

THE WILDLIFE CENTER



JOURNAL

Summer 2005



This young bobcat is being raised in special facilities at The Wildlife Center because someone had taken it from its mother, and the whereabouts of the mother could not be ascertained. The young bobcat is being raised in a spacious enclosure without any human contact, and has a domestic kitten as a playmate. Before it is released to the wild, it will be given an opportunity to develop its skills as a hunter. But nothing can completely substitute for the protection and teaching that only a mother bobcat can give. This issue of the Wildlife Journal is dedicated to The Wildlife Center's "Mother Knows Best" Program, thanks to which nearly half of all healthy baby animals received at the Center this year have been reunited with their parents in the wild. To read about a baby bobcat whose story had a happier ending, see the back cover.

FROM THE DIRECTOR

In a recent article by Lisa Osburn in the Birmingham News, I was quoted as saying that comparing wildlife baby seasons is “like comparing one major tornado to another major tornado—they’re all bad.” In fact, the tornado analogy was inexact. It’s more like waiting for a hurricane to come ashore. Each one is different, and each one brings its own set of difficulties. We are now in the middle of this year’s baby season, and it is like no other. The number of orphaned and injured baby animals brought to the Center, as usual, is overwhelming. That’s why our “Mother Knows Best” Program, which you can read about on page 4, is such an important breakthrough in enabling us to help the greatest number of baby animals, without compromising the quality of care for individual infants at the Center. When you visit The Wildlife Center, it’s fascinating to view the baby bird and baby mammal nurseries, and the solarium, where baby birds are constantly being fed. But visitors to the Center are really only seeing the tip of the iceberg – most of the activity during baby season takes place out of sight. The babies that are reunited with their parents, either through direct intervention or through advice given over the hotline, by far outnumber the baby birds and mammals that you see at any one time at The Wildlife Center.

Over 13,000 callers annually take advantage of The Wildlife Center’s Emergency Hotline, with the majority of these calls coming during baby season. **Over 50% of the calls about baby animals result in helping callers to reunite the babies with their own mothers.** In these modern times, when just about every agency you call uses telephone screening systems, we still do it the old-fashioned way, with a real human being. We are also currently in the process of converting our entire Hotline Manual into user-friendly information that will be available on our website. Hotline callers will still be able to receive personal advice, but they will also be directed to the website to see photos of babies at different stages of development to help determine how old the baby is, and maybe even what species it is. Emergency care instructions can be downloaded directly from the website.

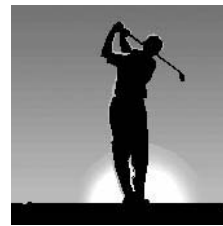
Of course, the Hotline receives all kinds of calls from all over the state about injured wildlife, as well. Just yesterday we received a call that a Great Blue Heron was lying on the ground in the median of a busy highway in Huntsville. We contacted the North Alabama Wildlife Rehabilitators Hotline in Huntsville, and they dispatched volunteers to rescue the bird. A veterinarian in Huntsville gave the bird overnight care, and the next day the same volunteers delivered the bird to us here in Birmingham. Most areas of the state aren’t lucky enough to have an organized group like the one in Huntsville, but through our network of raptor volunteers, we can usually respond to a call about an injured or orphaned raptor anywhere in the state. Birds are rescued and delivered to the Center usually within 5 or 6 hours. If they’re in the southeastern part of the state, we try to relay the bird to the Southeastern Raptor Center at Auburn.

Getting through Baby Season is a group effort that requires support from all of our constituents. We depend on a large force of dedicated people: our interns, Catherine Britt, Melinda Albarado,

Jessica Leonard, and Katie Stubblefield, supervised by Assistant Rehabilitation Director Sandra Allinson and volunteer Mammal Team Leader Jessica Johnson, volunteer Shift Supervisors Carla Simpson, Greg Smith, Michelle Bedsole, Chris Burgess, and Jen Holmes, and over 75 trained animal care volunteers to shoulder the tremendous job of keeping things running in the clinic. Our Administrative Coordinator, Debbie Battles, staffs the office and handles volunteer scheduling, which is a daunting task during the busy summer months. Beverly Crider and Carol McWhorter, in our Development Department, keep our name in the media, maintain case histories and photos, and keep the website up to date, while also pursuing funding from grants and other sources. Janet Byars quietly and competently keeps track of all of our membership files, and volunteer Pam Cooper maintains all of our animal care records and files our annual federal reports. And just as important, our members provide vital support for The Wildlife Center in the form of donations of time and money. I hope that our members feel that they are not just observing baby season from a distance, but feel that they are an important part of a large group of people that make it all happen. We truly depend on each and every one of you to be a part of the team.

