

# WILDLIFE RESCUE & REHABILITATION NEWS

MAY 2016



WILDLIFE-RESCUE.ORG

## Dear Members,

During the spring and summer months WRR takes in as many as thirty or forty animals every day, many of them mammal orphans: tiny pink squirrels, slick gray baby opossums, hungry young raccoons—all crying for their lost mothers. We also receive hundreds of orphaned and injured birds: song birds, doves, hawks, pigeons, shore birds, water birds and more.

Birds are often the most challenging of all the patients we receive: the injured great blue heron, the orphaned green heron, the egg-sized baby night hawks—each one fragile, frightened, and sensitive.

But of all the bird species, those who feed on the wing—night hawks, chimney swifts, barn swallows and flycatchers—are some of the most difficult to care for as they have a low tolerance for stress and are among the most fragile when in captivity.

Some years ago WRR took in an injured adult scissortail flycatcher. The bird had no apparent or severe injuries but he clearly could not fly. At the time the bird was found, his rescuer noticed there was another adult flycatcher in a neighboring oak tree. The mate to the fallen bird was frantic and calling to the grounded bird. There was nothing to be done; the

injured bird could not possibly survive without help. He had to be taken from his home and, sadly, from his mate.

Once we had him in care our veterinarian performed a thorough examination and the diagnosis was a painfully dislocated shoulder. This type of injury can be as serious as a broken wing because, even when it is put back in place, the shoulder will sometimes repeatedly dislocate. We also had to face the fact that his injury would require time to heal, as much as three weeks, and we could not be confident that his mate would wait for his return.

Wild animals live in a state of nearly constant fear when they are held captive by humans. This deep-seated feeling is understandable but a serious detriment to their well-being and their ability to heal. At WRR we provide all wild animals with as natural a diet as possible; this can help mitigate some of the stress of captivity but even the best food and housing cannot change generations of natural behavior.

The initial days of his stay in our hospital were the most challenging. We re-set his shoulder, after which it was critical that he engage in as little movement as possible. The problem was that he was frantic to get out when what he needed was

to remain calm. We learned quickly that a small area where he could receive cage rest was the very setting where he fought to get free, all the time jeopardizing his injured shoulder. We had no choice but to move him outdoors to a large aviary, where we hoped he would relax, feel less intimidated by our presence, and stop aggravating his injury.

Because we purchase thousands of live crickets specifically for species such as flycatchers, we were able to blanket his quarters with thick leafy branches and let the insects roam about and attract his attention. If we were lucky, his hunger would surpass his fear and we would not be confronted with having to force-feed him.

The next twenty-four hours would tell the tale; if he chose to eat, we were one important step closer to his rehabilitation, and if he did not, we were back to square one and would have to find a way to keep this beautiful bird alive. Now there was nothing left to do but give him plenty of peace, quiet, privacy, and live food, and hope he would make the choice that would be best for his future.

Exactly two days after he was moved to his outdoor aviary the frantic flycatcher was observed consuming crickets, and

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#### OUR MISSION

To rescue, rehabilitate, and release native wildlife, and to provide sanctuary, individualized care, and a voice for other animals in need.

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#### CONTACT US

Wildlife-rescue.org  
info@wildlife-rescue.org

P.O. Box 369 Kendalia, Texas 78027

Phone: 830-336-2725

Fax: 830-336-3733

WRR Sherman Animal Care Complex

137 Earl St. San Antonio, TX 78212

Phone: 210-257-8823

#### NEWSLETTER DESIGN

Cathy Savage

#### NEWSLETTER PRINTING

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## When a Baby Is Not An Orphan

Welcome to another baby season at Wildlife Rescue & Rehabilitation! "Baby season," in our vernacular, refers to the spring and summer months when nature graces its inhabitants with new generations. There is something about the innocence of infant wildlife, their diminutiveness and vulnerability, which draws out the protectiveness of human nature. Unfortunately, sometimes that is the worst thing for the animal. The trick is knowing when to step in and help a baby who may be orphaned, and when the best course of action is to take no action at all.

