

Spring is Here By Cindy Williams

I am often asked by new friends and associates why I would bother to rehab, for instance, a squirrel (since we have so many and they are destructive) or an opossum (since they are ugly and scary) or a raccoon (since they carry diseases and get in the way of cars). There are lots of answers to this question, and it provides a good opportunity for education if the person is open to it. But I have found that the best shorthand answer that ends the conversation with perhaps some food for thought is simply “don’t you think they deserve a chance?” The vast majority of the animals we see in the rehab hospital at Lakeside are animals that came to us because of a negative interaction with people (hit by a car, caught by a pet, fooled by a window, etc...), luckily followed by a positive interaction with people who cared enough to give them safe harbor and bring them to us (often at great inconvenience). Those people are searching for someone, anyone, who can give these poor creatures a second chance to be a wild animal. And we are happy to oblige, if that animal can be returned to the wild in a condition which is conducive to their continued survival.

I am happy to report that the Screech Owl who unwittingly hitched a ride in the grill of a car (after being hit by said car) that I told you about in December was finally able to get the heck out of captivity and back to the great outdoors. The pin that corrected the break in his leg was removed and after much rehab and checking to see if he could still grasp the good folks at Lee’s Summit Animal Control released him. Such a happy ending, and a nice second chance, for the little guy who gave us a lot of fits since his wing wrap came off a while ago and he was able to use his wings perfectly well!



Migration has been occurring for the last few weeks, and it’s sometimes interesting to see what critters we come into contact with during this time that we wouldn’t normally see. This adorable little Golden Crowned Kinglet found its way to our door after running into a window – a common problem with our modern structures. I know I have one window in

particular that seems to attract them. This little guy was in sad shape when he came to us with a terrible head injury. We do what we can in situations like this, but we find sometimes they come around and sometimes they don’t. I’d never seen a bird like this in our area before and it turns out that they don’t usually reside permanently in our area. They spend the summers in the northern US and Canada and the winters in the southern US, Mexico and Central America. Have you ever been lucky enough to see one at your backyard feeder?



Along with the spring migration comes spring baby season, and if you’ve been with us for a year or more, you know that it’s an all-consuming time for the rehab hospital. We get hundreds of baby bunnies, birds, squirrels, opossums, and raccoons – all looking for second chances. Not all of them were impacted by interactions with humans. Sometimes a storm will knock a nest out of a tree, or a mama will kick out a “defective” baby from the nest, or a small critter will wander too far from where they belong and get lost. We can’t save them all but we certainly do what we can. The first babies of the year are usually squirrels (see the obligatory cute baby photo), followed closely by bunnies then opossums, birds, and raccoons. Throw in a few fox kits, a sprinkle of fawns, a generous helping of bats and various other mammals and you get the picture. Being a wild baby is a

tough gig, and so is being a wild parent (or a human parent for that matter). We all need a helping hand sometimes to get our second chance.

Our current census also includes a few parents – namely, mama opossums. This time of year the chance is very good that the opossum you see on the side of the road may be



harboring as many as a dozen or more babies in her pouch – that was certainly the case for two of our, thankfully live, opossum mothers who ended up on the losing end of an interaction with a car. Both came from Jackson County. Most opossum babies start out gray, but it's very common to see some that range more to the black side and some that lean more to the white side of the spectrum – they are all still Virginia Opossums. As they get older they continue to get bigger and lighter, like this mama opossum. If you look closely

you can see that there is bandage on the end of her tail. Most opossums come in with frostbite at the end of a long winter, either on their tail tips or their ears.

Cats may have nine lives but wild animals don't often get second chances when something bad happens. With your help we can give them that. If you find any wild babies PLEASE contact a wildlife rehabber (like Lakeside) before you decide how to help that animal. Wild parents are pretty good at raising babies (so much better than we mere humans) and the best second chance of all is to reunite baby with mama. Let us help you with that, or with the decision of what to do before you remove them permanently from their environment. Hope you have a wonderful spring!