

# WRNC



*Sharing information and knowledge for the benefit of native wildlife.*

A Quarterly Newsletter

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**Detective work**

WRNC student liaison Jenessa Gjeltema strapped on the snake chaps and spent the summer tracking birds for the state Wildlife Resources Commission.

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Photo by Jeff Lewis

**What to say about snakes**

WRNC Board President Elizabeth Hanrahan has created a brochure for her local SPCA to educate the public about snakes. Page 27



**A cruel world**

When do injuries to wildlife constitute cruelty? Page 11

## Chimney Swifts? Relax!

By Shirley Needham

Help! I have a rattlesnake in my fireplace!  
That's the call that comes in late June or early July . . . and you know you're going to be receiving Chimney Swifts. The very first preparation long before that initial call is to study the natural history of the species.

The Chimney Swift (*Chaetura Pelagica*) is found primarily in the eastern half of the United States and Canada. Before North America was settled, they lived in large hollow trees but as lands were cleared, competition for the remaining trees became intense, and as the smallest of tree users, swifts adapted to chimneys and developed a relationship with humans that continues today.

Part of the fun of rehabbing swifts is knowing you're not going to be able to imprint or tame. They are, by their very living arrangements, already habituated to humans.

These tiny blackish-gray birds average a weight of only 22-24 grams (less than 1 oz). They have a wing span of about 12 to 12.5 inches and yet fly all the way to the upper Amazon River Basin in South America to spend the winter, and then make the long trip back to the same area, sometimes to the very same chimney, the following spring. They arrive in the Carolinas generally around the first week of April, begin mating and nesting in May and will begin hatching by the end of June or the first week in July. Babies stay in the chimney about 30 days. They will start gathering in large flocks and begin migrating in late August. They are generally all gone by late October, depending on the weather. When they leave the chimney each morning, they spend the entire day on the wing collecting thousands of those pesky mosquitoes, flies, gnats and flying termites. If people are lucky, they can see them re-enter the chimney each evening at dusk to settle in for the night.

## Responding to the call

Rehabbers often get a call when babies and nests fall into a fireplace. If the babies do not yet have their eyes open, or the homeowners know for sure the birds have been down for a time, I take the birds in and check them. Because of the time of the year, assume dehydration. If the eyes are still closed, keep for rehabilitation. If the eyes are open, and it's a case of hunger and dehydration, treat for both, then try to talk the homeowners into letting you put the swifts back up the chimney as soon as possible. Most of the time I am successful with that. However, if the birds come down a second time, I take them into rehab. Occasionally the parent swifts will come down into the fireplace and feed the babies. This should be encouraged as long as there is a safe screen between the swifts and the living area of the house. It also depends on the type of damper on the chimney and whether the young will be able to attach to the chimney wall and climb or fly back up.

If the caller complains about the noise or doesn't like having birds living that close, explain they are a protected species and will be there for only a very short time. You might also mention what wonderful little bug catchers they are. Tell them the fascinating natural history of the bird, and, no, they don't carry diseases and . . . well, just keep talking fast. This is your big chance to fulfill the single most important function of wildlife rehabilitation. Educate, educate, educate. Sometimes you can get them so interested in the outcome for these marvelous little creatures, they will become rehabilitation supporters. I've had people call me year after year and proudly report on the activities of "their" Chimney Swifts. If the noise is an issue, suggest a baffle (insulation or foam) at the



*Photo by Dan Kaiser*

### **A Chimney Swift descends while carrying food.**

damper level. Most of the noise starts about 14 days after hatching, and they leave the chimney at 30 days. Most homeowners, once they hear your explanation, will let the birds continue to live in the chimney. If they really don't want birds in their chimney, suggest capping, but only after migration is complete. There is only one situation where I automatically take swifts into rehab, and that's from the home of some Caribbean Islanders who believe having a bird inside a dwelling is a sign of impending death. Their fear is so real and so great that trying to overcome it is a waste of time and a probable death warrant for the birds.

### **Birds raising birds**

Both parents build the nest, incubate and feed the nestlings. They usually only have one brood, with an average of 4-5 eggs, but will sometimes try again if the first nest fails. The flimsy, stick nest is glued to the inside of the chimney using the parents' saliva. If, by this time, you have convinced the homeowners they WANT to have swifts in their chimney, suggest they have their fireplace cleaned annually to remove the soot. If there is a large soot buildup, the nest is more likely

to fall during damp and humid weather . . . in other words in the Carolinas, most of the time!

The tiny altricial hatchlings arrive totally naked but already have the beginning of those pointed pins on emerging tail feathers and have very sharp claws that allow them to cling to most textured surfaces as if they possess prehistoric Velcro. At no point in their life can swifts perch, stand or walk, so they must have access to a nesting or roosting site where they can "hang out." There is only one close avian relative to the swift family and that is the hummingbird . . . admit it, you thought it was going to be the swallow, didn't you?

At just a few days old, swifts begin to get a grayish tone to their skin as the pinfeathers appear, giving them a bizarre, porcupine look. From about 10 days on, the feather coating or sheath begins to drop off, and the black feathers will be present. At about 14-16 days, the eyes will open, although birds that have been under extreme stress, hunger or dehydration will sometimes open their eyes earlier. By about 21 days, their feathers are out of the sheath (other than around the face), and they will begin practice flapping, sometimes

jumping straight backward before realizing they're not holding on to anything. Then with a totally panicked look on their face, they will re-grasp the nearest surface. They have such wonderful expressive faces, and you can just see the "what the #%^& just happened there?" look. By Day 30, they literally, and figuratively, take the leap of faith from the top of the chimney and into the wild blue yonder.

The only time Chimney Swifts become territorial is during nesting season. Each chimney only has one nest. After nesting season, they become communal again and start gathering in large flocks before fall migration. One of the most satisfying activities connected to swifts is helping with the fall migration roost count. There are sites in the Winston-Salem area, for example where thousands of swifts gather nightly in one smokestack. Watching them swirl and drop into the chimney is an amazing sight, and I encourage everyone to get involved in counting and protecting these sites. For more information go to [www.ChimneySwifts.org](http://www.ChimneySwifts.org). This is the home organization for Paul and Georgean Kyle, Chimney Swift rehabilitators and researchers extraordinaire.

## Getting started

O.K., you've tried all the above, nothing worked, and you still are going to be presented with a box of loud, raspy-voiced, bobble-headed baby swifts. What do you do first? Yell for HELP! Nah, relax and enjoy the ride.

My first and most repetitive rule for dealing with Chimney Swifts: Wash your hands. Every time, often, always. I even wash when I'm going from one container to another until I am sure each group is healthy. If you have long or acrylic nails, please consider trimming them for swift



season. The area under the nail is a perfect petri dish for breeding bacteria and sooner or later you will have a Chimney Swift try to swallow your finger. If you smoke . . . O.K., O.K., I won't nag about that, but please wash your hands extra thoroughly.

Make sure your size-appropriate housing is ready. If the babies are not completely feathered, use heating pads set on low with a source of humidity in the container. If the babies are younger than 7-10 days old, use the smallest of the plastic reptile containers (**Photo 1**). Wrap a piece of cardboard or rigid plastic grid in soft sweatshirt or T-shirt fabric. Do not use any type of terry cloth with swifts to avoid the toes getting tangled and damaged in the loops. Place the cloth-covered piece at an angle against the side and be sure it is down far enough on the side of the container that they can't crawl over the sides and out. Most swifts will cling to that surface almost immediately. Leave a soft padded space in the bottom for the really tiny

ones and then place a piece of paper towel or tissue in the bottom for frequent, easy cleanup. Consider using duplicates of all housing so nestlings can be fed and transferred from one to the other to avoid frequent handling. The quality of the feathers is very critical for swifts, so I try not to handle them more than necessary. As they grow and become more active, I switch them to larger containers (**Photo 2**). To safely detach a swift from its bedding, keep in mind all 4 toes point forward most of the time, so if you bring your fingers up from behind and keep nudging them, they'll end up in your hand. They have one toe that does go backward but they have the ability to swivel it forward when they're "hangin' out." When swifts come in initially, it's a good idea to check toes to make sure they're all there and in good shape. A swift with missing sharp toes will be at a serious disadvantage in the wild.

So, they're at the door. Your containers are ready and you've washed your hands. You will assume

they're somewhat or severely dehydrated, and have your oral solution ready and warmed.