Anne Miller

Golf Tournament to Benefit The Wildlife Center



Start putting your golf teams together for this year’s “Wildlife Center Annual Golf Tournament”. The tournament, which benefits The Wildlife Center, will be held at the Oak Mountain State Park Golf Course on Oct. 11. For more information, please email Mel Cosgrove at mcosgrove@iccsafe.org or visit our website at www.awrc.org.

The Wildlife Center provides care for injured and orphaned native wildlife and returns them to the wild while educating the public about Alabama wildlife and awakening concern for the problems they face due to the impact of human development.

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Office Staff

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Janet Byars

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Beverly Crider
Carol McWhorter

Hotline Coordinators

Kim Strange
Gail MacMahon

Assistant Rehabilitation Director

Sandra Allison

Animal Care Interns

Melinda Albarado
Jessica Leonard
Katie Stubblefield

RPF Intern

Catherine Britt

Volunteer Staff & Shift Supervisors

Sandra Allison
Michelle Bedsole
Chris Burgess
Jen Holmes
Carol McWhorter
Carla Simpson
Greg Smith

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Alford Avenue Animal Clinic
Dr. David Friddle
Grayson Valley Pet Clinic
Dr. Carl Grimmett
Riverview Animal Clinic
Dr. Alvin Atlas
Dr. Arthur Serwitz
Eye Clinic
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Internship Program Benefits Interns as Well as Wildlife Center

The Wildlife Center's Internship Program, started in the mid-1990s, has made a tremendous difference in the recruitment of qualified individuals for our full-time Animal Care Staff positions. Interns are selected from applicants who are college students, recent graduates preparing for careers in veterinary medicine and wildlife biology, and current Wildlife Center volunteers who show potential as future wildlife rehabilitators. The opportunity to work closely with so many native species is available nowhere else in the state of Alabama, and in few locations nationally. In fact, we now receive applications from all over the United



RPF Intern Catherine Britt (L), Raptor Intern Jessie Leonard (M), and Mammal Intern Melinda Albarado (R).

States. Interns work closely with the Rehabilitation Director to obtain firsthand skills in all aspects of animal husbandry, and gain hands-on experience in the rescue, rehabilitative care, and release of our wild animal patients.

The position of Intern requires a real dedication to the job. Our interns work long hours, especially during baby season, when many of them arrive long before our opening time of 8:00 AM in order to maintain the schedule required to keep all of our wild



baby patients cared for. The commitment and devotion of our Interns is one of The Wildlife Center's most valuable assets, and has made a real difference in the efficiency and quality of our Animal Care Program.

Baby Bird Intern Katie Stubblefield feeding young Hummingbird.



Sell on eBay and Support The Wildlife Center!

Now you can sell an item on eBay and donate from 10% to 100% of the final sale price to help injured and orphaned wildlife in Alabama! Visit our website at www.awrc.org to find out how. While you're there visit our new online store as well!

Mother Knows Best

The Wildlife Center has launched the “Mother Knows Best” Program this year, which makes it our highest priority to return every baby animal to its own mother, or to foster it to another mother of the same species in the wild. This program, while time-consuming for our staff and volunteers, has reduced our caseload in the Baby Bird Nursery by over 50%, and in the Juvenile Raptor Program by over 40%. This has resulted in the best chance of survival for the babies and substantial savings in expenses in the Animal Care Program. As a result of the “Mother Knows Best” Program, many of our young patients have been successfully returned to homes in the wild, either with the natural parents, or sometimes, adoptive parents. This was the case with a brood of orphaned chickadees.



Chickadees

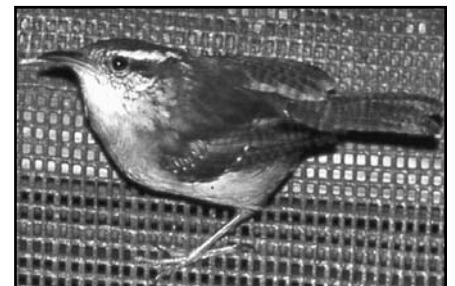
After a cat killed the chickadees’ parents, they were cared for in the Center’s incubator until they were close to being ready to fly. While feeding the little birds one day, staff member Sandra Allinson had an idea: A pair of chickadees in her yard had lost their nest and young ones to a raccoon the previous night. Would they be willing to adopt the orphans? Sandra took the fledglings home in their laundry basket enclosure, which was equipped with a mesh cover. She placed the basket near a red tip tree 15 or 20 feet from the destroyed nest. Within five minutes, one of the adult chickadees showed up with food in its mouth, trying to figure out how to feed the birds in the basket. Soon the second adult appeared. Sandra removed the mesh cover; a moment later, the adults were flying in and out of the basket with food.

