Dear Members,

How does one tell the story of an entire life in just a few pages? I consider it a near impossibility but will do the best I can to tell you about the male African lion who recently died here at WRR.

His life began in some unknown place that exists for the sole purpose of profit making for humans—the wild animal “pet” trade. He was no doubt taken from his captive mother and sold as a cub. In his case, the purchaser was a young man who lived in an apartment in Detroit, Michigan. There is no need to take the time to tell you how absurdly cruel this practice is so I will move along to how he was found and rescued.

When the lion was a few years old and quite large, the individual who purchased him was stopped for speeding. When the officer approached the car he found a large lion sitting in the backseat. It was great good fortune that in that city it was illegal to privately own a lion and the big cat was confiscated and sent to the Belle Isle Zoo. There the lion and two lionesses lived for a number of years until that facility was closed. It was then that WRR was contacted and asked to take the three lions. After much negotiating, we agreed.

It was never my plan when founding WRR to take in the larger members of the cat family such as lions and tigers. They need so much space and require massive amounts of food and I feared this would create a financial burden that would jeopardize our ability to feed and care for the thousands of native wild animals we receive every year. But there was some funding that accompanied these three cats and there seemed simply nowhere else for them to go so WRR became their home.

Here they had more space and peace and quiet than they had ever known. No prying, public eyes staring at them every day; instead, tall shade trees, green grass and no need to do anything but loll about in each other’s company. As it turned out the male lion was considerably younger than the two sisters and he was less outgoing. He had lost his mane when he had been castrated some years ago and he was not in the best condition despite his relative youth; his timidity coupled with his poor health simply meant that we must watch him closely to be aware of any problems that might arise.

In contrast, the two lionesses were older but they refused to let their advancing years slow them down. They would romp around bounding over logs and hide in the tall grass and lie in wait for the male to wander innocently past. As he did so they took pleasure in tackling him to the ground and having great fun with him, but all he wanted was to be left in peace. The male lion did not share the females’ sense of humor. If a vulture landed in the enclosure with the hope of finding a bit of leftover lunch and the lion decided it was his job to pursue the bird until he was air

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I consider the Nutrition Center at Wildlife Rescue to be the heart of the sanctuary. Though the number and variety of animals at WRR is huge, each requires a unique diet, sometimes per species and at other times for individuals. Our daily task is to acquire what they need and prepare every bowl or tray so as to ensure the health and well-being of the animals who call WRR home, whether temporary or permanent residents.

Although the NC (as we call it) may be the heart of WRR animal care (along, of course, with the hospital), it is usually not well known to outsiders, so I want to give you a short tour of what goes on there. Meeting animals’ nutritional requirements is vital to achieving their best rehabilitative outcome, and considering the 100+ species that we care for you can imagine the complexity our staff faces. No matter what time I arrive or leave, the lights in the NC are on and something is happening there.

It is also where we store dry food, refrigerate produce, freeze longer term items, cook, wash food bowls, and stock paper and cleaning supplies, medication, landscaping tools, and animal carriers used in the hospital.

Produce is picked up daily by our apprentices or volunteers from several grocery stores in our area, including HEB, Walmart, and sometimes Whole Foods and Marriott. Although it is considered past prime for human consumption, it is still fully edible and healthful. Its donation to Wildlife Rescue saves tens of thousands of dollars every year. When the truck arrives at the NC people spring into action and it is unpacked in minutes. Apprentices and volunteers who participate in our Helping Hands Program begin preparing bowls and trays according to the very large list of diets posted on the white boards in front of the preparation tables. The huge wallboard lists the special diets for each particular species.

Diets are determined from research and experience by the animal care team and monitored by the animal caretakers who observe the animals regularly. A morning or evening meal might be modified if a caretaker notices signs of illness or some symptom that can be better served by tweaking that day’s meal plan. Medication may need to be added to the meal or in a snack that appeals to that particular animal. For example, one of the black bears is over 20 years old and has arthritis and needs chondroitin pills. The pills are inserted into something sweet like a date that can be offered in the meal or as a separate snack. We often use peanut butter to help bind together fruit or veget-
ables that contains a remedy so that the medication is delivered in a way that will ensure that it is enjoyed and consumed. And some food must be cooked so that it can be managed by older animals or because it is only safe to eat after cooking, such as sweet potatoes which cannot be eaten raw by lemurs.

The white board provides instructions on amount, kind of food, and how it is to be prepared. Here are a few typical diets:

- **Wolf Hybrids (3)**: In large bowls, each receives 2 cups dog food and 1 ½ lbs red meat/chicken with grated veggies.

