

# WILDLIFE JOURNAL

2022 Annual Review

An Annual Publication of the Mercer County Wildlife Center

## NATURE'S CLEAN UP CREW

BY JACK DREGER



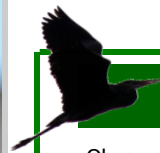
**Black vulture**

Often seen circling in the skies, perched in trees, and picking at roadkill, vultures are a common sight here in Mercer County. Vultures are a type of scavenging raptor that help keep nature clean and the environment healthy. These birds have a reputation from cartoons and old westerns for

being an omen of death, soaring above some poor soul, waiting for them to drop; these creatures are an essential part of our ecosystem and without them, certain diseases would have a much easier time spreading from animal to animal.


When an animal in the wild dies, their body, also known as a carcass, begins to decay. A decaying carcass can often be host to a myriad of bacteria, pathogens, and toxins. These pathogens can easily spread to nearby animals and even humans if left to decay over a long period of time. Luckily, our feathered friends make for excellent clean-up crews! The diet of vultures consists exclusively of carrion, or dead animals, meaning they do not hunt for living prey. Vultures will use their sense of smell to locate a freshly dead meal and get right to work. The stomach acid of vultures is more potent than in most other creatures and is exceptional at breaking down and getting rid of the bacteria and pathogens (3). Vultures can even digest dead animals that are host to


*(Continued on page 12)*




### what's inside

Observations	5
Patient Log	8
Redbelly Turtles	14
Farewell To The Golden Girls	17
There Is No Such Thing As Seagulls	23
Eyes On Eagles	24
What Can I Do?!	26

 Download our Free Apple App for iPhone, iPad and iTouch! Mercer County Park

 Download our Free Apple App for iPhone, iPad and iTouch! Mercer Meadows

 Like us on Facebook! Mercer County Park Commission

 Follow us on Twitter! @MercerCoParks

 Check out our new website! [www.mercercountyparks.org](http://www.mercercountyparks.org)



# wish list

## Office Supplies

Forever stamps – rolls or sheets  
Copy paper: 8 1/2" x 11"  
Liquid Paper

## Animal Care and Handling

Laundry detergent  
(perfume and dye free, any brand)  
Bleach  
Trash bags (13 & 38 gallon size)  
Food storage bags (gallon size)  
Pet carriers – medium size only  
Paper towels  
Receiving blankets  
Heating pads (no auto shut-off)

## OTHER SUPPLIES

Pens  
Surge protector strips  
Scrub brushes

## Animal Food

Gerber's jarred baby food:  
chicken -2.5 oz.  
Gerber's jarred baby food:  
beef -2.5 oz.  
Pedialyte  
Wild bird seed

## Medical Supplies

Fr feeding tubes: 3-1/2, 5 & 8  
Gauze Pads: 4"x4" & 2"x2"  
Latex exam gloves:  
medium and large  
Tegaderm (any size)

**\*\*\*PLEASE NOTE\*\*\*  
WHERE BRAND NAMES ARE  
SPECIFIED WE CANNOT ACCEPT  
SUBSTITUTES**

Dear Friends,

There has never been a more exciting time to be part of the Mercer County Wildlife Center. Our Wildlife Center is a unique, modern facility that not only allows greater possibilities for treatment and rehabilitation of injured and displaced wildlife, but new opportunities to engage and teach the public about nature. This facility is one of the only sites of its kind in all of New Jersey.



Over the past 39 years, the Mercer County Wildlife Center has provided an invaluable service to County residents and to our surrounding communities. Each year, our staff and volunteers accept and treat an average of 3,000 birds, mammals and reptiles at the facility and handle more than 18,000 telephone inquiries from the public. As County Executive, I am grateful for the number of our residents who, in the past, have chosen to volunteer their time in the effort to aid the native wildlife of the area, and I am equally thankful for the many businesses, organizations, veterinarians and others who donate a variety of goods and services. The past two years have been a challenge for all of us. The Wildlife Center staff worked to maintain a high standard of care for patients in spite of not being able to utilize the normal cadre of volunteers.

The Outdoor Education Environment, which was officially opened to the public in 2016, has educated thousands of citizens, of all ages, about the various wildlife that are located in our own backyards: the bald eagle, Virginia opossum and peregrine falcon, to name a few. I encourage you to visit during operating hours for a free, self-guided tour.

Inside this newsletter, you will find a wealth of information on topics such as gulls, and the nesting eagle that was banded in a county nest last year, as well as facts and insight from our staff and volunteers. Best wishes in the year ahead.

