

Is It Warm Yet? By Cindy Williams

It's the busiest time of the year at Lakeside Nature Center, and for all rehabbers in general. Spring is a time of renewal in nature and baby season is in full swing. When the weather warms up (and we were starting to wonder if it ever would), people can't wait to go outside. This combination (babies and people spending time outside) means lots of "business" for us. Sometimes we get babies that we should never get – they may be perfectly fine where they are, or maybe just need a little help to reunite with mom – but mostly we get babies in trouble. This alone would make for a busy time, but let's not forget that we are still getting all the adult animals who get into trouble. The combination of the two is formidable and that's why we need home rehabbers for the babies. The Center can't possibly keep up.

Home rehabbers are people with either their own license from the Missouri Department of Conservation permitting them to rehab animals in their homes or a short list of rehabbers under the Lakeside permit. Rehabbing isn't a lark – it's expensive, time-consuming and heart breaking. The commitment must be strong and you must be willing to follow the rules. Making pets out of these abandoned animals is the last thing we want to do. If your babies don't hate/fear you a little by the time they are released, you haven't done your job.

It works like this; when a person finds a baby or babies in trouble, she will call the Center to find out what to do (this often involves an internet search to find us). The Center has dedicated volunteers who return these phone calls after hours so no one has to wait until the next day to get an answer. They have to determine whether or not the baby (or adult) needs our help. If the animal does need help, they instruct the caller what to do until they can transport it to the Center. Otherwise, they instruct the caller as to how to return the animal to the wild. Returns CAN be done and definitely should be done if possible.



Once the 'patient' arrives at the Center, staff or onsite volunteers check it in and fill out the appropriate paperwork. The babies get warmed up and then evaluated, weighed, sexed and treated. Wounds get fixed up if necessary and often the mammal babies get subcutaneous fluids to restore their electrolyte balance. This is more important for a compromised baby than even food. The baby is started on the appropriate formula, slowly at first then built up over time. This all happens pretty quickly, and then the search for an available home rehabber is on.

Once the staff finds a home rehabber who has room in their homes and hearts for another batch of babies they are farmed off to those rehabbers where they will spend the rest of their time rehabilitating. The Center supports the rehabbers on their permit with supplies and advice, and a shoulder to cry on if necessary (which is not uncommon). The benefits to the babies and the Center are innumerable – the babies get more personal care than they could possibly receive at the Center, including nighttime feedings and, in my case, a personal touch to weaning the baby Virginia Opossums (how cute is that?!?! I just love my little possies).



And moving them to home rehabbers means they don't have to euthanize for lack of space. The payoff? Releasing your healthy, happy (although by now a little frustrated and hateful, sort of like teenagers) babies into a species-appropriate environment and watching them amble, run, fly away free. If you ever feel like you want to join that team contact Ruth at the Center for more information. There is a process, and we

are only allowed to add rehabbers to our permit once a year so it might not happen right away. But rest assured, we need you! Working in the hospital at the Center is a great first step. Or even a final step if you don't want to be a home rehabber!

But of course as I mentioned, we still have all the non-baby patients to treat and last month brought us an interesting winged animal and an unfortunately all-too-common problem with some of our four-legged friends. Let's start with that one – a Red Fox with mange. The good folks at Kansas City Animal Control brought in this little guy from 17th and Tracy in Kansas City – yep, that's right, wildlife can exist just about anywhere in our city. From the country to the suburbs to downtown, wildlife has learned to adapt as much as possible to the human invasion. Mange is caused by a mite infestation, and it is believed that most wild foxes and coyotes probably carry the mite but it doesn't become a problem unless the animal is otherwise compromised. Who knows what caused this pathetic little guy to go downhill, but as bad as he looks the prognosis is good. He started eating right away (a great sign) and with a round of Ivermectin he should be as good as new in a few weeks. We'll fatten him up and get him back out there to do his thing. If you happen to see a mangy fox or coyote in your area, Bi-State Wildlife has set up a "Mange by Mail" program that allows you to contact them and get medication via the mail that you can feed to the affected animal since some of them can be hard to catch. Check out www.wildlifehotline.com/mange if you are interested in that program.



I've talked about the fact that we have gulls in our area, and that there is really no such thing as a "sea gull" other than the fact that some gulls live by the sea. Here's a great example of one of them. The Franklin's Gull breeds in Canada and adjacent northern US states and winters in South America and the Caribbean so this guy was probably just migrating through our area when he ended up with a broken wing. Our favorite vet Dr. Exline of Kansas City Veterinary Clinic did an x-ray and determined that he should be able to fly once it was healed, so we taped up his wing and put him on a regiment of fish, metacam and calcium and will give him plenty of time to heal. We usually have a hard time getting water birds to eat but this one started fishing in his little pan right away and loves to splash around. He's a beautiful specimen and in this picture you can't even see his bandaged (left) wing. He came to us all the way from the Nodaway Valley Conservation Center near Mound City. That area is a mecca for migrating Snow Geese and the eagles that follow them so I guess it makes sense that an occasional gull might get in trouble there too.



Enjoy the beautiful spring weather and keep an eye out for our wildlife friends. Give them a break if you can, they belong here just as much as we do and we can sometimes be a little difficult on them. Watch those little squirrels on the road, they sometimes double-back right under your tires, and help out the occasional turtle that wanders into the road – they aren't very fast and can use your help if you can do so safely. Always move them in the direction that they are heading. And at night keep your eyes peeled for other eyes in the road – raccoons and opossums sometimes get caught out and they don't always run out of the way quickly enough (opossums are notorious for standing their ground and hissing – they don't know that thousands of pounds of vehicles wins every time). Be safe and enjoy!