

## Winter at the Center By Cindy Williams

2018 has arrived with snap! A cold snap, that is. I happen to like the cold but this has been a little over the top. As we bundle up in heavy pants, boots, sweatshirts, downy coats, thermal gloves, knit hats and scarves for the 15 second dash from the car to the building, ever wonder how the wild critters survive? How a Virginia Opossum's ears and tail don't just fall off their little bodies? How a Blue Jay's tiny feet don't freeze to the branch? How a Coyote's wet nose doesn't turn into a snowball? I'm well aware of the fact that these things don't really happen as a general rule and that there are completely logical reasons why they don't, but still.... doesn't it seem like a Goldfinch that weighs less than  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an ounce shouldn't be able to sit at your birdfeeder eating seeds when the temperature is in the single digits and you can't step outside without your nose hairs freezing?!?! Amazing.



Meanwhile inside the building we are still taking care of the critters that end up on the wrong side of an interaction with humans. There are no small babies running around in the cold – nature has managed to prevent that from happening in the worst of the season – so we tend to see a lot of adults who have been hit by cars, or were attacked by pets, or have run into windows or fences. That last part is mostly birds, of course, but you knew that. In fact, we see more raptors than mammals as a general rule during the winter with one exception - Raccoons. This winter we are seeing a lot of Raccoons coming in with distemper.

Raccoons can get both canine and feline distemper which seems pretty odd and highly unfair. It's one reason that vaccination is so important for our pets. And there's really no good treatment for it so the sick Raccoons that come into the Center are humanely euthanized. It's just the best we can do for them. The good news is that humans aren't in danger of catching it. Raccoons are nocturnal for the most part but seeing one during the day doesn't guarantee that it's sick. However, if it acts "drunk" or "wobbly" or appears to be seizing you should steer clear and call your local animal control or police department.

On a happier note, there are plenty of creatures that we can and do help. This Eastern Screech Owl came to us from Lee's Summit Animal Control who collected it from – get this – a car's grill. He wasn't in great shape at first (I mean, would you be if you got hit by a car and stuck in its grill?!). His right ear was bruised and swollen, his right eye was full of blood and his right metatarsus was fractured. A bird's leg is similar to a human leg. The bone between the hip joint and the knee joint is the femur. From the knee joint to the ankle is the tibia and fibula. And from the ankle to the beginning of the "fingers" is the metatarsus. Thankfully an x-ray revealed that the break was mid-shaft which means it has a good chance of healing without causing problems in the joints. He's been on gentamicin for his eye, which improved very quickly, and metacam for pain and swelling. Unfortunately the break required a pin so he'll be with us for a while until it heals, and he needed Baytril to prevent infection. So far so good. Special thanks once again to Dr. Entrekin at Kansas City Veterinary Care! Those guys really help us take care of our wildlife friends.



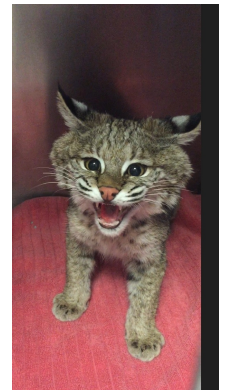
Eastern Screech Owls come primarily in two "morphs" or "phases" (fancy names for color variations); there is a red phase and a gray phase. This little guy is a red phase, and we actually just got in a second one that is also a red phase owl. Eastern Screeches are among

the larger of the screech owls, though they are the smallest of the owls that are common in our area. Western and Eastern Screech Owls are almost identical except for the fact that the Westerns don't have a red phase, they only come in gray (there are other differences, including bill color and the sound of their call). Of the Eastern color variations, red phase owls are more likely found to the south and gray phase to the north, although there are overlays. We see both phases in our area but the gray tends to be more common (though you couldn't tell by our current guests). I'm told that we even had siblings here at one time that were different phases – one gray and one red! I'm glad I don't have to try and categorize these things as they tend to break all the rules.

Screeches are tree dwellers and their color variations tend to correspond to the more common trees in the area since their color helps them blend into their environment and be hard to spot. Red phases blend more efficiently into pine trees while gray phases practically disappear against a gray hardwood tree. There is also a brown phase that is more common in Florida and is thought to be a hybrid of sorts, but according to MDC they are in Missouri as well. Eastern Screech Owls eat small rodents, reptiles and insects; as with most wildlife they are helpful to have around. And they are adorable. Doesn't this one look like he would love to have a go at the person holding him? That's the look we like to see in our owls.

Another winter guest currently in rehab is a beautiful Bobcat. Bobcats are common throughout Missouri and in fact most of the contiguous United States and Mexico. They are about twice the size of a domestic cat but much smaller than a Mountain Lion. They are considered "crepuscular" (there's your word for the day) which just means they are most active during twilight as opposed to "nocturnal" (active during the night) or "diurnal" (active during the day). During the colder seasons they may be out more during the day to correspond to their prey animals' habits. Eastern Cottontail Rabbits are their preferred prey in our area, but they wouldn't be opposed to competing with an Eastern Screech Owl for a small rodent, and in fact would consider a little owl to be a tasty morsel.

The Bobcat we currently have in residence came from Boliver. He is a first year cat who was hit by a car and apparently was in pretty bad shape when he was originally taken to a veterinarian in Warsaw – not even able to raise his head. They stabilized him throughout the week, confirmed through x-ray that he had no broken bones (maybe some cracked ribs) and then transferred him to us. By the time we got him he had rebounded nicely. In fact, so nicely that he is really tough to handle. I asked the staff whether he was male or female and they just laughed at me and said they hadn't checked and had no intention of doing so. I can't say as I blame them. I managed to catch this wild thing in mid-hiss – he's got quite an attitude, let me tell you! We'll continue to feed him for several more weeks until his ribs have had a chance to heal completely, then return him to his home territory in Boliver where he probably still has a mama Bobcat who can help care for him. Considering his body condition when he came in he was getting by just fine until he tangled with a car. Let's hope this experience will teach him to stay far away from roads and vehicles!



Thanks so much for all you have contributed in 2017 for the welfare of the wild animals, and all the help you will continue to contribute in 2018 whether it is in the form of food or money or time or other donations. Without our great base of volunteers (of which I am one) we couldn't continue our mission to Let the Wild Be Free. Hope you had a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year and that the coming year finds you healthy and prosperous – and communing with nature in a very positive way.