



A Day in the Life of Lakeside's Rehab Hospital By Cindy Williams

Today was insane, and I just have to tell you about it. I generally volunteer in the rehab hospital on Tuesday mornings and today was no exception. I'm a home rehabber in addition to spending time at the Center and on this day I had 26 Virginia Opossums and one Eastern Gray Squirrel who was recovering from a possible head injury. This morning I cleaned and fed all my home critters and headed out the door early so I could stop by a local bait shop and pick up some donated dead minnows (opossums and raccoons love to eat minnows). I also enter paper chart information into the computer and mentor an occasional new volunteer. Today was the second day of mentoring for Jess, not to be confused with the awesome Jesse who is a full-time naturalist and was also there today along with the other awesome full-time naturalists Ruth and Jacque and the amazing part-time naturalist, John. Add director Kim into the mix and we had a pretty full crew (thank goodness).

My "shift" is from 9:00 – 12:00 and I got there a little early because I also brought in donated newspapers from the library (used to line cages), as well as my head-injury squirrel. I wanted John to take a look at her again because he has been helping me evaluate her progress. Ruth helped me unload the car and John was available immediately to evaluate my baby, who looks like she is making progress – seemed like a good start to the shift. I threw the frozen minnows onto the counter in a container with a towel to let them thaw, so I could move them to smaller bags to store in the freezer. They make quite a mess when they thaw.

I usually work in Room 2 with the raptors, but there were only two baby Barred Owls in there, and the baby room (aka Room 1) was pretty full. Volunteer Frank was there to handle Room 2 and the flight pen, so we determined that my trainee and I should work in the baby room. Ruth was already feeding babies and the room was a flurry of activity. Jacque and an intern already had a lot of aquariums set up for the older babies, so I quickly showed Jess how to tube some baby opossums. We needed to stimulate, weigh, and tube them, and then set up in their new aquarium. After that we needed to make food for them – soft, weaning food. Oh, and the littlest one also needed Gent (Gentamicin) drops in her eyes! I broke off to make some new mush food for them (dry cat food moistened with formula combined with some yummy pear baby food). But first I needed to make a lot more formula. Jesse was going to be feeding young Raccoons later so I thought I might as well make a bunch. So far, while busy, the morning had been pretty normal. Then the madness began.



We go to great effort to keep baby owls from imprinting!

Jesse asked me if we could feed the six baby Groundhogs (aka Woodchucks) and move them to the treatment room – you bet! I've actually never syringe-fed a Groundhog before, but I'm told it's much like feeding a baby squirrel (syringe with a nipple on the end), so Jess and I learned this new task together. But first I had to finish making the mush food. Then, "BUZZZZZZZZ." The parade of injured and abandoned wildlife entering the building began. You may know that when the general public brings in wildlife, they can either go to the front desk if the doors are open ("ding ding" goes the front desk bell) or they can buzz the back door to be let directly into the hospital. Injured baby Eastern Cottontails, baby birds out of their nests, baby Raccoons – all the usual suspects. Then it started getting interesting...

A very nice woman brought in an injured American Crow. After an evaluation it turned out it wasn't injured, but just a fledgling and could be returned to the area so the

parents could continue to feed it, which the lady was more than happy to do (the crow is a huge fledgling looking much like an adult, so I certainly don't blame her for the mistake). At that point all the babies in Room 1 were quickly being transferred from the baby room into the treatment room, so the activity was a bit more hectic than usual. Unfortunately, it turned out that one of our Raccoons had parvo (parvovirus), a very contagious infectious disease common in dogs and occasionally found in Raccoons. Out of an abundance of caution it was decided to empty the room and scrub everything down. Well, that is just what the staff doesn't need on a busy day! Because of that, the newspapers I brought in were in the way, so Jess and I quickly distributed the papers to the various rooms. While I was out of the room, I heard a crow cawing in the treatment room (where intake animals are generally taken to be evaluated).

"Wait a minute," I thought, "Didn't that crow go back home?"

I peeked into the room, and lo and behold, there were now three fledgling crows. We can go months without seeing any and then we get four within a matter of minutes? Weird.

As I slipped into the baby room to get some more formula, Ruth showed me an ADORABLE baby bunny with a white patch on her nose. Isn't it cool that we get literally hundreds of bunnies each spring and we can still get excited over an extra cute one?! There was some discussion amongst the staff as to whether it was wild or whether it was possibly bred with a domestic rabbit, but she looked just like a wild bunny except for the white patch.