Before discarding the arrival box or container, check for droppings. A normal dropping will be wet looking, consisting of a dark solid portion and white uric acid with the dark portion being the largest percentage confined to one end. **(Photo 3)** If the parents have been feeding the babies up to the point of them falling, the droppings should be fairly normal. If they've been down in the ashes of a fireplace, they will have a dull, dry look to them. It is especially important to check the droppings if the birds are arriving from another rehabilitator where they presumably have been fed. Brown and pasty droppings indicate an incorrect diet or a bacterial infection. Fluid therapy protocol should be started immediately for the first reason and possibly antibiotics for the second.

All new arrivals should be kept in separate containers from current residents. Make a quick assessment of the droppings, count toes, and check for parasite overload. Feather lice are the only parasites that seem to arrive with swifts. I use a Q-tip dipped in Sevin dust and very gently wipe the area under the wings, the back of the neck and the area around the tail feathers. Keep away from the eyes and head. Get a quick weight on a gram scale to use as a benchmark and place in the correct size container.

## Rehydration

Under no circumstances should a cold or dehydrated bird be given solid food. First give 3-4 drops of warmed fluid from a curved-tip irrigating syringe (Photo 4). I use Lactated Ringers Solution or Pedialyte mixed with a tiny bit of Nutri-cal. This provides electrolytes and easily digestible calories without stressing the digestive system.



Administer every 15 minutes until you see a fresh dropping. Sometimes holding the swift over the back of the artificial nesting area will stimulate it to provide a dropping. You have washed your hands, right? If you're satisfied with the dropping, give one small mealworm each hour along with 3-4 more drops of the fluid mix. The nares on the swift beak are quite far forward so care should be given when offering the fluids. As the droppings improve, the number of mealworms can be gradually

increased but if no progress is seen, decrease the solid food temporarily. The calories in the fluid solution are sufficient to keep a swift going for at least 24 hours.

## Saliva transfer

Chimney Swifts come out of the egg with a sterile digestive system. If I'm going to lose swifts, it is invariably when they come in very tiny, and I have no older swifts to use for saliva transfer. Swifts receive the boost for their immune system over a period of the first few days from their parents while being fed. The live culture in yogurt helps somewhat, but nothing is as good as being able to take a mealworm, swabbing it in the mouth and throat of an older, healthy bird, then feeding to the very young. Truly an amazing technique. However, do not try to use the saliva of another species of bird. Only same-species saliva is effective.

## Substitute diet

Those of you who are familiar with the Kyle's methods will recognize that, for the most part, I stick with

their advice. They are the only Chimney Swift rehabilitators I'm aware of that have positive band returns. In other words, they know for a fact their birds were healthy enough for the grueling journey to South America for the winter and a successful return flight in the spring. Until someone else proves they can do that with their methods, I'll continue following the Kyle's route with some minor modifications.

In the wild, Chimney Swifts are exclusively insectivores, and I do not feed any diet that does not have insects in it, no matter how often the diet is touted as being nutritionally complete. There is also no benefit to the swifts in using a syringe for feeding. Most syringe feeding consists of one food source, and one syringe going from bird container to bird container with the very real potential for bacterial infections being passed from one to the other. I use only rubber coated tweezers but know of other successful rehabilitators who use forceps or stamp tweezers to present the insects. I, however, am an absolute klutz with forceps so will stick with my trusty tweezers! Swifts have no true crop and feeding has to be every 20 minutes for about the first 10 days, with the time between feedings increased slowly as the birds age. Even after fully grown, I feed at least once an hour from sunrise to about 9 p.m.

I use only small mealworms that have been raised on ground waterfowl chow and wheat bran supplemented with carrots, apples and an occasional piece of lettuce. Part of the colony is refrigerated and only an adequate working supply kept out for feeding. Drown the mealworms in room temperature water for at least an hour before

## INFORMATION SOURCES

*Chimney Swifts, America's Mysterious Birds above the Fireplace*, by Paul & Georgean Kyle, 2005, can be ordered through Driftwood Wildlife Association at [DWA@austin.rr.com](mailto:DWA@austin.rr.com)

*Rehabilitation and Conservation of Chimney swifts (Chaetura pelagica)*, Fourth Edition, 2004, by Georgean Z. Kyle and Paul D. Kyle, can be ordered through Driftwood Wildlife Association at [DWA@austin.rr.com](mailto:DWA@austin.rr.com)

*Comparative Avian Nutrition*, by Kirk C. Klasing, UCal, Davis, 1998

Jayne Amico, (State and Federal permits) The Recovery Wing, Southington, Connecticut, [www.therecoverywing.org](http://www.therecoverywing.org), be sure to check out her fake brick chimney.

Liz Hatton, (State and Federal permits) Songbirds of Indiana Rehabilitation, Westfield, Indiana

Linda Hufford, (State and Federal permits), Austin County, Texas

Michele Kline, (State and Federal permits) HOPE Wildlife Rehabilitation, Crystal River, Florida

## SUPPLY AND PRODUCT SOURCES

**Mealworms and Waxworms:** Nature's Way, Ross, Ohio. (800) 318-2611

**Nutri-cal:** Evesco Pharmaceuticals, Buena, New Jersey, your veterinarian or veterinary supply catalogs.

**Plastic Coated Tweezers:** No longer available and I guard my remaining few fiercely! Stamp tongs can be purchased through a stamp collector's store and cause less hand fatigue than forceps. Several sizes and shapes available but those with narrow, blunt tips are recommended.

**Osteo-Form:** Vet-A-Mix, Shenandoah, Iowa, your veterinarian or veterinary supply catalogs.

**TwinLab SuperRich YeastPlus:** Ideasphere, Inc., American Fork, Utah. Can be ordered [www.vitaminshoppe.com](http://www.vitaminshoppe.com), through or health food stores

**BION TEARS:** Lubricant Eye Drops, Alcon Laboratories, Ft. Worth Texas or at Walmarts and local pharmacies.

feeding to the swifts. When the swifts first come in for rehab, and for the first couple of feedings each morning, I use the Kyle's "dip" composed of equal parts of active-culture PLAIN yogurt, Nutri-cal and Yeast Plus. This mixture must never be used longer than 2-3 hours to prevent spoilage. Each mealworm is then dipped in the mixture before feeding. Since this mixture is sticky, it can also be a recipe for disaster if not carefully

given. After reaching their optimum weight (22-24 grams), I only use the dip for the first couple of feedings of the day.

A new study has just been published in Great Britain regarding the calcium requirements of the Common Swift. It's believed that the general lack of calcium in their diet may be one reason why young swifts develop so slowly and spend so long before flight (30 days) compared to other small

birds. Following the advice of Jayne Amico (The Recovery Wing, Southington, Connecticut), I have begun sprinkling the mealworms with calcium and vitamin-D (Osteo-Form) from a salt shaker for the remaining feedings of the day.

### Cleanliness next to impossible

And did I mention you should wash your hands? All feedings utensils should be sterilized at the end of each day. Because of the swifts' normal habit of bobbing their heads around frantically, feeding without getting them covered with the mixture is very tricky. I have found if I place a finger along side the head of each swift, it will turn its head in that direction, try to swallow my finger, and then I can quickly pop in a worm. Go up and down the row at least twice in the first feeding of the day before using the sticky mixture to let them get over the frantic stage. Then as some of the head bobbing stops and they settle down, dip the worms. There will always be at least one swift in each group who insists on being fed with its head in the down position. That would be quite normal in the nest as the parent will sometimes cling to the side of the nest while the nestlings hang their heads over the edge. This presents a problem though when feeding in captivity because you will almost always be feeding from overhead. If you move the swift over to the side of the container, away from the other swifts, they will sometimes allow top feeding. Or you may just have to feed it anyway you can but if the head is in the down position, make sure that the food is being swallowed and not dropped to the floor of the container. The foam hospital disposable toothbrushes dipped in clean warm water are wonderful for cleaning the heads and beaks after the meal, as are small, soft paintbrushes (Photo 4).



If older fledglings are brought in, some may have to be carefully forced until they learn to accept food from the tweezers. The easiest way for me (translate that as there is no easy way) is to sit down with a cloth on my lap, turn the swift away from me and using the thumb and forefinger, gently open the mouth, being careful not to scissor the beak. Then using the other hand, pop in a worm. This is all while the bird is bobbing, weaving and climbing up the cloth. But swifts are such smart little birds -- it doesn't take long for them to catch on to gaping. Be extra careful not to get food in a swift's nares as it will harden and be extremely difficult to remove.

Weighing the swifts daily can be helpful in knowing whether progress is being made, and it's relatively easy when they're young. Just place them on a soft cloth and put them on the scale. The older ones are not as cooperative, and I usually slip them into a mealworm bag and quickly weigh, remembering, of course, to subtract the weight of the bag if you

don't have a Tare function on your scale. According to statistics kept through the years, a weight gain of no less than one gram per day should be seen for the first 3 weeks. After they begin flying, a fluctuation in their weight is normal, and as long as it's in the 21-24 grams range isn't cause for concern.