- **Hawks (6), morning only**: 6 plates, sprinkled with VitaHawk, 3 mice. No prep Saturday.

- **Lemurs (23)**: 1 ½ buckets of small pieces: 40% fruit, 50% veggies, 10% nutrition additive; Monday and Friday add eggs and insects.

- **Elderly Capuchin**: 1 large tray of small pieces of produce, cut grape size, diced too small: 60% fruit, 30% veggies, 10% nutrition additive; Monday and Friday add eggs. Wednesday: insects.

In addition, the board lists what foods are not to be fed. For example, no spinach for young, growing animals since it may strip calcium from the bones of young animals and stunt growth or cause body weight to be disproportionate to legs. There are also examples of the difference between minced and diced, small chopped and large chopped portions.

Enrichment items are also prepared in the NC. Empty paper towel rolls filled with mango, pineapple and peanut butter, for example, so that the animal can tear it apart and get to the delectable edible inside. The enrichment provides an activity and tasty snack.

I could go on, but I imagine I’ve said enough for you to realize how complex the seemingly simple matter of feeding animals is, and thus how much we appreciate and depend upon the attentive care that our staff, apprentices, and volunteers put into it. From rescue through medical care, feeding, and finally release, our people are intensely busy doing the good work for animals that you, our members, count on from Wildlife Rescue.

Cyndi Nelson, Executive Director
cnelson@wildlife-rescue.org
830-336-2725 x315

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You Can Help

The NC obviously gets a lot of wear and tear on a daily basis. It also faces the same budgetary constraints as all the important activities here at WRR.

Here are some of the things it needs now, before a new “baby season” gets underway.

- Containers, utensils, and other items used in food preparation seem always to wear out or be used up.

- We need to remodel the NC to better maintain a clean area that provides the healthiest atmosphere for food preparation, as well as being a safe place to work.

- Bowls, trays, and knives are currently hand-washed in a large sink—a commercial dishwasher that sterilizes bowls and knives would be ideal.

- Better lighting to improve the work area.

- A larger sink with 3 bowls, more hot water, and a place to hold scrubbing tools would be a great improvement.

- We need additional stainless steel shelving that accommodates the items we need to store.

- Our volunteers and apprentices stand on a concrete floor that could be made easier on their backs if we had commercial gel foam mats.

Taking care of the NC contributes substantially to our overall excellence in taking care of the animals here who rely on us. After over a dozen years of heavy use it is time for us to give some care to the Nutrition Center itself.

If you’d like to help with this, please call me and we can discuss what part you would like to play. Anything and everything will be deeply appreciated.

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Fruits and vegetables—Arrived and being organized
bound, the lionesses would usually leap ahead of him and steal all the fun. Their job was to provide daily annoyance and their own brand of excitement. As the years passed the threesome settled in to their routines and enjoyed their days filled with apparent contentment.

The calm was shattered one March day when the lion abruptly ceased showing any interest in his food. This is not necessarily unusual with carnivores or any animal but it is always cause for closer scrutiny and as the days passed and the big male grew increasingly listless we knew he was in trouble. Early one morning when he was found with yellow froth oozing through his lips I made for the telephone to contact emergency assistance. Drs. Fred Williams and Andy Anderson had recently opened their new specialty veterinary clinic in San Antonio and they would have both the expertise and the medical equipment to help the cat.

“There was no time to spare since the sedation was wearing off”

Thanks to their willingness to help, it was now up to us to transport the lion to their capable hands. Our equipment at WRR was excellent for cougars and all the other animals in our care but the lion was 700 pounds of muscle, bone, and skin, and most importantly, he was likely to need emergency surgery so no time could be wasted in devising an ideal means for transportation. After managing in ways I cannot begin to recount in detail we had the cat tranquilized and in the WRR horse trailer with a convoy of us following close behind. On our way I made a quick call to Fred to confirm that we were bringing an African lion not an American lion so there would be no surprises.

Once we arrived the caring staff at the hospital saw very quickly the difference in size between the two. The lion would not fit on the gurney so two of the wheeled devices had to be strapped together to whisk him into the operating room. There was no time to spare since the sedation was wearing off. As the huge cat was prepared for surgery his vital signs were taken and the opinion was that his gall bladder was no longer functioning. With several clinic and WRR staff in place, the lion was anesthetized and the hours-long surgery was underway.