Sincerely,

Brian M. Hughes  
County Executive



HOW WE GOT IT DONE...

In 2022 we were, once again, able to invite new volunteers! We have missed our volunteer staff and look forward to the safe return of our remaining volunteers and welcoming new volunteers!



## 2022 VOLUNTEERS

### Clinic Supervisors

Shelby Coulton  
Samantha Cruz  
Kimberly Dawes  
Jack Dreger  
Lisa Hewitt  
Adrianna Manchen  
Megan Morici  
Kristi Schollenberger

Sarah Carey  
Soledad Cepeda  
Pat Costello  
Ronnie Daldos  
Addie Dodge  
Ashley Emmel  
Kim Eschbach  
Sue Fajgier  
Janet Forgrieve  
Stephanie Foy  
Deb Freedman  
Susan Gallagher  
Marie Hendricks  
Emily Hendrickson  
Peg Hanna  
Juanita Hummel  
Meghan Hyde  
Lois Keats  
Corissa Kazar  
Joanne Klempner  
Elizabeth Kuziel  
Michele Mariano  
Susan Michniewski  
Christina Kish

Betty Moran  
Beth Morpeth  
Wendy Most  
Geoffrey Peters  
Adrienne Pitrelli  
Janice Quilla-Bud  
Shari Rexroad  
Tim Richards  
Sussi Riggelman  
Marilyn Sanders  
Lynne Scymanski  
Dave Sedmak  
Jodi Specter  
Taylor Sternotti  
Aggie Szilagyi  
Margaret Taylor-Ulizio  
Diane Turner  
Laura Wallin  
Barbara Warfel  
Kathryn Williams  
Mary Wood  
Brad Zeller  
Sharon Zimmerman

### Volunteers

Ross Amico  
Erin Arthur  
Bonnie Baker-Casally  
Kathleen Bascio  
Cathy Beans  
Kate Black  
Bob Bowden  
Jennifer Brady  
Daniel Buckley  
Susan Buckley  
Lisa Butterfield  
Kevin Buynie

### Spring/Summer/Fall Interns

Hannah Bernard	Delaware Valley University
Reese Buckley	Mercer County Community College
Carlene Chianese	Mercer County Community College
Tina Kulick	Mercer County Community College
Tristan McMerty	University of Maine
Melanie Ryan	College of William and Mary
Cara Perrone	Rutgers University
Julia Viviano	University of Delaware

### **COUNTY EXECUTIVE**

Brian M. Hughes

### **MERCER COUNTY PARK COMMISSION**

Kelly A. Mooij Esq., President

Amber L. Forrester, Esq., Vice President

Philip B. Caton

Marissa Davis

Sharon Gardner

Antonio Martinez, Esq.

James J. Schulz, Jr.

Walter D. Smith

Aaron T. Watson, Executive Director

R. David Blake, Esq., Park Commission Counsel

### **STAFF**

Diane Nickerson, Director

Jane Rakos-Yates, Deputy Director

Nicole Golden, Rehabilitation Manager

Kristi Schollenberger, Clinic Supervisor

### **WILDLIFE CENTER FRIENDS BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

Sharon Lauchaire, President

JillAnn Murphy, Treasurer

Linda Proefrock

Paul Renner, JD

Bruce Stout, PhD

Jodie Shuster, Director WCF

### **VOLUNTEER VETERINARIANS**

Peter Batts, MRCVS

Jerome M. Glickstein, VMD

L. Paul Lanctot, VMD

Erica A. Miller, DVM

Paul Wagner, VMD

**ART DIRECTOR/EDITOR** : Jami Arbizu



Mercer County Wildlife Center is owned by the County of Mercer and operated and maintained by the Mercer County Park Commission.  
Aaron T. Watson, Executive Director  
[www.mercercountyparks.org](http://www.mercercountyparks.org)

# Wildlife Center Friends

Supportive Partners of the  
Mercer County Wildlife Center



Find us on  
**facebook**

save wild.