As an added note for centers with rotating volunteers, chimney swifts do seem to do better if there is some consistency in their caretakers, and they will recognize and respond to particular people while raising the alarm call when strangers are present. But once they have been released and recaptured, they show no recognition or affection for their former caregivers. Ungrateful wretches.

### I want out! I want out!

The day will eventually arrive when you remove the lid of the container in the morning, a swift pops out and flutters to the floor. Once they're out of the box, they definitely do not want to go back in. I spoke with many swift rehabilitators before writing this article and was fascinated with the

different ways they cope with this final stage before release. I am fortunate to have a 12' x 16' sunroom with floor to ceiling windows (with interior screens) on the east, south and west walls of the room. The north wall has a sliding door with a screen, with the rest of the wall being solid with a workbench for the containers. The room has a lot of tall tropical plants, which makes for some interesting hiding places for the swifts the first few days they're flying and before their guidance systems kick in. I only feed at one location. The first day is wild as the swifts careen frantically from place to place. I retrieve them and put them all in one location before I begin feeding. Best to do a head count occasionally! For the past 3 years, they have rejected my choice of a convenient feeding location (well, convenient for me) and have instead chosen the north screen on the sliding door. Why? I don't have a clue.

Since they always go to the highest point to congregate, I have a small step ladder and place clean newspapers on the floor each morning and evening for easy cleanup and to be able to check the droppings. They learn very quickly to return to the feeding area when they see me enter the room with the plate of food. At this point, I start feeding a "wad" of small mealworms for each bird, always dust with the ground Osteo-Form and generally discontinue the yeast/yogurt/Nutrical dip. If an individual bird's weight starts to drop too much, I can always add it back. Because swifts do an amazing amount of head bobbing and moving around while feeding, you may find more worms on the floor than in their mouths. When you're placing the tweezers or forceps in their mouth with the worms (**Photo 5**), try leaving it in their mouths until



they stop moving, then withdraw the tweezers. It takes just a few minutes longer to feed but you don't have a lot of wasted worms.

The air conditioning to the room is turned off when swifts are in residence and windows left open on the east side so natural temperatures prevail in the room. Since the mostly glass room has its own ventilation system to the outside, I can keep it from being an oven no matter how sunny or warm it gets during the day. As the birds age, they become far more interested in flying than eating, thus accounting for the weight fluctuations. Not to worry. They're gaining muscle mass while doing this.

Other people have hung rough-weave fabric on walls for clinging; some have fake wooden chimneys and even fake brick chimneys for practice runs in their bird rooms. Because hand-reared birds will not have the advantage of parental guidance, having a room to practice in will give them a head start upon release as well as improve their strength and stamina.

Once the birds are out of their

containers and on the screen, I mist them lightly after each feeding. This not only stimulates them to preen, but helps with waterproofing.

### Miscellaneous injuries

Homeowners will frequently try to smoke out whatever those evil sounding creatures are in their chimney. Any swift with smoke inhalation damage should be at a veterinarian as soon as possible to receive oxygen therapy. Eyes should be treated with an artificial tears solution. I like the ones in the individual ampules so there is no chance of contamination.

If a swift gets out into a house, they can be caught by a dog, cat, a kid, or a homeowner with a badminton racquet. Any suspected puncture or open wound should be flushed with sterile water and the bird treated with the appropriate antibiotic. Window collisions should be treated as head injuries and receive Metacam (meloxicam)

Leg fractures are difficult to splint because of the shortness of the swift's legs. One method used is to put the leg in as normal a position as

possible, and using small strips of stretch gauze, wrap the leg to the body. The fracture should heal in about 10 days. Be careful not to obstruct the vent and make sure the wrap is not too tight. A swift that cannot use a single foot or both feet cannot survive in the wild and should be euthanized.

Chimney Swifts with wing fractures, no matter what the age, should probably be euthanized, as should swifts with seriously damaged or deformed feathers. Because swifts only molt once a year, having poor feathers would require wintering over. From a personal and emotionally trying experience, I can tell you they will survive the winter but the chances they will ever be releasable are slim to none. Try not to ever raise a single swift. They are basically a communal bird and are highly stressed when alone.

### Illness

Some of the signs to look for are white mouth (a healthy swift should have a pink mouth), difficulty swallowing or excessive mucus in the mouth and throat, swelling or air pockets on the face or head, nasty odor of droppings and change in consistency of droppings. Cultures should be done to pinpoint whether the pathogen is bacterial, viral or fungal and the appropriate antibiotic used on the advice of a veterinarian. I have had people ask me how to treat a condition called "Mung." My answer is: I don't know. I don't even know what it is and have heard several descriptions. As far as I can tell, it a condition around the mouth and throat of swifts. Some believe it is improper diet; others feel it is caused by lack of cleanliness after feeding, or regurgitation from the incorrect use of syringe feeding. Maybe it's my exclusive use of tweezers, my obsession with cleanliness (you have

washed your hands, right?), or maybe just plain luck, but so far I've managed to avoid anything that looks like "Mung." I would love to hear about other rehabilitators' trials and tribulations with this ailment.

### Can we go now?

No matter what the swifts want, I have three critical criteria before release:

1. While the bird is in a resting, hanging position, the tips of the wings should cross by no less than 1 inch.
2. They must weigh no less than 20-21 grams.
3. They must be able to do 3-point landings rather than just being able to fly. In other words they must be able to get where they want to go and back again to their home base while maneuvering around tall tropical plants and ceiling fan blades. And, of course, you remembered to duct tape the fan switch in the off position before the start of the Chimney Swift season.

My favorite spot to release is on a hill near a large older building with 4 chimneys and a large resident Chimney Swift population. Having 3-4 days of good weather following the release is preferable and I release late afternoon or at least 3 hours before dusk. I wait for the resident swifts to arrive and then carefully remove the cover of my trusty Rubbermaid transport container. Large squares have been cut from the lid of the container and soft screen glued over the openings for ventilation. A piece of sweatshirt fabric is draped and securely fastened to the inside wall of the container and the swifts ride quite comfortably to their release site. I stand back and let them leave whenever they are ready . . . and it doesn't take long! I can spot my swifts among the flock

for about 5 minutes because they will be flapping frantically but they very quickly begin to glide and soar. I've never known whether it's instinctive or it takes a bug hitting them in the face, but they begin feeding almost immediately. You all have surely had people ask to go on releases with you, and normally I discourage it. Hummingbird releases last about two seconds; songbird releases are a little longer while they go into the tree canopy or underbrush and promptly disappear; hawks and owls find the nearest large branch and sit in the same position for the next hour. But chimney swifts put on a show and are not bothered by the presence of human gawkers. They will remain in the area for sometimes up to an hour. It's a wonderful time for an impromptu education program.

Chimney swift population numbers are dropping steadily with the easy answers being lack of nesting sites and migratory roost sites. Plus, we don't know what is happening in the winter territory as logging encroaches upon their jungle winter home. Even if you don't choose to give up your summer rehabilitating chimney swifts, please consider helping with the Swift Night Out, building alternate chimneys, and protecting the ones that are already there. For information on all these activities, visit [www.ChimneySwifts.org](http://www.ChimneySwifts.org).

There, wasn't that easy?

*Shirley Needham, formerly of Kernersville, is a wildlife rehabber who now lives in Rochester, Ind. She began rehabilitating Chimney Swifts after moving from Oregon to North Carolina in 1988 and continues rehabilitation efforts as well as public presentations for the Chimney Swift Migratory Roost Project. Her email address is: [spaceworksin@rtcol.com](mailto:spaceworksin@rtcol.com)*

# *A wildlife detective on the case*

By Jenessa Gjeltema

Compass, check. Bugspray, check. Binoculars, check.

I'm ready to head into the seemingly endless sea of longleaf pine trees, sand, and native wiregrass to see if I can locate a Bachman's Sparrow. I am a wildlife diversity technician for the Wildlife Resources Commission at the Sandhills Gamelands this summer, but I like to think of myself as a "wildlife detective."

Each morning, I wake before dawn so I can be in the field to hear the birds begin singing. Their melodious harmonies sound somewhat like an opera, where multiple voices are singing at once. I close my eyes, and just take it all in. This is what they call "morning chorus." I have worked for years in wildlife



*Photo by Jeff Lewis*

rehabilitation, but spending this summer in the field gave me an appreciation for the secret lives birds lead in the wild.