I held both the lion’s head and the anesthesia mask in place as it was far too small for the carnivore’s massive jaws. As the operation progressed I began to feel woozy and could not help but notice as my eyes began to close that there were two large, golden eyes now open and staring foggily into mine. That moment of contact was one I shall never forget. The anesthesia was increased, the mask was modified, the lion went peacefully back to sleep, and I became more alert. By the late afternoon we were relieved to know the surgery was apparently successful but sad to realize that the male lion would never again be truly healthy. In the coming days he would entirely shut down and refuse all food and take only the smallest amounts of water. On day 17 after he had lost considerable weight and was more listless than alert we knew the end had come. All we could do was to trust that we had done all we could on his behalf and accept the fact that nothing was really enough. We offered one more meal to the large, thin cat and began our unpleasant discussion of the best way to proceed now that the end was near.

But as we stood outside the lion enclosure the distinctive sounds of bones being crushed were an odd music to our ears as we knew the two lionesses were out under their favorite oak tree and had long ago enjoyed their breakfast. The slow, deliberate, satisfying sounds were that of our convalescing male making it clear that his fast had come to an end and we could shelve our preparation for his untimely demise.

From that day on whenever the month of March would come about the lion would repeat his self-induced fast and every year we would worry that this spring would be his last. Like all animals he knew what was best for him and how to go about dealing with his less than ideal condition. The enormous cat clearly felt his limitations. His play time of batting about his giant, hard plastic red ball as if it were made of fluff would quickly give way to naptime while the frolicking female felines seemed tireless.
be alone. It was impossible to know if he preferred his solitude but to our limited, human understanding he seemed lonely. The time between our rescues of other female lions was always brief and every time a new lioness came into his life the male was accepting yet diffident, curious but reticent. His demeanor was that of a resigned yet welcoming host.

During the cold winter months the lions would consume more food and lie about warm in the thick bed of soft hay, and during the warmer months naps in the grass or atop the platform were chosen spots. Their lives went on as all captive lives do: days of rest, play, boredom, and interest and finally days that move toward an imminent finality. For the male lion his end was much like his time of illness. He chose to stop eating and became less active, but there was something different this time, something more final in his manner. To say that he passed with dignity is cliché but to say that his profound approach to leaving this world was his alone affords him the respect that all animals deserve. This massive male cat was found early one morning by his staff caretaker, the life gone from his aging body, never again to resume his post atop his preferred platform, but his view in his new world was now endless.
Wildlife Rescue Sustainers

If you’ve wondered how you could afford to do even more to help wildlife and other animals, please consider this—if you contribute, say, $120/year to Wildlife Rescue now in a few gifts, that means you average $10/month. You could increase this to $20/month with each monthly contribution being billed to your credit or debit card, and now you have doubled your annual assistance toward our life-saving work. $30/month would triple it! A small monthly gift like this (or even more—you choose) will have little impact on your household budget but over the months will add up to significant support. Each month your card will be automatically charged for the designated amount, but at any time you wish you can cancel the arrangement.

Since we began the Sustainers group a few years ago it has turned into a substantial and dependable source of assistance. When you join you can know that your increased help will feed more babies, mend more broken wings, buy more veterinary supplies and medications…and on and on. Please join. The enclosed envelope shows you the way.

A Bequest

We all know that “we can’t take it with us.” But we can arrange that after we die dedicated organizations like Wildlife Rescue, which you care so much about while you live, can continue to receive your assistance. Including WRR in your will or other estate planning offers the best and most certain way of ensuring this. Whether you choose to leave money, land, property, art works or some other asset, it will be turned into reduced suffering, lives saved, and wild animals returned to the wild with a new lease on life.

Bequests provide vital help for Wildlife Rescue and a painless way for our members to leave a lasting legacy long after they are gone. Contact Cyndi Nelson, our Executive Director, at 830-336-2725 x315 or Lynn Cuny at x309 to discuss your wishes.

Prepping for Baby Season at WRR

Most people probably think that winter is the slow season for Wildlife Rescue. This is true in that we see fewer animals, but this does not mean we slow way down! Our staff and apprentices stay very busy doing all of the necessary tasks to prepare for our upcoming baby season, which can start as early as February.

Winter is a crucial time for us to work to prepare for baby season so that it goes as smoothly as possible. Our hospital receives over 6,000 patients every year, which takes a toll on the hospital itself as well as on the supplies and equipment necessary to care for all those animals. Winter is the time to do a deep cleaning, scrubbing our hospital rooms from top to bottom.