Sandra watched this activity until dusk, and then brought the young birds in for safekeeping. The next morning, she took the basket back outside, and the bereaved parents immediately came to feed the nestlings. Within two hours, the fledglings had flown out of the basket to join their adoptive parents, who continued to care for them.

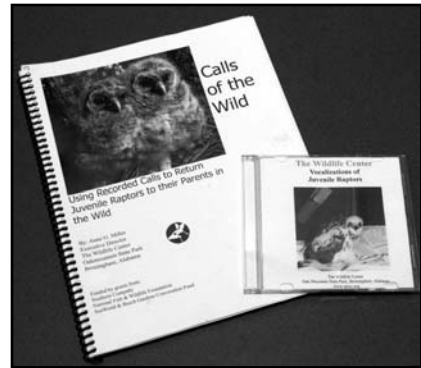
Do They Remember?

When creatures are released back into the wild, do they remember their experience at The Wildlife Center? After observing the behavior of a family of wrens, Sandra Allinson thinks so.

When Sandra set the nest of chickadees in her yard, she also set out a black plastic dish of mealworms, fruit, seeds, and moistened lam’s kitten food for the foster parents she hoped to attract. Songbirds feed from these particular dishes during their stay in the Center’s aviaries. This is learned behavior, however, and when the adult chickadees came to the rescue of the orphaned babies, they ignored the dish, bringing the fledglings food they had gathered themselves. Much to Sandra’s surprise, however, the food did attract the attention of some Carolina Wrens, which dipped down time after time to feed from it. She could only assume that these were wrens she had released earlier who recognized the dish and remembered the Center’s hospitality.



Handbook Published



“Calls of the Wild,” a handbook written by Anne Miller, and funded by a joint grant from Southern Company, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, and Busch Gardens, has now been completed. It offers detailed information about the technique of using recorded vocalizations to reunite young raptors with their parents. A CD of vocalizations of juvenile Raptors of the Southeast is included.

Domestic Cats: One of Wildlife’s Greatest Hazards

Nationwide, cats are estimated to kill hundreds of millions of birds and more than a billion small mammals, such as rabbits, chipmunks, squirrels, and shrews each year. Cats kill not only plentiful animals, but rare and endangered species for which the loss of even one animal is significant. Wildlife rehabilitation centers report that a large percentage of their patients are cat attack victims and animals orphaned by cats.

Not only do cats prey on birds and small mammals, but they can also outnumber and compete with native predators. Domestic cats eat many of the same animals that native predators do, and can reduce the availability of prey for native predators.

Keep your cat indoors. If you must let the

Continued on Page 5

Keeping Them Wild

The staff at The Wildlife Center takes great care with all the creatures in residence, but that dedication is disciplined by the imperative to keep the animals wild for eventual release. That imperative has resulted in some ingenious rehabilitation techniques, as illustrated by the story of a pair of baby beavers who arrived at the Center in February. They had lost their parents when their lodge was destroyed, and they were no more than ten days old when they arrived.

Beavers can be hand fed with bottles, but they love the nursing experience so much that they will throw tantrums when the nipples are pulled from their mouths. This problem and the “keep them wild” goal resulted in a remarkable innovation. A special beaver “Mom” was made by volunteer Cynthia Bolding out of dark brown, fake fur. Mom became much more lifelike and nurturing when bottles were installed within, nipples protruding for the nursing babies.

Photographs illustrate the difference between nursing from the hand-held bottles and from Mom. In the first case, the feeding babies are held upright and empty bottles have to be removed quickly to avoid a struggle. In the second case, the feeding babies loll on the floor



almost as though they are with their real mother. And when empty bottles were replaced with clean ones stuffed with plastic wrap, the babies went on suckling contentedly without running the risk of getting gas, and usually fell asleep while contentedly suckling their “mother.”



In a further effort to shield the babies from human contact, staff installed a “Beaver Cam” video camera to allow visitors to observe them from a distance. Audio transmitted the sound of their little mouths working away at the nipples, hour

after hour. In the wild, mother would have firmly pushed them away when it was time for them to be weaned. At the Center, the babies eventually lost interest in the nipples and weaned themselves. It was soon clear that they had something new and very important on their minds.