I'm still strapping on my snake chaps, when I hear the musical "tweee-tweeter-tweeter-tweeter" then "sreee-tee-tee-tee-tee."

Each species of bird has its own

particular song and call, but I can tell immediately that this is a Bachman's Sparrow in the distance. I quickly turn in the direction I heard the song, and begin rushing toward it, leaping over logs and dodging brambles.

The Bachman's Sparrow, which is only one species of bird that I have helped spy on this summer, is a small, brown, drab-looking bird, not much to look at. However, it is a species of concern in the sandhills. Most people associate game species with the Wildlife Resources Commission, however, their wildlife

diversity sector studies non-game species so they can make land management recommendations to preserve habitat for those species in dire need such as the Red Cockaded Woodpecker and the Bachman's Sparrow. Forest thinning, prescribed forest burning, and other methods are used to create useful habitat on the gamelands for many animals including these sparrows.

As I finally get a view of the Bachman's Sparrow, it continues to sing. In the distance I hear another Bachman's Sparrow. The two birds are counter-singing, which means they are using their beautiful music to let each other know they are each guarding a nesting territory. Although these birds are very serious about

protecting the boundaries of their territories, which average at about 161 meters in diameter, they politely take turns singing to say they mean business. If another male Bachman's Sparrow gets too close, this bird may burst into a frenzied variation of his song that almost sounds like a scratched record.

As I watch the male Bachman's Sparrow, he moves to a new perch closer to the counter-singing bird. I carefully document all of his movements on my map, and remain still to watch what he does next. I hear the slightest movement of a leaf from an oak shrub behind me. As I turn, I see another Bachman's Sparrow! Males and females look identical, which makes telling them apart a challenge. This new bird does not sing and is carrying a piece of blueberry in its mouth. Since it is so close to the singing male, I believe it is a female. This is a wonderful sign, and I continue to watch her in hopes of possibly seeing some fledglings.

The Bachman's Sparrow spends a lot of time on the ground, where it can run quickly under the thick cover of the oak shrubs and wiregrass. Sometimes they look like little mice scurrying around. These birds nest on



the ground, placing nests under the folded-over tufts of wiregrass. I try my best to avoid stepping directly on these tufts as I move through the pine forests.

After what seems an eternity of watching the presumed female, I see her hop gracefully toward the ground. That's when I see the fledgling, which has only been a few feet from me the entire time. I can't believe how quiet these little birds can be.

I carefully document the presence of the fledgling, which is an important factor for our research. Because the nests are so difficult to find, the researchers rely upon other clues to help score each bird on its productivity. Some of these clues include seeing a female nearby, nesting material or food in an adult's beak, and the presence of fledgelings.

I decide that I have spied enough on this little family of sparrows, and I begin to head back to my truck. The data I have collected today will be used to track the sparrow's territory size, its productivity, and will contribute to overall data about territory abandonment. By piecing together the secret lives of these Bachman's Sparrows, we can determine how to best manage the gamelands to benefit these birds and other species.

For me, working in the field this summer gave me a new perspective on working with wildlife. I realize that the beautiful bird songs I hear each morning as I walk to my car mean much more than I had thought. They aren't just random vocalizations of birds passing through the nearby trees. Instead, they help these birds attract mates, defend territories, and communicate with each other.

As rehabilitators, we often see our little orphan nestlings outside of their natural social settings. While we fret and are very fastidious about these bird's medical care, nutrition, and comfort we often overlook their social education. There are many studies that have looked into how birds learn songs, and it varies depending on the species. However, some studies have shown many songbirds may have a critical early learning period in which they must be exposed to their species-specific song in order to reproduce this vocalization as an adult. How can we help these orphans achieve reproductive success once we release them if we do not help them learn how to sing? Working with the Bachman's Sparrow and songbird research project really made it clear to me just how important song-learning is for our orphaned birds.

This summer was a wonderful experience for me, and working in the field helped me learn a great deal about the wild lives of the animals I spend so much time caring for. It truly has been an eye-opening experience, and has made me more aware of ways I personally can improve my rehabilitation methods. I hope that if you have not spent any time observing the animals you rehabilitate in their natural setting, you take the time (perhaps a well-deserved vacation?) to see how your patients really live in the wild. You, too, may have your eyes opened.

*Reference: Dolinsky, Melissa. "Song Development in Songbirds – Are Rehabilitators Missing a Crucial Step?" International Wildlife Rehabilitation Council 27<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference Proceedings. 2004.*  
<<http://www.iwrc-online.org/members/proceedings/proceedings.html>>

### Tips for exposing nestlings to bird songs

- Purchase a CD of bird songs, and play it softly for periods during the day (avoid CDs that may have predator noises such as hawk or owl vocalizations and human noises)
- Make your own recording outside during "morning chorus" using an MP3 player (make sure that it includes the song of your nestling's species)
- Use a non-releasable male bird of the same species to help "tutor" the nestling in its songs (be sure both birds are healthy, and perhaps set their cages adjacent to each other, monitoring them carefully)

# Building a case against cruelty

By Brenda Hiles  
and Jennifer Gordon

A barred owl caught in a trap on top of a utility pole in rural Mecklenburg County, had its legs nearly severed before it was buried alive.

A case of animal cruelty?

No, because it involved wildlife, typically not covered under cruelty laws.

Jennifer Gordon of Carolina Waterfowl Rescue picked up the owl from a rehab volunteer and took it to a vet to document its wounds. Then she called a wildlife enforcement officer with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to report the incident.

"It's getting worse every year," said Gordon, who this year has cared for several animals that have been the victims of cruelty, including a goose shot with an arrow and another with a nail gun.

No statistics are available on the number of cases because neither the state nor the federal government track animal cruelty.

"It's impossible to track cruelty cases other than through anecdotal information because there is no mandatory reporting system," said Dale Bartlett, a spokesman for the Humane Society of the United States.

The Animal Cruelty Tracking Bill (S 2439), introduced by Sen. Robert Menendez, a New Jersey Democrat, would require cruelty cases be entered into a national database.

State laws on cruelty vary, Bartlett said, with most being limited to companion animals such as dogs and cats. Few states have cruelty laws that apply to wildlife, fearing it could complicate legal hunting.

"For too long, cruelty cases have been treated as poaching cases, when they have nothing to do with hunting," Bartlett said.

The case involving the owl was prosecuted on the grounds of illegal trapping and illegal possession.

See CRUELTY



*Photos by Jennifer Gordon*

**A Barred Owl dangles from a trap set on an utility pole in rural North Carolina.**



**Hot oil was dropped on this mallard duck. Necrotic tissue was removed and the skin was stitched over the wound.**

## Cruelty

The landowner set the trap because he said owls had killed his chickens, and he hoped the dead owl on top of the pole would serve as a warning to other raptors.

The Migratory Bird Act, which makes it illegal to hunt or possess a raptor without a permit, serves as a basis for many prosecutions.

“Normally, we don’t look at cruelty,” said Sandra Allred, an enforcement officer with USFWS. “We prosecute unlawful possession, import-export violations and illegal hunting.” The USFWS has three enforcement officers to cover North Carolina. “We have to prioritize our cases,” Allred said.

The Humane Society tries to draw attention to animal neglect cases, offering rewards of \$2,500 for information leading to an arrest.

“Often law enforcement and court system don’t take these cases seriously,” Bartlett said. “We face a bias in both the press and the courts. Some prosecutors think it’s somehow beneath them.”

Animal cruelty cases often indicate a more serious problem, Bartlett said.

“People who commit these kinds of crimes are dangerous. Seventy percent of them have other convictions. These people often go on to commit other crimes. “A community that fails to address cruelty issues does so at its own peril.”

### How can you aid enforcement?

- Get to know law enforcement officers in your community. You have a better level of success if you report the crime to someone you know.
- Familiarize yourself with hunting laws so you know if an animal has been shot out of season.
- When you report a crime, tell law enforcement the Humane Society offers rewards, or call the Humane Society directly with details of the case.
- Standardize your reports. Note the time and date of the incident.
- Provide specifics of what leads you to believe a crime is being committed.
- Note the location and names of anyone who can testify.
- Above all, be persistent. “The squeaky wheel gets the grease.”



## A goose chase pays off

A Canada goose that had a nail lodged in its neck was returned to its mate in Charlotte in June after 10 days in rehabilitation.

Rehabilitators with Carolina Waterfowl Rescue spent several days trying to capture the goose, part of a nesting pair on a pond off Prosperity Church Road in the University City area. They waited for him to molt, then took out a kayak. When the kayak hit the water, the goose took off down an embankment into the trees, where he ran into a small fence and was netted. The rescue took about 15 minutes, Jennifer Gordon said.