Ok, now we needed to get started on the Groundhogs. Before I get to them, though, Frank asks for my assistance tweezer feeding a baby Barred Owl. Heck yeah! I love to help with that task, so we donned our owl masks (baby owlets are easily imprinted upon humans, especially when there is food involved) and got that task done. Now we had to go back to



Albino Robin chick

the Groundhogs. We got set up in the treatment room because the baby room had become a madhouse. Let me tell you, baby Groundhogs are insanely cute, but they are big and they eat a lot and they are messy. I fed the first one and then let Jess try her hand on a few of them while I went to make yet more mush food, this time out of monkey chow (yes, you read that right) soaked in formula with some veggie baby food and some diced carrots thrown in. While I was doing that, Jesse and Kim checked in an albino American Robin. A WHAT you say?! Yes, it's an albino Robin! Now that's one for the books.

OK, then I had to get back to the groundhogs—six of them. Jess was doing a great job, but it is a time-consuming task. It was already 11:15! I was hoping to break off and start doing paperwork by then, but no point in worrying about that. I jumped back in and helped and finally that task was done and we've run out of time for anything else. Where did the morning go? Between the breaks to intake new animals, the



Baby Groundhogs are awesome!

interruptions for different tasks and the interesting species that we had to check out it seemed that we'd gotten very little done, but we'd experienced a lot. Oh, and on the way past one of the rooms during the flurry of activity I noticed that somewhere along the way we checked in an Armadillo. They've been migrating farther north in the last few years and this is about the third one I've seen in the last 3 or 4 years. I was so busy that I didn't even stop and get a picture!

Jess and I finished up and went over her Mentor Checklist. Around 12:30 I finally got to sit down and start on the paperwork, and there was a lot of it. All those intakes generate a mountain of charts that have to be entered into the computer once the animals have been “resolved” (transferred to other rehabbers, released or died). I do this weekly, but there was so much on this day that they didn’t all fit into the “To Be Filed” file. As I worked on the computer, I heard the buzzer buzz and the staff break off from their tasks to answer it over and over and over again, always with the same cheerful demeanor and often saying the same things again and again. The bell rang out front and the staff answered questions about renting the buildings on the hill. Kim sat down at her desk to work on her long to-do list, then popped up to answer a question or help a staff member check someone in. Ruth wolfed down a banana and something that looked like trail mix before she and John headed up the hill to do a program. At 2:00 I had to get up and feed the baby squirrel that I brought with me, but I spent the rest of the almost 3 hours working on the computer and listening to the normal hubbub handled so well by a staff who loves their jobs but has way too much of it for comfort in the spring. I marveled that they can handle it all with the energy and good humor that they do. I’m very grateful I sometimes get to work alongside such a dedicated and talented mix of people all doing great work for the right reasons, and I’m often in awe that they are so patient with me with all of the other distractions that they have to handle. Connie cheerfully passes through on some cleaning task—she doesn’t handle animals but she’s been a recent and very welcome addition to the staff. Part-time naturalists Sarah and Morgan aren’t here today, but they would be doing the same great work as the rest of the rehab staff if they were. I’ve seen them perform the same way many times.



Finally I finished my paperwork—by then it was after 3:00. I still had to copy charts for the 10 new opossums I’m taking home, note my hours into the volunteer notebook, parcel out the partially thawed minnows and bundle my squirrel and new baby possies into the car. Jesse was finishing up cleaning the baby room and the kitchen, the staff were moving all the babies back into the now disinfected room, and Jacque had finished up the second round of feedings and was sending the six Groundhogs (which she had just fed again) off with a home rehabber. Ruth and John were still on the hill doing their program. Kim was working at the computer in her office. Did they get lunch? I know I didn’t, but I hoped they managed to snatch some food in between tasks. I loaded my car and headed home at around 3:30, passing through a drive-in for a hasty lunch/dinner on the run since I had babies in the car and it was a hot day. I got home and settled my squirrel back into her home, set up the two batches of new possies into their new homes and checked my 16 older possies. Then it was time to chart my own home rehab and spend a few hours catching up on my home tasks before starting the nighttime feeding.

Is it hectic? You bet. Was today typical? Not exactly, but not far off the mark for spring rehab either. Is it hard? Yes, yes it is. Is it worth it? Absolutely!