[www.WildlifeCenterFriends.org](http://www.WildlifeCenterFriends.org)



**Eastern gray squirrel neo-nate**

**Social Media is an invaluable tool in raising awareness about the Wildlife Center. Our Facebook page has the most up to date information on events, animals, fundraisers, and public service announcements that pertain to our wild neighbors (the furry and feathered ones, I mean).**



**White tail deer fawn**

**LIKE**   
**SHARE**  
**& FOLLOW**



**Eastern screech owl nestlings**

Mercer County Wildlife Center - 1748 River Road, Titusville, NJ 08560 (609)303-0552

# OBSERVATIONS

BY DIANE NICKERSON



The year 2022 started off with all of the protocols that we had put into place for our “new normal” living in a Covid world. We were becoming more comfortable and cautiously optimistic. Then, in early spring the other shoe dropped – highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) became our newest companion. In order to treat avian species, we scrambled to set up three isolation areas on the property and, as always, continued our work.

During 2022, MCWC treated 2,519 new patients, encompassing 131 species, and released 63% back into the wild for a second chance. Looking back at our caseload for 2022, some rather unusual cases passed through our care. There were new species, genetic abnormalities, toxins, and human interference. Be sure to check out the patient log on page 8 to find out about all of the interesting patients.

For the first time since 2019, we welcomed new

volunteers this year. Look for the article by Kim Dawes about this big step on page 29. Susan Buckley updates us on the enrichment program on page 30. Carlene Chianese submitted an article about her intern experience on page 13. Laura Wallin and Jen Brady tell us about being a first-time volunteer on pages 7 & 21. They all shine a light for us on the wonder of working with wildlife for the first time! As staff, we tend to not be quite as awed as we once were. It is good to be reminded how very lucky we are on a daily basis.

*(Continued on page 6)*

**from the  
director**



(Continued from page 5)

Staff members Adriana "Arie" Machen commemorated some of our ambassador animals on page 17 and Nicole Golden added some information on one of our native species, the redbelly turtle, for this publication on page 14. Jane Rakos-Yates shares her fondness for gulls on page 23. Kristi Schollenberger offers so tips on living with our wild neighbors on page 26. And, Jack Dreger takes a look at our new nemesis, HPAI on page 1.

The *Eyes on Eagles* program, a collaboration between the Wildlife Center Friends, the Mercer County Park Commission, Conserve Wildlife Foundation, and PSE&G took a year off in 2022. Unfortunately, the birds did not return to the nest at Mercer Lake during 2022. Plans for 2023 season are underway. Our collective fingers are crossed for the birds to return this year. Check the Park Commission website for updates. <http://www.mercercountyparks.org/#!/activities/eyes-eagles>

Our last pre-pandemic education outreach program of was held at the Decoys and Wildlife Art Gallery in Frenchtown on February 23, 2020. As always, I would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to Ron Kobli, the owner of the gallery <http://www.decoyswildlife.com/>. We certainly missed the day's activities at the gallery in 2021. It was the first time in twenty-seven years that we were not be able to attend this event. Unfortunately, 2022 marked the second time. We will look forward to the norm changing and being able to, once again, present outreach programs in the community and be back at Ron's gallery. Many thanks, as always, to Ron for introducing us to possible, new supporters and the many gifts he sends our way.

All of our education ambassadors were removed from programming in March of 2020 due to cessation of programming caused by Covid. We have begun the retraining process and hope to be able to resume programming by Spring of

2023. A reminder that the Outdoor Education Environment adjacent to our building remains open. The hours are Wednesday through Sunday, 10:00am to 4:00pm. The education ambassadors are on display in this area. Admission is free.

This is where I normally thank all of our volunteers for their service throughout the year. I continue to be grateful to the stalwart group of volunteers that returned at the end of 2020 and early into 2021. They continue to be with us and helped to on-board the small, new group that joined us in 2022. We are slowly working our way back to pre-pandemic numbers of volunteers. Our volunteers show up week after week, month after month, and many, year after year. For the 2022 season fifty-nine hearty souls jumped in to work with the patients and staff to keep the center operational. We cannot thank them enough for their continued efforts.

Finally, thanks to you, our members. We spoke to over 18,000 of you this year by telephone, trying to answer your questions and concerns about your wild neighbors. We hope you will continue along our journey with us in the years ahead.

***We continue to be here to serve you because you care enough to be there to support us. 🐾***





**Don't get paid, not because they are worthless, but because they are PRICELESS!**

## 1st Year Volunteer

BY JEN BRADY

### SAVE WILD!

This is the edict of the Mercer County Wildlife Center and its Friends. I am a volunteer at the Center and one of the friends. Since I live on the Delaware and Raritan Canal, I see the wildlife up close in their daily activities. I also sometimes see their daily struggles to survive in an ever-shrinking and sometimes hazardous environment. There is glory and agony with the emphasis on the glorious for now. I can be a part of aiding in their survival by working and supporting the Center.

