

Sharp Teeth and Sharp Shins... by Cindy Williams

Welcome to 2016, and to a whole new year of interesting creatures and strange situations at Lakeside Nature Center. You never know what's going to happen at the Center, and last year certainly was no exception. Take the interesting case of Jackie the North American Beaver who came to us last month.

Jackie was found at an apartment building in Independence. Apparently she had fallen down a window well at an apartment complex (a 6 foot drop) and started doing what beavers do – chewing. Unfortunately she decided that a sump pump wire made a good chew toy and she got electrocuted. At least three times, according to a witness. I didn't say they were the brightest of mammals.

Animal Control was called to rescue the little beastie and since she didn't run away when she was freed, they brought her to us. She didn't have any obvious injuries so the good folks at Lakeside decided to sedate her in order to do a thorough exam without becoming another Jackie chew toy. If you've seen what those long teeth can do to a tree (not to mention the fact that she's basically a 22 pound rodent), you would do the same. Fun fact: beavers' teeth keep growing throughout their lifetime – otherwise the constant gnawing would wear them down to nubs! During the exam Jackie's heart stopped. Now, the staff at Lakeside doesn't let a little thing like death prevent them from doing their best for the animals in their care, so Jesse and Kim immediately started doing chest compressions and David rushed out to get oxygen. With a shot of atropine, an oxygen tube up her nose and her heart being pumped for her, Jackie would rally then fail, rally then fail. For almost an hour the team worked, occasionally detecting a faint heartbeat and stopping compressions only to have her fail again. Finally, Jackie developed a strong heartbeat and started breathing on her own. The crisis was over. For those of you who can't believe the team would make such an effort for an animal, I can only tell you this – more than once I've seen Jesse breath life back into a baby squirrel. Sometimes it works, often it doesn't. If an animal is not going to have a good outcome and the treatment will be torturous it's often best to let them go. But if an animal stands a fighting chance the staff and volunteers at Lakeside are more than willing to go above and beyond to save them. This was a perfect example of that commitment.

So now Jackie was firmly back in the land of the living, with no obvious injuries. Beavers are herbivores, so she was fed a diet of vegetables, willow bark, corn cobs and cattails. At first she was, well the (not so) technical term we often use is "wonky" – unsteady on her feet. After a few days they moved her into a larger area where she could do some swimming, and she did a lot more than just swim. As you can see from the photos, Jackie was not satisfied with her small accommodations. I tell you, life is not a Disney movie and animals don't really show much



Photo: David Johnson



Photo: Morgan Gentile

gratitude for all we've done! We of course prefer it that way since wild animals need to maintain a fear of humans. After less than a week in captivity, Jackie went from "mostly



Photo: Morgan Gentile

dead" to free once again to pursue her life in the wild – and hopefully avoid electrical wires from now on. Thanks to the great people at Independence Animal Control, the apartment dwellers who called them, and the wonderful care of the staff at Lakeside Nature Center, this drama had a happy ending.

We had a few more unusual guests at the Center as well last month, but these guys don't bear much resemblance to a large rodent. After months without seeing any sign of a Sharp-Shinned Hawk we received two injured ones within a few days of each other, one from St. Joseph and another from right here in Kansas City. The males of the species are the smallest hawks in the US and Canada (if you're thinking an American Kestrel might be smaller, well you're in the right ballpark but a Kestrel is actually in the Falcon family not the Hawk family). They are widespread throughout the Americas but usually spend the winters in the southern US, Mexico and Central America. Our guests were probably migrating through the area and got into trouble when they tried to see what life is like on the other side of a window – not the best idea for anyone, let alone a bird of prey. Both appear to have suffered wing injuries which don't appear to be serious – no breaks detected – so they will be spending some time here getting bulked up and hopefully sent on their way once their wings mend, unless they miss their window of opportunity for migration and have to be either overwintered or driven farther south.



Sharp-Shinned Hawks are beautiful little birds, often mistaken for the more common Cooper's Hawk in this area. These two are first-year birds (basically teenagers) who haven't completed their growth into their final plumage. It's not unusual for first-year birds to get into trouble since, much like their human counterparts, they haven't yet developed all the skills they will need to survive. Sharp-Shins often live in wooded areas with dense vegetation, and their prey is usually smaller birds so they have to be skillful hunters in order to either surprise their prey or hunt them down through trees and shrubs. We hope these two will thrive in the wild once they recover from their injuries – and stay away from picture windows!