The nail was removed and the goose was treated with antibiotics.

The nail, which had wedged between the goose’s trachea and esophagus, didn’t appear to interfere with eating and drinking. If left untreated, it could have caused blood poisoning, Gordon said.

A worker at a nearby construction project was suspected of shooting the goose with a nail gun. No charges were filed, but the work crew was dismissed from the job, Gordon said.

There was a long awaited reunion on Monday for a couple of geese in Charlotte.

Carolina Waterfowl Rescue is seeking donations to help cover the cost of the rescue and the care for the goose. Paypal is available on the group’s website: <http://www.carolinawaterfowlrescue.com>

## See how their garden grows

By Sharon "Cookie" Holt  
Valerie Schindler Rehab Center  
volunteer,  
NC Zoo

To augment the vegetables we receive from the Zoo Commissary, myself and volunteer Penny Lindlau posed the idea of having our own onsite "browse garden." After talking to Halley Buckanoff, supervisor at the Valerie Schindler Wildlife Rehab Center, we approached the vet staff with our idea. We received permission from them and enlisted their help in tilling the ground and raising seeds.

Our garden is in front of the building in three 4X8 raised beds. Compost from the zoo was used to supplement the original soil.

Our plants were late going in this year, but even so, by July we had Roma tomatoes, yellow cherry tomatoes, squash, zucchini and broccoli. By August, the sunflowers were coming into bloom. We have planted lettuce on two occasions,

See GARDEN



*Photos by Pat Ferrell*

**The raised browse garden at the Valerie Schindler Wildlife Rehabilitation Center in Asheboro includes greens and tomatoes.**



### Not a gardener? Try the grocery store

Free fruits and vegetables can often be obtained by contacting the home office of your local grocery store or market. Most are required by company policy to throw away "pulled" or old produce unless the home office has approved the transfer. Once approved by the home office, there are papers to sign and a meeting with the store produce manager. Some larger chains require you to be nonprofit, others do not. It's a good idea to share with another rehabber because the volume can be overwhelming. Some rehabbers use the excess in a compost bin to raise worms for feeding their animals.

— Melissa Coe

## Garden

and we began harvesting it in late July. Our newly planted fig tree has three figs. Our peppers, though slow to grow, now have some small peppers. All in all, I'd say the garden's not doing half bad.

This fall we're planning to plant a strawberry tower that will allow us to grow more in a small space because it grows up rather than out. We will probably plant muscadine vines this winter, because they are native to the area and the animals should be able to find them readily in the wild. Plants have been moved, mulch applied, beds made and short fencing put up. The fence is for looks more than for protection. More salvias will be added over time for the hummingbirds and the bees. Penny Lindlau and Steve Sweat were real troopers in tending the garden.

Our facility is unique because it's part of the North Carolina Zoo. But a browse garden doesn't have to be large or complicated. Yes, it takes planning, sweat equity and donations. Begin planning and site preparation during the winter slow period. Make a list of the vegetables you use and those that could be grown in your garden. Start the seeds early. Remember to water.

A browse garden won't replace all those shopping trips, but it will help the bottom line. Plus, you know just where those vegetables came from.

If anyone has questions I might be able to help with, please contact me at [cookiesnotes@bellsouth.net](mailto:cookiesnotes@bellsouth.net).

### *Pearls of Wisdom*

Use humidity jars and lanolin to treat dry, flaky skin in "pinky" opossums.

Humidity jars can be created by punching holes in the lid and putting water in the jar. Lanolin, a substance secreted by the sebaceous glands of sheep, can be bought over-the-counter as an ointment. The ointment is very oily and rich and can solve the problem of dry skin overnight.

*Do you have a tip that makes your job easier?*

*Send your favorites to Toni O'Neil at*

[oneil9734@yahoo.com](mailto:oneil9734@yahoo.com)

### *At the Carolina Raptor Center...*

**Weathering Program:  
Migration. How do they know  
which way to go?**

1-3 p.m. Sept. 14: Flying blindly or following a map? Many raptors head south for the winter, but where are they going and how do they know how to get there?

*Free with regular admission*

## Join us online!

WRNC has set up a listgroup on Yahoo! for members to share information, ask questions, network and get to know each other. To join, go to:

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/WRNC/> or send an email to: [WRNC-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:WRNC-subscribe@yahoogroups.com).

# In the spotlight

**Name:** Kathy Lillard  
**Charlotte, N.C.**

**How did you get started in rehabbing?**

I go to Wild Birds Unlimited quite often. I'm always talking to the employees in there, and one day Nancy DeVries started talking to me about becoming a rehabber.

**How long have you been rehabbing?**

11 years

**Who was your mentor or who is someone you admire?**

Nancy DeVries and Toni O'Neil

**What animals do you work with?**

I work mostly with neonate squirrels, young opossums, and I'll take bunnies as a last resort, if no one else is available.

**What type of setup do you have?**

I took the new addition of the shed, an 8x12 foot area, with lights and electricity. I use mainly crab boxes, and aquariums. Since I rehab small animals, I don't need a lot of room

**Any pets?**

A dog, a cat, and a ferret

**Any non-animal family members?**

A husband and a son and a daughter. Both of my children are grown and out on their own.

**What are your hobbies?**

Gardening, reading,

**If you're employed, what type of "day job" do you have?**

I'm not employed outside the home

**Tell us about an accomplishment of which you're proud.**



Raising my kids to become two pretty good adults. They even picked up some animal-rescue mindset and skills along the way.

**If you could have dinner with one person alive or no longer living, who would it be?**

My Mom. We would have a lot of catching up to do.

**What do you like about being a part of WRNC?**

The people. You can learn so much from each person even if you don't rehab the same animals they do. You also learn to build networks.

# Surviving a wildfire

By **Brenda Hiles**

Most wild animals outran wildfires that ravaged thousands of acres this summer near the Pocosin Lakes Wildlife Refuge in eastern North Carolina.

“They smell the smoke, and they head in the other direction,” said Bonnie Strawser, a spokeswoman for the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

The fire, sparked by a lightning strike on private land June 1, devoured more than 40,000 acres as firefighters struggled to contain it.

Deer, bear and birds that fledged before the fire would have no difficulty escaping the flames, state biologists said.

“That’s not to say we’re not losing any animals,” Strawser said. Burrowing animals such as turtles, groundhogs and voles likely suffered fatalities, as did young birds. Wildlife officials, who look at populations rather than individual animals, said wildlife populations often increase after a fire because of the new growth.

“As bad as this fire may appear, with the smoke and the heat, there may be good that can come out of it,” said Tommy Hughes, a biologist with the Wildlife Resources Commission, in a press release. “Smoky and nasty as this fire is, the animals are getting out of there, and there is an abundance of habitat that is created for some species.”



*Photo by Robert Vanderpool/USFWS*

**Mama bear watches as cubs play on Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge near the Evans Road Fire.**



*Photos by USFWS*

**This Snapping Turtle and Barred Owl survived the fire this summer at the Pocosin Wildlife Refuge. Burrowing animals and young birds often fall victim to wildfires.**



## TRAINING

**Advanced Wildlife Rehabilitation:** Prepare for advanced-level intern positions and staff positions in nature centers, wildlife centers and animal sanctuaries and work toward the 100-hour requirement to apply for the Federal Migratory Bird Permit. Students must be 16 to attend. Prerequisite: Basics of Wildlife Rehabilitation. 48 hours. Fee: \$60. 6-9 p.m., Mondays and Wednesdays Oct. 8-Dec. 5. For more information, go to: [www.coastal.cc.nc.us](http://www.coastal.cc.nc.us) or call 910-938-6294.



**Beginner Class:** WRNC is offering a Beginner Rehab Class from Oct. 10 to 11 at the Broad River Greenway in Shelby. For information, contact Kim Duren at [kduren@broadrivergreenway.com](mailto:kduren@broadrivergreenway.com) or 704-434-2357.

**Wildlife Rehab:** An 11-week course at Forsyth Tech begins Sept. 4. Fall classes are held from 6 to 9 p.m. Thursdays on the West Campus, Bolton Street. Cost is \$50. For more information, go to <http://wildliferehabinc.org/classes.html>. To register, call Forsyth Tech at 336-761-1002. Classes also are offered on Tuesday nights in spring.

**The Wildlife Center of Virginia's** 13th annual Call of the Wild conference Nov. 8-9 in Waynesboro, Va. (<http://www.wildlifecenter.org>).