Through educational efforts including our 24/7 Rescue Hotline, Wildlife Rescue hopes to avoid the premature "rescues" which result every year as well-meaning humans try to do what they think is the right thing for seemingly helpless babies. What people often forget is that no human, no matter how hard we try (and here at Wildlife Rescue we try VERY hard), can ever compare to a wild animal mother.

One commonly misunderstood species is the rabbit. There are two types of native rabbits in the Hill Country, the Eastern cottontail and the jack rabbit. While they look very different as adults, they are difficult to distinguish as babies. They also have similar parenting styles. Rabbits are prey species so are always on the lookout for predators. Babies, of course, are quite helpless but develop quickly and can survive on their own after only a few weeks.

Mothers of both species make a nest for their babies, but not a nest in the traditional sense. To the rabbit a slight depression in the ground will do! Often, people come across a warren of baby rabbits and assume that they are orphaned because they appear to be left on the bare ground. But, to a rabbit, it is a nest.

Mother rabbits also do not tend their offspring at all hours of the day. To

do so would be to alert any predators who might be watching her to the location of her nest. To avoid this, she will only visit her babies at dawn and dusk, otherwise staying far enough away not to attract predators and also to keep an eye on things.

Because they develop so quickly, any youngsters you come across with eyes open and ears pointing upwards are already able to survive on their own. This is difficult for many to believe because they are so small and delicate-looking, but they are actually very capable even at this young age.

Conversely, they are extremely vulnerable to death via human intervention at this stage. Nature has provided rabbits with a strong fight-or-flight response. Their adrenaline system is so strong that they can die of a heart attack before a predator has had a chance to inflict painful wounds.

To a rabbit, a human, even one who only wishes to help, is a predator, and when the rabbit finds himself in the predator's grasp, he might expire immediately. For this reason, intervention in rabbit-related wildlife situations is discouraged except when there is a strong chance the animal might die without intervention.

Overall, the best thing to do during baby season is to be observant and cautious. If you are unsure what to do in a wildlife situation, know that you can always call our Rescue Hotline at (830) 336-2725. If you want to learn and do more, then sign up to volunteer to feed the babies or go out on rescues. We provide the training, you provide the passion and commitment! Together, this year and in years to come, we will all be doing our part to return nature's favor by looking out for her most vulnerable beings.

**Krystal Mathis**

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we knew he was now on his way back to the wild. Another week went by and the bird was still doing well. He had adjusted somewhat to his temporary life in captivity. He was eating his fill of insects and his shoulder was holding in the position that would once again enable him to fly. There was a real chance that this long-tailed beauty would survive and be returned to his home.

After the second week, the scissortail had made even more promising improvements; he was strong and active, his injury was no longer causing him pain, and we felt sure he had received all the help he needed and was impatient to be set free... and perhaps, if she had been very patient, rejoin his mate.

To be honest, I had little hope that after two weeks she would still be waiting, but I knew that if they had a nest and if there were babies to be cared for, she would

have more than one reason to stay and anticipate his return.

Finally, the long-awaited release date was set and WRR staff member (at the time) Tim Ajax took on the task of releasing the scissor-tailed flycatcher. The bird was transported to the site where he had been rescued. Here there was a large, grassy field, an expanse of tall, native grasses interspersed with thick, dark green juniper, possum haw and other local shrubs. There were also two towering live oaks and it was beneath one of these where the flycatcher was first found.

And it was here that he would regain his freedom. As the carrying cage was opened the bright-eyed bird looked out onto his meadow. This welcome and familiar site was the ideal impetus urging him on to fly free of his confines for now he was once again home and there was nothing stopping him. The male scissor-tail streaked

out of the carrier and straight up into the pale blue sky and as he did he called out in the unmistakable scissortail "kew-kew." The penetrating call reached the waiting ears of his mate and in only moments she replied repeatedly with her welcoming melody. The two birds met in the live oak and lingered there, together again as if they had never been apart.

We can never know if their time apart was sad or anxious, if it was filled with trust or despair. All we can know is that there was determination in their mutual waiting, for neither of these birds gave up, neither moved on with their lives. Instead they held fast to their loyalty and perhaps even knew all along that one day they would find each other. Today was that day, and it was indeed a very good day.

