

Jackson County Wildness! By Cindy Williams

Who knew there were so many cool wild animals living in Jackson County? You did? Well, we do too. It's amazing how many wild animals are brought to us from Kansas City's home county considering how much human interaction they have to overcome – pollution, trash, lack of habitat, fences, cars, fishing tackle, guns, domestic pets, noise, light, poisons, firecrackers, bored teenagers, well-intentioned adults. Did I miss anything? There's probably more, but you get the picture. Urban wildlife faces a lot of challenges. But somehow they manage to thrive in the world that people have fashioned to make our lives easier. We had some pretty cool wild Jackson County residents in our care this month - here are a few of them.

Ever heard of an Eastern River Cooter? I had not, so when I saw this beauty, I did a double take. It's a turtle that looks very much like a large Red-Eared Slider, a very common reptile in our area. Eastern River Cooters are much more common in the south east part of the US, but a small population does reside in the Midwest. It appears from my research that they are considered a southern Missouri resident, so who knows how this particular turtle found her way to Lee's Summit. As you might guess they are usually found in freshwater rivers but can also be at home in more still bodies of water. A Jackson County Parks worker brought her in with some major shell damage; I'm guessing she got hit by a car. Luckily for her even though her shell (or carapace) was severely damaged, her body cavity underneath was not breached so she has a good chance at recovery.



River Cooter.
Photo Cindy Williams

Eastern River Cooters live in shallow fresh water, and unlike some of our other aquatic turtles they don't eat a lot of fish – they exist mostly on plants and algae. The younger animals might eat a fish or two for added protein, but the more mature ones do not. We hope that girl will make it through her ordeal with some interesting scars and a wild story to tell her progeny. (in the southern United States, beginning with African Americans in the early 1800s, people use *cooter* to refer to a few species of box turtles and tortoises. The word may have come from *kuta*, meaning *turtle* to the Bambara and Malinke people of West Africa.)

Speaking of eating fish, here's an animal who eats plenty! This Great Blue Heron from Blue Springs managed to get tangled in fishing line and a hook that a careless fisherman left behind. The hook was removed from his left leg, leaving a wound, and the line was



Great Blue Heron
Photo: Cindy Williams

unwrapped from around his left wing but, luckily, did not do any damage. However, he somehow picked up some lacerations on the left side of his face, and his left eye was bloody. After a few days of tubing fluids for hydration and a yummy concoction consisting of Science Diet A/D cat food thinned out in the blender with water (so it can also be delivered via a tube) he was able to graduate to fish, first hand delivered then he started eating on his own. Fishing tackle injuries are very common – we currently have two Canada Geese in for the same injuries (hook wounds), but even more common are fishing lines wrapped around wings and legs. They get tighter and tighter and eventually the lines will cut into the flesh causing infection and restricting blood flow. The end result will usually be death, a very slow and painful one at that.

Great Blue Herons are large wading birds that can be found throughout the US. If you've ever heard one in the wild, chances are you were as startled as I was. They make a

sound I can only describe as a guttural squawk – it's what I imagine pterodactyls sounded like when dinosaurs roamed the earth. I had no idea what was behind the trees the first time I heard it, but I was ready to run when that monster broke through. Luckily, I saw it fly away and realized I was not about to be eaten. I've since learned that it is wise to keep your distance from them. Even though they aren't vicious they are capable of doing some major damage with that huge beak. They spear fish in the water with that beak and if they ever decide to go for your eye (and that would probably be their first line of defense) ... well, let's just say that's why we take very strict precautions when we deal with these guys. They are probably one of the only animals we handle that could actually kill us with a single strike. You can see in the picture that John is taking no chances. We take safety very seriously when we handle Great Blues. Once the heron finished his round of Baytril for infection and got his strength back, he was able to return to his lovely Blue Springs home, perhaps to a mate who was waiting for his return. Hopefully he will steer clear of any future "entanglements" with humans.

Great Blues are only one of the herons we see in our area. This awkward looking Jackson County baby bird (he came in from Raytown) is the smaller heron cousin, the Green Heron. We see them occasionally at the Center but I can't say I've ever seen one in the wild. They are practically the opposite of the Great Blue – short and stocky as opposed to tall and graceful. But both hang around the water's edge and hunt for fish, so they share the dagger-like beak and the big feet that are typical of a shore bird. This little guy definitely needs to grow into his beak and feet. He will eventually take on a dark green color on his back and head and a rust color on his breast and neck. His wings will be mostly gray. In the meantime, he has a lot of growing to do.



Green Heron
Photo: David Johnson

We received several Red Foxes from Jackson County the past few months. Two of them came in with mange, a common occurrence in our area foxes and coyotes. Mange is easily treated but very contagious. It's thought that most of the larger mammal populations carry the disease but unless their immune system is compromised in some other way (injured, sick, starved, dehydrated) the mange is kept in check. When they arrive at the Center they are generally in pretty poor shape. One of our mange victims from Kansas City was caught by a dog. He is a juvenile who had a relatively light case but was injured by the dog and had a lot of congestion so we had to treat him for infection with Baytril, congestion with Amoxicillin and mange with Ivermectin. He



Red Fox
Photo: Cindy Williams

rebounded relatively quickly and was able to be released back to his Kansas City home area in less than a month.

The other two are a little less fortunate and will be with us for a while longer. This poor little guy came in from Independence with a terrible case of mange. He was starving, his eyes were sunken and he had pressure sores on his body. You can see he looked pretty pathetic (and he didn't smell all that great either). The bad news is that he was in pretty bad shape. The good news is that he started eating on his own right away! That's always a good sign – it means they feel good enough to eat, that they have a will to live, and that we have to handle them less. He still needed all the usual routine – wound care, subcutaneous fluids, meds, meds, meds – but it's great to be able to put food in his cage and let him feed himself. He sure did look miserable when he came in but I'm happy

to report that after a few weeks of care he's already looking much better. We'll keep our fingers crossed for this one.

On the other hand, this cutie pie from Lee's Summit has great skin, hair and personality – doesn't she look like she's ready to fetch a Frisbee with you? Don't be fooled though, this juvenile Red Fox hasn't been lucky in life so far. The car that hit her broke her pelvis. She's going to be with us at least six weeks while she heals. The great folks at Kansas City Veterinary Care did surgery on her injured hip, now it's up to us to provide the proper supportive care and a quiet place to rehab. In the meantime she's eating well and doesn't appear to be too stressed to be in captivity temporarily. We can encourage that sentiment for a little while so she doesn't move around too much but eventually she'll have to learn to hate us just like all the rest of our charges.



Red Fox

Photo: Cindy Williams

A shout out to the Animal Control officers who participate in many of the rescues that come through our door every day – Blue Springs, Independence and Kansas City Animal Control in the above cases. We really appreciate the service they provide to Jackson County humans and animals. But most of our animals come to us from the general public, people like you who can't turn away from an animal in need and are willing to go the extra mile. Don't forget to appreciate the wildlife that exists all around us. You see them every day – the birds that fly overhead, the little mammals that cross the road in front of us, the shiny eyes you see at the edge of the woods. Try to give them a break when you can – we take up a lot of space and they deserve the chance to survive in our urban environment.