It is also a time to take inventory of all the basic but essential items that will get us through the season. We happily welcome donations of paper towels, toilet paper, cotton balls, baby bottles, bleach, linens, etc. as these are all items we try to stock up on since we go through them very quickly in the spring and summer. We also look at other necessities that are either in need of repair or replacement before we begin the season, for example, bird perches, crates, weigh-scales, hot plates, and more. We do everything we can to ensure that we are ready to receive the hundreds of baby squirrels, opossums, raccoons, fawns and other infants and youngsters without a hitch.

Ashley Kees, Hospital Supervisor

How can you help WRR prepare for baby season?
Visit wildlife-rescue.org to see WRR’s wish list items.
Since so many of the wildlife patients who arrive at Wildlife Rescue have come into contact with humans in a negative way, it is only fitting that it be humans who repair the damage. With such a large number of animals needing our help, the people who undertake the daily tasks of cleaning, feeding and providing care are obviously essential to our efforts as an organization.

The Animal Caretaker Apprenticeship Program plays an important role in bringing caring, hard-working people to WRR. The one-year apprenticeship is a challenging, fast-paced, learning program designed for individuals who plan a career specializing in animal care. There are three training classes each year, with eight apprentices per group. Apprentices come from all over the world, most recently from Malaysia and Ireland as well as from all across the United States, to learn the practices of wildlife rehabilitation in a sanctuary setting. The program is designed to be progressive and stimulating; apprentices progress through multiple program and skill levels, learning everything from daily care and handling protocols to performing intake examinations on new arrivals. The apprentices work extremely hard to provide the best care possible, often working shifts of twelve hours or longer in order to ensure no detail is overlooked. They are given leadership roles amongst their peers to develop team management and problem-solving skills, helping prepare them to take on the challenges of an animal care career once the program is completed.

There are two specializations within the Apprenticeship program: Wildlife Rehabilitation Apprentice and Veterinary Technician Apprentice. Rehabilitation apprentices focus on the daily care needs of the thousands of animals brought to WRR, from native mammals and birds destined for release, to farmed animals, to nonnative birds, mammals, and reptiles in sanctuary. They learn the skills required to ensure safe, healthy lives for animals in our care whether the goal is eventual return to the wild or a permanent home at our facility if they are unreleasable. Veterinary Technician Apprentices learn laboratory and medical skills to prepare them for a career in wildlife veterinary medicine. They assist the veterinarian and veterinary technician in their day-to-day operations, which involve physical examination, diagnosis, and treatment of each injured or ill animal received by the hospital.

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- Wildlife Rehabilitation Apprentice
- Veterinary Technician Apprentice

Apprentices learn the skills required to ensure safe, healthy lives for animals in our care. They assist the veterinarian and veterinary technician in their day-to-day operations, which involve physical examination, diagnosis, and treatment of each injured or ill animal received by the hospital.

As the field of Wildlife Rehabilitation continues to grow the need for skilled animal caretakers increases and the Animal Caretaker Apprenticeship program will need to grow and change as well. We hope to continue to provide caring, hard-working and dedicated individuals the opportunity to work with and learn from an immersive year at WRR.

Rebecca Michelin, Apprentice Supervisor & Training Specialist

Future plans for the program include providing new housing for apprentices with the hope of being able to accommodate more people per training class. We also hope to add a third specialty within the program for a Sanctuary Apprentice to work alongside our Animal Caretaking staff in care of the primates, other nonnative species, and native unreleasable animals that have found a permanent home with us.

Rebecca with apprentices Ann and Mary
Wildlife Rescue Donation Registration Form

You may use the enclosed envelope (filled in) by itself or fill in, clip and send this coupon.

ONE-TIME GIFT DONATION

☐ $35  ☐ $50  ☐ $100  ☐ $250
☐ $500  ☐ $1,000  ☐ $______________

WRR SUSTAINERS (minimum of $10/month)

☐ I want to be a WRR Sustainer and make a monthly gift of: $______________

Your card will be charged this amount on approximately the 5th of each month.

Name ____________________________
Address ____________________________
City ________________________________
State _____ Zip _____ Phone___________
Email ______________________________

Payment Enclosed: ☐ Check ☐ Cash ☐ Charge (Check card type below)
☐ Visa ☐ Mastercard ☐ American Express

Card# ______________________________
Expiration Date _____________________  *CVV Code,________________
Signature ____________________________

*3-4 digit security number on the back of the credit card

JANUARY 2015