vehicles, dogs and other competing animals. And also because people know I’m here, so they don’t have to call someone farther away.” Danny reports the most wide spread medical problems within his fawn population this year were bouts of diarrhea and deer mange which afflicted five of the fawns, but fawns received due to dog attacks evidence the most serious injuries which usually requires sutures, surgery, splints and wound care. He keeps a schedule of four Purina Kid Supplement feedings a day and as the fawns mature, they graduate to grasses, soybeans, apples, goat feed, sweet potatoes and corn.

Danny says tending to animals is his most enjoyable hobby, although the work is not easy and never ending. If or when he gets the time, he loves to farm, especially grasses for the deer. While the fawn food prep is continual and cleaning and hauling tiring, Danny is always astonished and rejuvenated when he takes a peek at the social behaviors of the fawns. “It’s amazing to see them interact; how they check out the newcomers and very quickly accept them into their group where they basically foster each other.” When I asked about his favorite fawn rehab experience, he didn’t hesitate saying “All the releases. They’re all my favorites.”



Then he went on to talk about his first fawn from Beaufort two years ago. The fawn was lame because he was walking on his ankles with his front hoofs bent under. The fawn was diagnosed with malnutrition, but with Danny’s constant care, the fawn eventually stood up on his hoofs and could soon out run the other fawns in the pen. The recollection of that fawn brought Danny around to talking about Cotton from South River. He couldn’t help but name her because she required more time, attention and babying than most. Bit by a venomous cottonmouth on the end of her nose, her face, nose and mouth were so swollen she could not bottle feed. Pan lapping worked better for her, although other fawns soon surpassed her in size. “She’s grown now and doing fine today but doesn’t wander too far from the barn and pen yet. That snake bite was serious and her condition touch and go, so she’s been with me the longest and will probably stay close by for a while. Of course, one of the goals in fawn rehab is to limit human contact to prevent imprinting, which is always a challenge you have to stay focused on,” Danny states, “especially when you are their sole source of food and care. Blind feedings are my M-O.” Another challenge Danny faces with the fawns is how strong they become as they grow. A few times they escaped the pen by bumping or pushing their weight against the gate or literally running through the fence. They didn’t go far and were easy to round up, but what he’s learned they are capable of caused him to mend and reinforce fencing and the gate to a point that ensures the only way they can get out is if they sprout wings and fly. Danny always utilizes a soft release after opening the gate to their new world in the Croatan Forest, allowing the young deer to return to the barn and pen for supplemental feedings (breakfast and dinner) and safety, if they so choose. “I’m always rethinking my approach and methods to ensure I keep doing it better each year.” When asked how long he sees himself in the biz of fawn rehabbing, he stated “I can’t imagine not doing it. I love it. The satisfaction I feel from seeing them make it is overwhelming. I noticed a couple of my releases in the field across the way this morning. That’s a great feeling.”

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