**IWRC's International Education Symposium,** Nov. 5-9 at Gaia Hotel & Spa in Napa Valley Calif. Three concurrent tracks will be held daily, with classes and workshops in animal care, behavior, enrichment, public education, disaster response and post-release monitoring. Early registration discounts will be available until Sept. 16. <http://iwrc-online.org/conf/edsymp2008.html>

## Ask WRNC

**Q.** Can animals in rehab that will later be released to the wild be used in public education programs?

**A.** In North Carolina, the short answer is: NO!

The North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission and U.S. Fish & Wildlife rules specifically say animals in rehabilitation shall not be exposed to the public. Wildlife in rehabilitative care are supposed to be being prepared for release back into the wild; part of proper rehabilitation includes making sure the animals in care do not become habituated to humans. Keeping them away from humans in general, (limiting exposure to their caregiver(s) only) is the way to succeed with this.

The Wildlife Resources Commission requires a special possession permit for wildlife (non-releasable mammals and birds) that are used for educational programs.

Native mammals that are used for education programs also require a USDA license.

To legally use non-releasable birds for education, both state and federal possession permits are required. The federal permit also requires that birds permitted must do a minimum of (12) programs annually or be on static display for "open to the public" centers.

*Have a question? Send it to Beth Knapp-Tyner at [WildatHeartRehab@aol.com](mailto:WildatHeartRehab@aol.com)*

## Test your diagnostic skills

The neighbor's cat just brought home one of your soft release juvenile squirrels. The physical exam reveals two puncture wounds on the back; otherwise, all seems fine.

Immediately you start the squirrel on a course of Clavamox® as prescribed by the veterinarian. The squirrel will be kept in the clinic area for 10 days and given lots of TLC and enrichment.

On the third morning in the clinic you notice the squirrel has diarrhea. It is getting monkey chow and a selection of natural foods. It is no longer on formula.

### Questions to consider:

1. Why did the squirrel get diarrhea?
2. Is there another issue or question of ethics?
3. What can be done to correct it?



Photo by Elizabeth Hanrahan

*Answer on Page 25*



## Board members

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## About Us

This is a quarterly newsletter produced by Wildlife Rehabilitators of North Carolina (WRNC). WRNC was organized in 1999 with a mission to share information and knowledge about wildlife rehabilitation.

The opinions, techniques and recommendations expressed in the articles of this newsletter are those of the authors and do not imply endorsement by WRNC.

All material in the newsletter is copyrighted and should not be used or reproduced without the permission of the author.

This newsletter is your tool for reaching everyone in WRNC. Submit comments, corrections and announcements to editor Brenda Hiles at [bhiles919@earthlink.net](mailto:bhiles919@earthlink.net), or by phone at 336-420-5581. The next editorial deadline is Nov. 6.

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### State collecting data on seabird mortality

The N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission (WRC) is collecting data on bird mortality because of reports of dead or dying seabirds along the coast.

Reporting forms are available at:

<http://ncwildliferehab.org/newsletter/Rehabilitator%20Reporting%20Form.pdf>.

Record the location, date, time and species on the form and return it to Alex Houston, waterbird technician, at [ahouston@ec.rr.com](mailto:ahouston@ec.rr.com). Birds can be left where they are found. If there is a question about the species of bird, submit a photo along with the report.

Houston can be reached by phone at 252-423-0716.

### Rules for Mute Swans prohibit their release

Mute swans, which are not native to North America, can no longer be released in public waterways, including parks, ponds and lakes. Swans found there will likely be removed.

The law (15A NCAC 10B .0125), which went into effect July 1, also requires all mute swans to be pinioned on the owner's land.

Mute swans affect native fish populations and compete with native wildlife for habitat and resources, according to government reports.

The law reads:

*It is unlawful for any individual to release any mute swan (Cygnus olor) into the public waters of North*

*Carolina. Any individual who releases a mute swan to privately controlled waters must ensure that the animal has been pinioned. Individuals who currently possess or confine mute swans on their property must pinion all mute swans on their property by January 1, 2009. For the purposes of this Rule privately controlled waters is defined as: a body of water lying wholly upon a single tract of privately owned land or a body of water lying entirely within private property, even if that property is comprised of multiple tracts owned by one or multiple individuals. In addition, privately controlled waters are waters to which the public does not have access without permission of one or more of the private landowners surrounding the water(s).*

### WRC's website includes wildlife rehabilitators

The Wildlife Resources Commission has upgraded its website to include all wildlife rehabilitators in its database. Rehabbers are encouraged to look at the posting and report any errors or oversights. If you do not want to be listed on the website, send an e-mail to WRC to request the information be removed.



WRC is requiring anyone working with songbirds, raptors, waterfowl or other bird species to supply the agency with their federal permit number and expiration date to list on the website. If the information is not submitted, those categories will be removed from their state permit by default.

### Chemical in sugar-free foods harmful to dogs

A substance in sugar-free gum can be deadly to dogs.

Xylitol causes dogs to secrete insulin, causing a rapid drop in blood sugar, and in higher doses can cause liver failure.

Xylitol, a sugar substitute used in candy and gum, is also found in health products, including chewable vitamins and throat lozenges.

A dog that has eaten an item containing Xylitol can quickly exhibit symptoms of weakness, lethargy and seizures. Veterinary care is required immediately.

Play it safe, and keep candies and gum away from your dog

### Mealworms rebound after summer die-off

Mealworms are back in supply after a shortage earlier this summer.

Tim Vocke, a representative of Nature's Way in Ross, Ohio, said the company identified a problem with the feed that caused the worms not to eat. That has been corrected, and regular supplies are now being shipped.

Book Corner

## Running a-fowl of nature

**“Enslaved by Ducks”**

By Bob Tarte  
Algonquin Books  
320 pages  
\$12.95

By Brenda Hiles

People who spend time with animals like to tell stories about them. When they're not telling stories about their own animals, they like to listen to stories about other people's animals. So I was looking forward to reading Bob Tarte's "Enslaved by Ducks:

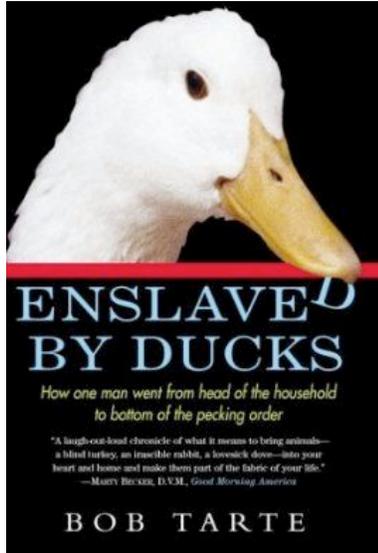
How one man went from the head of the household to the bottom of the pecking order." The reviews were lavish in their praise. What better book for an animal lover on vacation?

I smiled as Tarte described lunch in his house. He can't eat at the dining room table without setting off a raucous chorus from the parrots. He takes his lunch outside and the ducks and geese clamor to get out of their pen. Finally he settles on a soft patch of grass near the barn, and just as he bites into his sandwich, his cat jumps into his lap and begs for a bite.

I laughed out loud over the stories about Binky, described as "a sour dwarf Dutch rabbit with few social skills."

My laughter faded as Tarte began adding birds to his menagerie. Underlying the humorous anecdotes is the serious issue of people acquiring animals they're not equipped to care for. The Tartes take in parrots, rabbits, ducks, geese and turkeys, giving little thought to the needs of their animals. The more the merrier seems to be the rule, even when they inflict serious injuries on each other.

There's plenty here to make a rehabber shudder. Tarte introduces readers to Marge Chedrick, a teacher who cares for neonate squirrels. How do you manage to ever leave the house, Tarte asks her.



"The animals come to school with me... the kids love to see me feeding them," she replies.

(Insert scream here)

Chedrick passes along nestling starlings to Tarte and his wife, Linda. Linda happily embarks on raising them, taking them along to her housecleaning jobs. Bob Tarte comes home one day to find her using a blow dryer on the birds. After washing dried food from their heads, their feathers were slow to dry, and she didn't want them to catch a cold.

(Go ahead, scream again).

So perhaps it should come as no surprise that after releasing the birds, they come back to perch on Linda's head when she works in the garden, pecking at her scalp. It's like a scene out of Alfred Hitchcock's "The Birds," she complains, eager for the starlings to fly the coop.

Tarte is an entertaining writer. In front of visitors which include a child, a male parakeet named Reggie tries to mate with Howard, a ring-necked dove.

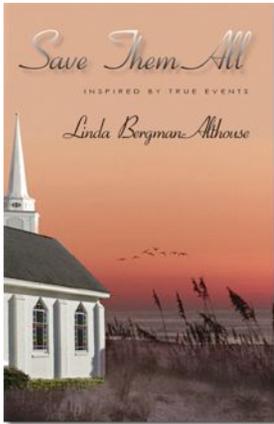
"I waved a stained dish towel in the birds' direction, once, twice, three times, and like adulterers in the parking lot of the Red Roof Inn, they parted without a glance," he writes.