*Lynn Cuny*



**Members' Day**  
**At Wildlife Rescue**  
Saturday, October 22 / 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

An opportunity for WRR members to see how their support is directly used to help animals. Visit the sanctuary, enjoy a luncheon buffet, and chat with WRR animal caretakers, volunteers, members and special guests.

# “God’s Dog” Rather than Coydog

Craig Brestrup, PhD

After 39 years in operation and some 200,000 native wild animals passing through, we at Wildlife Rescue have seen just about all the ways wildlife can be harmed. Naturally many of those ways are purely happenstantial, such as a nest being blown from a tree during a storm, or disturbances arising from flooding, fire, or other calamity. Others involve accidental encounters with humans, as when wildlife movements bring them into contact with a vehicle along a highway. And some are purposeful, such as when animals are shot but not killed, or a killed mother is found to have babies. Human culpability varies from case to case but in all of them WRR does everything we can to restore the animal to health and return him to the wild.

Other animals, both native and non-native, come to us after they have become casualties of failed attempts to make “pets” of them, or after roadside zoo exhibits are closed by the authorities, or after many years of laboratory testing renders an animal no longer a “good subject.” These animals come into our sanctuary where they receive lifetime care.

A few years ago, we, along with every other wildlife sanctuary, animal control department, and many shelters, were confronted with call after call looking for placement for “wolf-dog hybrids.” Certain types of people found the idea of making a pet of

these animals, who they presumably hoped would have the appearance of a companion animal and the on-demand ferocity of a wild one. It was a very bad idea. Children died from attacks, wolf/dogs suffered from the bewilderment of finding themselves “domesticated” while remaining essentially wild inside, and many were eventually killed as unpredictable and dangerous. Fortunately, over recent years it has begun to seem as if enough people have realized the folly and cruelty of these hybridization efforts that the calls have abated.

But folly is never, it seems, in short supply. Now we receive calls to take coyotes who were taken in as pups and subjected to the cruelty of being habituated to humans rather than allowed to live a natural life for their species. Wildness—the natural make-up of animals designed by Nature to live autonomously and occupy their own distinctive niches within ecosystems—does not easily yield to taming. And now, and even more worrisome, a new hybrid has arisen—the “coydog.” I needn’t explain the meaning of this new word and new creature. You will recognize them, and we’ve been down this road before.

As with those wolves, so with coyotes now—it is a serious affront to the way things were intended by Nature to be to create

this new strain of would-be companion animal, as if there weren’t enough companion animals in enough varieties already. And most of all, it is cruel and wrong. All animals are potentially in jeopardy in our human dominated world, but to deliberately participate in combining the wild and domestic worlds of such animals and to create the confusion, suffering, and uncertain future that they must endure... this doubles the jeopardy. We hope our members will speak out against this practice whenever appropriate, and call our Rescue Hotline whenever you have questions. Wild animals deserve our respect, not our manipulation and exploitation.





## A Porcupine Goes Home

After spending nearly an entire year in rehabilitation, a porcupine who came to WRR as a juvenile was finally released this spring to resume his life in the wild. This adolescent porcupine was brought to our Rehabilitation Hospital in the summer of 2015 after being found with a severe, open wound on his back.

WRR has received more than our share of porcupines suffering with skin diseases over the past couple of years. The outcome for these patients has been less than fully successful so when this youngster arrived our vet staff was understandably concerned. The “positive side” of this was that this youngster was injured, not usually a plus, but certainly more promising than a serious skin disease would have been.

One consequence of illness and injury in porcupines is that they often lose many of their quills, certainly not good for them but if the loss is considerable the process of treating them can prove less daunting. However this juvenile maintained the majority of his “prickly assets,” presenting yet another challenge to our vet staff. As is always the case at WRR, determination prevailed and his treatment regimen began. There were frequent cleanings and treating of the wound, remedies were given orally and his day to day progress was closely monitored.