While they were still cuddling with Mom, the little beavers had virtually ignored a cardboard shelter that had been set up for them. Now, however, it became a point of great interest to the weanlings. They began to harvest twigs from the branches in their enclosure and drag them over to their shelter, furnishing it more to their liking. Driven by instinct, they had begun to construct an authentic beaver lodge.

The beavers are now staying in the Center’s Solarium Pool, busily honing their construction skills. They will remain at the Center until they are released in the fall.

About Beavers

Natural habitat: Flood plains, streams, rivers, lakes, and ponds

Size: Three feet tall standing; 30 inches long; up to 60 pounds

Diet: The inner bark of woody plants (especially aspen, birch, willow, cottonwood, poplars, maple, apple and oak) and leaves, shoots, and aquatic herbs such as duckweed water lilies, and pond weed

Reproduction: One litter of three to four kits per year, in late winter. Babies remain with their parents for a full year, and only leave when the next litter is born.

Outstanding Characteristic: Skills as engineers and builders are used to build dams to impound water and lodges for shelter out of piles of sticks and mud. Beavers create valuable wetlands that protect water tables and provide prime habitat for many other wildlife species.

Continued from Page 4

cat out, keep it on a tether, or in a fenced area or enclosed runway. Even if a cat is declawed and wears a collar bell, it can still catch and kill birds. Studies have shown that bells on collars are not effective in preventing cats from killing birds or other wildlife.

Cats are a significant source of mortality among birds that come to feeders. **Keep feeders, bird baths, and bird houses away from trees or posts where cats can get to them, and in sites that do not provide cover for cats to wait in ambush.** If a cat can reach a bird house, it can reach in and grab fledglings or nesting adults. To prevent cats from climbing to bird nests, put animal guards around any trees in your yard that may have nesting birds.

Foster Parenting in the Wild

Two young Great Horned Owls became stepsiblings this spring even though they were hatched in nests nearly 150 miles apart.

The first bird in this case was already in the brancher stage in Prattville when it came to the Center's attention. Branchers are young raptors that have left the nest, but have not yet learned to fly. They venture among the trees, hopping from branch to branch, thus the term "branchers". The owl had apparently tumbled to the ground accidentally, and was discovered at the base of a tree in the yard of the Clayton Wood family. In the wild, this would not have been a critical situation, because the parents would have stood guard from above and continued to feed the juvenile until its hopping and flapping had evolved into climbing and then flight. In this case, however, a large dog in the yard made it too risky to leave the bird on



Prattville Brancher

the ground. The Wildlife Center agreed to take custody of the bird until it had developed enough strength and coordination to enable it to climb into the higher branches of a tree. Then it would be returned to Prattville to rejoin its own parents.

The very next day, The Wildlife Center received a call from Huntsville

Animal Control, where two fishermen had dropped off a Great Horned Owl nestling they had discovered along the Tennessee River. Since the men left no information about the exact location of the discovery, there was no possibility of trying to reunite the baby with its parents, if they were still alive.

In this case, the baby was much younger, between two and three weeks old, and needed to eat every four hours. After picking it up, Anne Miller kept it with her overnight and soon discovered that it was, as she put it, "a wonderful vocalizer." Even after being fed, it called loudly and incessantly for its parents. Because of her research in the use of recorded calls of the young

to attract their parents, Anne asked Raptor Intern Jessica Leonard to record the insistent cry and add it to their library of calls.

Anne also began to wonder if the Great Horned Owls at the Clayton Wood home would be willing to foster this bird. Since they apparently had no other juveniles to care for, this would have the added benefit of keeping their parenting instincts stimulated until she could safely return their own baby.

The next day, Jessie constructed a substitute nest by filling a plastic laundry basket with sticks and branches, then filling in the gaps with dry pine straw. Tim

Leopard, a fearless tree-climber, installed the basket high in a big tree at the Woods' home. Then the nestling was gently placed in soft material in a plastic bucket covered with a cloth and hoisted up to Tim, who carefully placed the little bird in a soft cup of pine straw at the center of the new nest.

Since this was such a vocal young owl, Anne didn't need to rely on her taped recording to attract the attention of the adult birds. In spite of the mice placed in the basket for dinner, the young raptor continued to call noisily for its lost parents. By sunup of the next day, Clayton Wood was able to observe the foster mother in the adjoining tree, and the young raptor's loud calls had ceased. From then on, the adult birds paid close attention to the needs of the little orphan, and obviously it no longer felt the need to clamor for its lost parents.