Tarte makes no apologies for endowing his animals with human characteristics. The premise of the book is that animals know exactly what they're doing when they get us humans to care for them.

"Stepping back from anthropomorphizing our pets while feeling close to them was always difficult," he writes. "It took me years to accept the fact that animals don't act according to human standards of generosity and forgiveness, which I seldom follow either."

He writes movingly of a turkey named Hazel, nearly pecked to death by a member of her flock.

See **DUCKS**

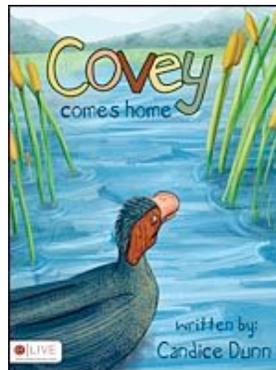
ON THE SHELF

Linda Bergman-Althouse, a WRNC board member, is the author of the novel **“Save Them All.”** Her story of feathers, fur and scales, inspired by true events, introduces readers to wildlife rehabilitators working 24/7 behind the scenes to rescue injured, diseased or orphaned wild animals. A poignant and recent review states **“Save Them All** is a work of depth, passion, drama, mystery, violence,

romance and friendship.”

Autographed copies of “Save Them All” are available through the author’s website: <http://www.bergman-althouse.com/>

**“Covey Comes Home,”** by Candace Dunn, with a forward by WRNC board member Jennifer Gordon, is a children’s book that tells the story of an orphaned Muscovy duck. The book is available through Tate Publishing <http://www.tatepublishing.com> and larger book dealers.

**Ducks**

For a while, it appears Hazel will be blind. At the moment Tarte realizes Hazel has sight in one of her eyes, he “sat on the basement floor beside her, marveling at its beauty and amazed by the fact that an event involving a turkey suddenly added up to one of the happiest days,” he could remember.

Tarte doesn’t pretend to be a wildlife rehabilitator. He and his wife take in animals on a whim. Though it’s not his intention, he reminds us of the harm done by well-meaning people who accumulate animals the way some people collect knickknacks.

**The gift of WRNC**

Membership in WRNC makes a thoughtful gift for the rehabber in your life.

Members have a link to wildlife rehabilitators across the state. They can access past newsletters as well as up-to-date news on our web site.

The annual membership fee is \$15.

For an application, go to: <http://ncwildliferehab.org/whoweare.cfm>

Not done shopping? How about a WRNC T-shirt? The T-shirts with Wanda Burton’s award winning design, may be purchased for \$15 each (the sale price of \$12 plus \$3 for shipping.)

Please print your name, shipping address, size desired (S, M, L, XL or XXL) and send your payment to: WRNC T-shirt, Linda Bergman, 130 Aldersgate Road, Jacksonville, NC 28546

## Case Studies

# Deciding right from wrong

### Case 5

A wildlife rehabilitator writes a letter to the editor supporting a political candidate and expressing a political position on a “hot” state issue. In the letter the rehabilitator identifies herself as a wildlife rehabilitator and as a board member of a local wildlife rehabilitation group.

- ❖ How does this relate to the Wildlife Rehabilitator’s Code of Ethics?
- ❖ Which Code(s) might apply?

### Case 6

A wildlife rehabilitator has lived in and practiced wildlife rehabilitation in the community for almost 20 years. When an animal is admitted, he always provides the presenter with information about the natural history of the animal, probable prognosis for release and additional, helpful, information.

He has never offered to present a program to a school or community group. He has never been featured in a local newspaper story. He says, “I am too busy for that kind of thing. I just want to work with the animals.”

- ❖ How does this relate to the Wildlife Rehabilitator’s Code of Ethics?
- ❖ Which Code(s) might apply?
- ❖ How can this be resolved?
- ❖ Other questions/ issues?



### Answers to previous ethics cases

#### Case 3

*At small, freestanding, wildlife rehabilitation center there is signage and a notice on the admission form:*

***A \$25 donation is required before an orphaned or injured animal can be admitted, treated or cared for.***

*This statement is also made by the wildlife rehabilitation staff.*

**Code(s) that apply:** (7) – The wildlife rehabilitator should place optimum animal care above personal gain.

#### Case 4

*A wildlife rehabilitation group in a small city accepts most types of wildlife. Members of the group usually specialize in particular animals. Some people work with only squirrels or opossums. A few work with songbirds. Several members work with most species.*

*One member works with most all species. In addition, he will take raccoons into wildlife rehabilitation “under the table.” Though it is against the law to rehabilitate raccoons without a special permit, he justifies raccoon rehab by saying, “everyone does it,” or “someone has to take care of them.”*

*He enjoys working with the raccoons and will often tell others he is the “only one around qualified to do this.”*

**Codes that apply:** (3) Abide with local, state and federal laws; and (4) Abide by current health and safety practices.

Raccoons, which are a rabies-vector species and present a public health danger, should be reported to authorities, though rehabbers will have to rely on their own judgment and conscience.

## Code of Ethics

- 1. A wildlife rehabilitator should strive to achieve high standards of animal care through knowledge and an understanding of the field. Continuing efforts must be made to keep informed of current rehabilitation information, methods, and regulations.*
- 2. A rehabilitator's attitude should be responsible, conscientious, and dedicated: continuously working toward improving the quality of care given to wild animals undergoing rehabilitation.*
- 3. A rehabilitator must abide by local, state, and federal laws concerning wildlife and wildlife rehabilitation.*
- 4. A rehabilitator should establish good and safe work habits and conditions, abiding by current health and safety practices at all times.*
- 5. Rehabilitators should acknowledge their limitations and enlist the assistance of a veterinarian when appropriate.*
- 6. As a means of preventing further wildlife loss and abuse, a rehabilitator should encourage community support and involvement through volunteer training and public education.*
- 7. Rehabilitators should respect other rehabilitators, sharing skills and knowledge with each other, and working toward a common goal: a responsible concern for living beings and the welfare of the environment.*
- 8. A rehabilitator should work on the basis of sound ecological principles, incorporating appropriate conservation ethics and an attitude of stewardship.*
- 9. A rehabilitator should acknowledge that a non-releasable animal, inappropriate for education, foster-parenting or captive breeding, has a right to euthanasia.*
- 10. A rehabilitator should strive to maintain all animals in a wild condition and release them as soon as appropriate.*
- 11. A wildlife rehabilitator should conduct all business and activities in a professional manner, with honesty, integrity, compassion, and commitment, realizing that an individual's conduct reflects on the entire field of wildlife rehabilitation.*

## Enrichment 101

### Opossums

Looking for ways to create a stimulating environment for opossums in rehab?

Here are some ideas:

- Create ramps and nest boxes at different levels.
- Build a shelf for sleeping and climbing.
- Introduce grass clumps, new branches and stumps, a bale of hay, and leaf or mulch piles.
- Provide an exercise wheel for the young, and hammocks for older opossums.
- Vary feeding areas.
- Use cardboard tubes with scents or food to stimulate foraging behavior
- Place food in plastic bottles and PVC pipes with holes drilled inside to promote foraging.
- Stimulate their senses by using animal scents such as lure, feces or skins. Set up a “scent box” by using spices and perfume samples.
- Rub small amounts of peppermint, animal scents and cooking spices on parts of the cages.
- Feed a variety of food, including: mealworms and crickets; fresh or dried herbs; bones; grapes frozen in ice; fish or mice frozen inside blocks of ice; produce bobbing in water; shish kabobs with sweet potatoes and other vegetables placed under water.
- Provide a variety of play objects, including: rawhide chew toys; a large cardboard box to play in; containers; paper bags; crumpled paper ball; balls; and raw cotton.



*Photo by Toni O'Neil*

**Ramps and sleeping shelves make life more interesting for opossums in rehab.**



*Photo by Jean Chamberlain*

**Try placing a variety of vegetables under water.**

## Diagnostic skills: Were you right?

1. A normal, healthy squirrel has a normal, healthy GI tract. It has a variety of healthy bacteria that support digestion. If the squirrel is on antibiotics or has had watery stools, the bacteria become out of balance or absent.
2. To rebalance the gut flora, or healthy bacteria, provide a probiotic during antibiotic therapy. Probiotics include Probios oral gel, Bene-bac for mammals, or lactobacillus acidophilus, which should be added to formula or food daily. There is also “live culture” yogurt available in the grocery store. Many wildlife rehabilitators use it to supplement antibiotic therapy; discuss this with your veterinarian and be sure to read the labels on the container.
3. An ethical issue to be considered is the safety of the animal at the soft release location. A site, without cats, dogs and other predators, would be much safer.
4. In addition, the rehabilitator may want to encourage the neighbor to keep her cat indoors to protect a larger variety of wildlife.
5. Release the squirrels at another, safer, site.