Another factor we had to consider was that this porcupine would still be in the care of his mother had they not been separated and she most likely killed. Not only did his serious wound need to heal but he had to be given the proper diet and begin to learn how to care for himself. Porcupines will remain with their mothers for as long as 18 months—this critical period of his life would have to be spent at WRR.

Maintaining the natural (that is, wild) behavior of every patient in our care is one of the highest of all priorities. Several species are particularly vulnerable to becoming quickly habituated to human contact: bobcats, coyotes, foxes...and porcupines. We had to be mindful of this during his treatment and his time in captivity. The sooner it was safe to move this youngster to an outside enclosure, the better for his future. As his wound slowly healed the decision was made to house him near the hospital but outside. He could be monitored, fed and cared for but he would not be affected by the sounds and scents of humans.

His first outdoor lodgings were modest, large enough to roam about but not so large as to provide an opportunity for reopening his wound. The fresh air, scents of neighboring wildlife and fresh hay under his paws proved invigorating and calm-

ing. Though he had lost his mother, at least now he had some contact with Nature. In the passing weeks, as his health was restored and he grew in self-confidence, he was moved to a larger and more interesting enclosure. Now he had tall, soft grasses, thick oak logs and limbs, and native soil beneath him. Life was beginning to look up for the growing youngster but he had yet to prove himself independent enough to be set free.

Nearly a year would pass before the severe wound would become only the smallest of scars and the now grown porcupine could identify his natural diet, climb to the highest limb, and behave as if he had never met or been cared for by a human being. In all of this, he let us know that he was ready for life on his own.

It was time for the prickly patient to take up his life again. It was late on a sunny afternoon, the ideal setting had been chosen, the Guadalupe River was nearby and the expanse was lush with tall trees, the kind that porcupines love. Here his life would begin again, the long months of confinement would fade from his memories as he goes about the business of finding a mate, roaming free and living the life of a perfectly healthy porcupine.

## New Digs for WRR Apprentices



Wildlife Rescue just installed two new on-site manufactured homes as accommodations for our apprentices, who come here to work and be trained over several grueling months. These new amenities will allow WRR to house up to 16 apprentices. Each abode has four bedrooms, two bathrooms, two living areas, a full kitchen, and a washer and dryer. They also have fenced-in yards where foster dogs can live and receive companionship from the apprentices. As part of our organization-wide green initiative, the houses will also be solar powered.

Our Apprentice Training Program is widely regarded as a model. The program gives individuals the skills and experience they need to apply to animal care positions at organizations across the country and sometimes abroad or to further their education at graduate or professional schools. We offer six apprentice paths: Intro to Wildlife Rehabilitation, Advanced Wildlife Rehabilitation, Intro Veterinary Technician, Advanced Veterinary Technician, Wildlife Sanctuary Caretaker, and Companion Animal Welfare. Each



We are still looking for furniture donations for the houses, including decorative items, kitchen appliances and utensils, and so on.

history, diets, enclosure setups, care protocols and all of the specifics of wildlife rehabilitation and animal care.

The housing was funded through foundation grants and individual gifts as well as through a crowdfunded Indiegogo campaign online. It was a two year fundraising campaign led by volunteer Taddy McAllister to whom we are all (especially the apprentices) extremely grateful. Taddy was able to secure gifts from the following, to whom we also send immense thanks: Roxana Richardson (through the Brown Foundation), Brandon Chenault,

is a six-month program that offers classroom and hands-on practical training to learn natural

Kronkosky Charitable Foundation, HEB, Edith McAllister, Beau McAllister, Ed Whitacre, Greehey Family Foundation, John Newman, Peter Holt, Amy Liebert, Frost Bank, and the McCombs Foundation.

We are still looking for furniture donations for the houses, including decorative items, kitchen appliances and utensils, and so on. If you have anything to donate, please call us at 830.336.2725 or email Krystal at [KMathis@wildlife-rescue.org](mailto:KMathis@wildlife-rescue.org).

Want more information on the apprentice program or have a friend or relative who might be a good fit? Check out the website here: [wildlife-rescue.org/get-involved/apprenticeships](http://wildlife-rescue.org/get-involved/apprenticeships)



PO Box 369, Kendalia, TX 78027  
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