

Never a Dull Moment by Cindy Williams

There are so many interesting and wonderful animals in rehab at Lakeside Nature Center that all deserve their stories told, but this month we had some rather unique animals show up that we just don't see that often. Of course we can only accept Missouri native wildlife so we are definitely limited when it comes to new and unusual species, but that doesn't mean there aren't occasional surprises.

The Belted Kingfisher is a Missouri native that we don't see often. They are considered uncommon in our state in the summer and rare in the northern parts of the states in the winter although in a mild winter they might stick around the southern part of the state.

Unfortunately they are on the decline. They are part of a family of birds that includes the Kookaburra in Australia and many colorful and distinctive Kingfisher cousins. Our local



version might be considered drab by comparison. One unusual aspect of this species is that the female is more colorful than the male, sporting a rusty red band on her belly. They like to nest in steep banks along stream beds and lakes, feeding primarily on small fish which they catch by diving into the water. They will also feed on other aquatic animals and insects, or an occasional young bird or mouse. They might also snack on fruit from time to time.

The Kingfisher that found his way to us hit the window of a building and managed to get himself caught inside. He was brought in from Sugar Creek by the local fire department. Hopefully a few days of supportive care will be enough for this little guy to shake off his head injury and he'll be snagging crawfish along the Missouri River in no time.

The Mississippi Kite who was brought to us from Independence is in a sorrier state. He was shot and suffered a wound to the body (very deep but seems to be healing nicely) and fracture to the right ulna (part of our forearm, part of their wing).

The ulna and the radius are two bones that run parallel to each other so a break to one, as long as it's not at or near the joint, has a good chance of healing since the other bone can help stabilize it. If we can stave off infection with antibiotics and get him to eat (no luck so far) then he should have a good chance of survival as long as the wing heals properly. We can never be sure that will happen, but they tend to do well with this type of break.

Despite the name, the Mississippi Kite is a Missouri native bird, albeit not as ubiquitous as our other more common birds of prey. They spend the winters in South America and breed throughout the central and southern U.S. You may have noticed one of our education birds is a Mississippi Kite but I have to say I've not seen many in our rehab hospital. Let's hope this one starts eating on his own and his wing heals as well as the wound to his body. It is worth noting that this species is protected under the Migratory Bird Act and therefore illegal to tamper with (and I think shooting counts as tampering).



This Peregrine Falcon from the Commerce Tower downtown is having a tough time of it. He's well known with MDC since he has been retrieved twice and he is a banded bird.

He's a juvenile who seems to be having a tough time making the transition away from his parents (like some teenagers we know, right?). He's very aggressive with his food when we tweezer feed him but he doesn't seem to have caught on to the idea of eating on his own. He was very emaciated when he came in so he doesn't seem to be hunting successfully. Peregrine's are the fastest birds of prey (and in fact the fastest animal, though it hardly seems fair to compare a Cheetah, let's say, with a bird) and they rely on that speed to hunt other birds in the air. Apparently this youngster hasn't gotten his wings yet, so to speak.



Turning to the mammal category, I'll bet when you hear Armadillo you think of Texas before you think of Missouri. Well, they have made their way as far north as Nebraska and Indiana now so start getting used to thinking of them as Missouri natives! The word *armadillo* means "little armored one" in Spanish and they originated from South America so it fits. They are prodigious diggers, feasting on insects, grubs and other invertebrates. They are not aquatic but are able to move through the water by either walking on the bottom (holding their breath for up to 6 minutes) or swallowing air to make them more buoyant. Their "armor" does provide some protection from predators but they are pretty fast on their little legs too. And their thick outer shell does enable them to scamper into places that other animals may not be able to go, like heavy brush or thorny plants.

The adult Armadillo in this picture has an injury to his back leg that will require some time to heal. Hopefully he will be releasable in the near future. In the meantime we'll try to keep him quiet and well fed (you can see he is extremely shy, if you're having a hard time making him out his head is to the left). So far he seems to have no trouble eating what we put in front of him.



And finally this Coyote pup came in from the Northland with a terrible case of mange. Though they are not uncommon in our area it's rare to do any more than catch a glimpse of them near the big city. This little guy is eating quite well while he's here but he doesn't seem to be

enjoying his spa treatments – here you can see him trying to take a bite of Jesse after she has given him a bath. Honestly, though it makes them harder to care for we love it when wild animals show this kind of spunk. We do everything in our power to keep them wild so when they recover from their injuries or illness they can be returned to the wild and stay far away from humans – no cooing and coddling for this mangy mutt (or any of our other adult rehab animals for that matter). Our resident Coyote is an example of a wild animal who was illegally kept by a person as a pup and became acclimated to humans. By the time he came to us he was too domesticated to return to the wild and too wild to be a good pet. Usually that is a death sentence for a wild animal but Lakeside received special permission (as with all our education animals) to set up an environment where he could live out his life. Hopefully our latest guest will be able to heal



and take his place in the wild pack where he belongs, even if that means we have to avoid some teeth. We prefer our wild animals where they belong – Let the Wild Be Free!