## Here's your chance to help with the raffle

If you have time to send off a few e-mail messages to solicit donations from companies and businesses in your area, Raffle Committee Chairwoman Toni O'Neil wants to hear from you. O'Neil will provide form letters. If you're pressed for time, send the names and addresses of potential donors to O'Neil, and she will contact them.

Members who contacted businesses last year for donations are being asked to contact the same businesses this year.

And don't be so quick to throw away those unwanted household items or gifts you've found no use for. Bring them to the symposium to be used as raffle prizes.

O'Neil also is looking for suggestions on what type of items to solicit for the raffle. Send your suggestions to: [oneil9734@yahoo.com](mailto:oneil9734@yahoo.com)

### ECOFACTS

What are the top three ways Good Neighbors are Cooling the Planet?

1. Turn off the lights when not in use.
2. Replace incandescent light bulbs with compact fluorescent bulbs.
3. Run the dishwasher and washing machine only when full.

— *The National Wildlife Federation*

Americans throw away enough aluminum to rebuild our entire commercial fleet of airplanes every 3 months.

— *Environmental Defense Fund*

Energy saved from one recycled aluminum can will operate a TV set for 3 hours, and is the equivalent to half a can of gasoline.

— *Library.thinkquest.org*

## CALL FOR SPEAKERS

Wildlife Rehabilitators of North Carolina invites members and associated wildlife professionals to give a presentation at its annual symposium Jan. 30 – Feb. 1. Presentations may be on topics such as species needs, natural history, veterinary medicine, education programs, administration and wildlife care.

Submissions will be accepted by mail or email ([symposium@ncwildliferehab.org](mailto:symposium@ncwildliferehab.org)). Submit a brief abstract of the proposed presentation with a short biography describing relevant experiences in your field and on the topic being presented. Individuals may submit more than one abstract. All submissions are subject to committee review. The symposium registration fee is waived for speakers.

We have two types of presentations:

- ORAL PRESENTATION:** a PowerPoint/slide presentation, demo, case study or skit on wildlife rehabilitation topics
- WORKSHOP:** a guided “hands-on” session demonstrating techniques or skills used in wildlife rehabilitation or a closely related field.

## Down on the Farm



**These young barn owls were found atop a combine engine at a farm in Washington County in August just at the time the rice was ready for harvest. Wildlife rehabber Elizabeth Hanrahan rode on a forklift to place the owlets on top of a shipping container about 50 yards from the nest. The parents came back to feed them the next day.**

*Photo by  
Elizabeth Hanrahan*

This information is taken from a brochure created by WRNC Board President Elizabeth Hanrahan for her local SPCA and the Chowan County Animal Control.

# Snakes Alive!

## Snakes are a protected non-game Species

There are 26 species of snakes in northeastern North Carolina, each with its own distinct markings, life history, and habitat requirements. Most snakes that share human habitats are harmless. It is important to distinguish between venomous and nonvenomous snakes.

Snakes commonly encountered by people include: garter snakes, rat snakes, water snakes, hog nosed snakes and ringneck snakes.

None are poisonous, and they perform beneficial roles by consuming small rodents.

Each species has its unique natural history and habitat requirements. Snakes people encounter frequent gardens, farms and suburban habitats. They are secretive and retreat from threats if given a chance.

Snakes are deaf and nearsighted, but are sensitive to ground vibrations and have a good sense of smell by flicking their tongues to gather odors from the air.

They do not dig holes in soil, but will use an available opening such as a mouse hole.

They are usually discovered when a person happens on the animal, or its shed skin.

Snakes in houses fall into two categories:

- those that entered accidentally and want to escape from unsuitable habitat; and those that have entered to find prey or shelter, and
- those that would take up permanent resident if allowed.

Small snakes like young garter snakes or ringneck snakes that are trapped in the house will die from lack of food or moisture if not captured and removed.

Snakes that may become residents include rat snakes, kingsnakes, black snakes, and other rodent-eating species that follow mouse trails into buildings. Some snakes may hibernate in crawlspaces with dirt floors. The presence of shed skins usually indicates that a snake

has been living in the house for some time and will come and go at will.

Snakes usually enter buildings and homes at ground level through a tiny crack or hole no more than 1/8 inch wide. An intensive inspection of the foundation for unsealed wire or pipe conduits and doors that do not seal tightly will usually reveal the snake entrance. All these openings should be sealed immediately.

### Resident snakes are difficult to locate and capture; even by an expert.

Resident snakes may live for months inside walls and inaccessible locations. There may also be more than one snake inside the house, so capture of one snake may not resolve the problem.

After discovery of a snake in the house, the entire building should be inspected inside and outside for potential openings.

Snakes are good climbers so check for plants that may give access to the roof.

**Consult a field guide to distinguish poisonous and common nonpoisonous snakes in the area. Snakes do not cause property damage.**



If openings have been found, seal all except the main snake entrance. Attach a one-way door to the remaining entrance. This will allow the snake to get outside and not re-enter. Leave this in place for a month to allow time for the snake to leave. If the door is installed in the fall, leave it in place until the following spring.

It may not be possible to completely snake-proof a house if mice have built an elaborate tunneling system.

Minimize the chance of a snake taking up residence in the yard by making the area unattractive to it.

Remove potential hiding places for snakes and their prey. This includes rock and wood piles, other debris, tall grass and undergrowth, cracks around porches, sidewalks, and space under storage sheds.

Pet foods and garbage left unprotected outside overnight attracts rodents which may attract snakes.

**Grounds that are manicured and kept free of debris generally make poor snake habitat.**

NOTES FROM THE FIELD

## An opossum and a teachable moment

By Audrey Cutright

I recently received a call from a woman who found a baby opossum in her garage. She explained that her son wanted to keep it, and she asked if they could. It would be better for me to raise it until it could

be released, I told her, explaining permits are needed to keep wildlife. She agreed and asked if I could come to her house to pick it up and talk to her son. I told her to put the opossum in a small box with a towel and keep it in a dark, quiet place until I could get there. Don't give it anything to eat or drink, I told her.

When I arrived, they had the opossum wrapped in a baby blanket and were carrying it around. They had been giving it water. She allowed me to take a quick glance at the opossum and then handed it over to her son. The opossum looked fine and I sat down with her and her son. The father also joined the conversation.

I explained wildlife should never be kept as pets and the harm that comes from doing so. I told them about Elizabeth Hanrahan, my rehabilitation teacher, and the opossum she had to keep because it was raised by someone and now has so many medical problems it can never be released.

They had many questions, which I answered the best I could. I suggested they take a rehabilitator's class to learn more. The father appeared to be upset the more I talked. He recounted how his friends had



raised opossums, and they were just fine, he insisted.

The mother told me their son wanted to be a vet. An excellent idea, I said, because so few vets work with wildlife. I gave them one of my cards and told them they could be there when I released the opossum. I also told them I would keep them informed of

the opossum's progress and e-mail them pictures.

They finally handed the opossum over, and I left, afraid if they found another wild animal they'd be reluctant to turn it over.

About a week later, I received a card in the mail with a \$30 check. It said:

"Thank you so much for caring for the orphaned opossum found in our garage. Without his mom he wouldn't have a chance at survival if it weren't for you. Also, thanks for spending time to explain the reality of caring for and keeping this baby. As you saw, my son has a tender heart and was wanting so much to try to care for the baby. We are going to explore taking the wildlife rehab course together. I hope this check helps defer some of the costs involved with the little one's care. Please let us know how it is doing."

*Audrey Cutright operates Guardian Angel Wildlife Rehabilitation in East Lake, NC. She has been a rehabber since 2007. She can be reached at [guardianangelrehab@yahoo.com](mailto:guardianangelrehab@yahoo.com).*

### Heat takes a toll on Purple Martins

Heat and drought along the coast have had an impact on Purple Martins nesting in gourds and man-made houses. The young birds that fell or were pushed from the nest were found to be suffering from severe dehydration. The most severely affected nestlings suffered from seizures. More than half of the Purple Martins I received in rehabilitation were lost due to kidney failure from prolonged dehydration. The others slowly recovered after intense fluid therapy and proper diet, and will be released. This is the first time we've received so many of these large swallows, all admitted with the same symptoms. — Toni O'Neil