About a week later, the older brancher from Prattville had progressed to the point where it could be safely returned to the Clayton Wood home. It now had enough wing development and strength to propel itself upward into a tree, out of the reach of the dog and other predators. Anne found an ideal perch on a leaning trunk with brush all around, and as soon as she took the young raptor out of its box, both parents flew up making alarm calls. Despite the difference in ages, the adult birds could easily provide for both juveniles, and their generosity ensured optimum care for a young raptor that desperately needed a family.



Tennessee River Owlet

About Great Horned Owls

Habitat: Dense forests, deserts and plains to city parks

Size: Length 18" – 25"; wingspan 36" to 60", weight 32 to 63.5 ounces

Diet: Almost any prey up to three times heavier than itself, including rabbits, skunks, squirrels, other birds, snakes, armadillos, and even small foxes.

Reproduction: Usually 2 to 3 eggs in January or February, one every other day. The young are relatively slow to develop, and remain dependant on their parents late into the summer.

In Honor

We are privileged to carry on the work of The Wildlife Center in the name of these honored individuals:

In Memory of Fred Bass

Tom and Wanda Hodges
 Alan and Cecilia Matthews
 Carson and Rebecca Robinson
 Cindy Matthews
 Graham, Natalie, and Emma
 Matthews
 Wilson and Shelley Matthews
 Harry and Emily Moore
 Russell and Marie Taber
 Kathryn Garcia
 Mr. E. R. Agee, Jr.
 Clyde B. Anderson Family
 Bruce Lindsey and Marilee Keys
 Joanie Pigford
 Patrick and Sandra Bernardi
 Gary and Kay Gerlach
 Earthworks
 Kathryn P. Garcia

In Memory of Ena P. Chamberlain

Tim E. O'Brien

In Memory of Ruth Estes

A. D. and Ann Miller

In Memory of "Ming Jameson"

Paul Joseph and Brenda Nola

In Memory of "Rosie"

Mr. and Mrs. J. Sharp Gillespy, IV

In Memory of John R. Staik

Irene Staik

In Memory of Helen Walker

Dorothy E. Dey

In Honor of Jody Borhani

Mr. and Mrs. Leland Keller

In Honor of Pam Kimball

Benjamin Masters

In Honor of Dr. Ron Kittinger

Phillip S. Pate

In Honor of Richard Pigford

Edith Bass

In Honor of J. Scott Rayburn

James and Carma Rayburn

In Honor of Patsy Scott

Will Shy



*Be an Active Participant in The Wildlife Center's Wild
Baby Season by Showing Your Support Today!*

Adopt A Baby Animal

To contribute to the Save Orphaned Wildlife Campaign, select the baby animal that symbolizes your concern for Alabama's injured and orphaned wildlife. Your name will be displayed at The Wildlife Center's Save Orphaned Wildlife Mural on a picture of your baby animal.

My check for _____ is enclosed.

Please charge my contribution to my Visa Mastercard.

Card # _____ Exp. Date _____

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Telephone _____

Please return to:
 The Wildlife Center
 100 Terrace Drive
 Oak Mountain State Park
 Pelham, Alabama 35124

Telephone: (205) 663-7930

Fax: (205) 682-6867

You may also contribute directly
 via our web site, www.awrc.org

Baby Bobcat Restored to Mother

Late in May, while clearing land for a game plot at a hunt club near Jemison, a man inadvertently destroyed a bobcat den and killed one of the babies. Terrified, its fur full of dirt, the surviving kitten was brought to the Center by Barbie Patterson, the man's wife. After its first feeding, the kitten recovered from the initial shock and became very restless and vocal. Because it appeared to be completely unharmed, the decision was made to try to reunite it with its mother as quickly as possible.



Barbie and Anne Miller returned the next day to the site of the destroyed den. Anne left the kitten in its carrier at the far edge of the clearing near the pile of dirt and brush debris from the land clearing and set up the game caller to loudly broadcast the call of a baby bobcat. Then she retreated to Barbie's SUV to wait and watch. It wasn't long before the mother bobcat emerged from the woods and crossed the dirt road behind the SUV, making her way toward the call. Anne hastily retrieved the caller, removed the kitten from the carrier and placed it on the far side of the mound of dirt and brush. From a distance, the two women listened as the baby's own cries guided her mother to her side. A few minutes later, the cries ceased abruptly. Reunited with its mother, the kitten no longer needed to cry.

WILD ABOUT CHOCOLATE!

Saturday, February 11

2nd Annual Valentine's Day Benefit for The Wildlife Center
Featuring Birmingham's Finest Chocolate Desserts!

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