My husband and I have been bringing sick or injured birds and wildlife to the Center for over 25 years, and it is inspiring to see how dedicated the people are who work there. As a result, I take the responsibility of volunteering as it was meant to be taken. Show up when scheduled and follow their lead. This means accepting that not all inhabitants can be rescued, not all can be released back into the wild, but every one of them is treated with utmost care and kindness.

That being said... every success is applauded and cherished. It enables me to be part of the solution, and part of the joy is in doing something positive for the engaging and amazing wildlife that live in our area. Seeing what is involved in order to rehabilitate an owl, hawk, dove, turtle, skunk - as you can see, the list goes on - shows me how important it is to be



respectful and kind to all who share this planet. Whether preparing food, cleaning cages, or simply sharing a smile with another volunteer, I am grateful to be a part of it all.

This has been one of the most rewarding experiences in my life. I feel good every time I walk into the Wildlife Center. In a stressful world, I can do some good and bring some balance to the sometimes chaotic world in which we live. Sometimes I get to see recipients of our care do something goofy and I laugh out loud. Raccoons and crows come to mind.

I look forward to each day at the Center, where I can contribute to the healing and care of all the wildlife that need it. Whatever good I can do comes back tenfold. It is healing for the volunteers as well as the birds and mammals. It is why I do it. 🐾



# PATIENT LOG

MCWC TREATED 2,519 ANIMALS DURING 2022

Welcome to the 2022 Patient Log. Find out about some of the more interesting cases that passed through our doors during 2022. The year brought 2,519 new patients. Happily, we were able to treat and return 63% of those patients to their native wild habitats.

On May 5<sup>th</sup>, case number **2022-00556**, an adult bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) was brought to the center by MCWC volunteer and NJFW eagle nest watcher volunteer, Kevin Buynie. It had found on the ground in Burlington County. Radiographs revealed a calcified fracture of the right distal radius (one of the bones between the elbow and wrist joints), and multiple splintering fractures of the left major

and minor metacarpals. Luckily, for this bird, the wrist joint did not appear to be damaged. Bright spots on the radiographs made us suspicious that this bird had been shot.

There was an open wound on the underside of the left wing where the fractures were located, from which small bone fragments protruded. The wounds were treated, the wing was bandaged to stabilize the fractures and supportive care and medications were started. Over the next couple of months, the bandages were regularly changed and more small bone fragments and dead tissue were surgically removed to promote healing.



This patient was finally moved outside at the beginning of August to work on pre-release conditioning. After months of encouraging improvement in range of motion (ROM) through



exercise, wound healing and feather growth, release day was upon us. After being fitted with both a green NJFW band and a silver United States Fish and Wildlife (USFWS) band, Park Commission Executive Director Aaron T. Watson, released this patient on September 10<sup>th</sup>.



Case number **2022-00823** arrived on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of May. The red knot (*Calidris canutus*) had been injured in Cape May as part of a netting and banding project. The bird presented with a drooping right wing. Radiographs were taken and a fracture of the right distal radius was noted. The wing was wrapped and the patient was given supportive care.

After the wing wrap was removed, it was noted that the bird was not fully extending its right wing and was not getting lift when it attempted to fly. An exam showed a thickening of a tendon near carpus (wrist joint). A review of radiographs showed the thickening had been present from the initial presentation and suggested that the tendon was damaged when bone was fractured. This meant a grave prognosis for flight, and in turn, for release as this species needed to be able to fly to South American coastal areas by August. The staff began looking for placement in a display setting.

By early July, after time in an outside pre-release conditioning enclosure, the bird had regained full ROM in right wing. New radiographs showed a solid callus of the bone and a decreased thickening of the tendon. The only roadblock to release were three broken flight (primary) feathers. There was hope that the patient MIGHT have a full return of flight function.

Unfortunately, the missing primaries showed no sign of growth over the next month. The veterinarian suspected either direct follicle damage or damaged blood supply to follicles at time of the fracture. The red knot was no longer a release candidate. On the 20<sup>th</sup> of August, representatives from the Smithsonian National Zoo provided transportation for this bird to its new home in their new shorebird display.



Shortly after the red knot arrived our next patient of interest arrived on May 25<sup>th</sup>, case number **2022-00846**. The adult great horned owl (*Bubo virginianus*) had been found on the ground, unable to fly, in Lawrence township. The bird's left wing was very swollen and bruised. Radiographs revealed a fracture to the distal radius and ulna (the two bones between the elbow and wrist).

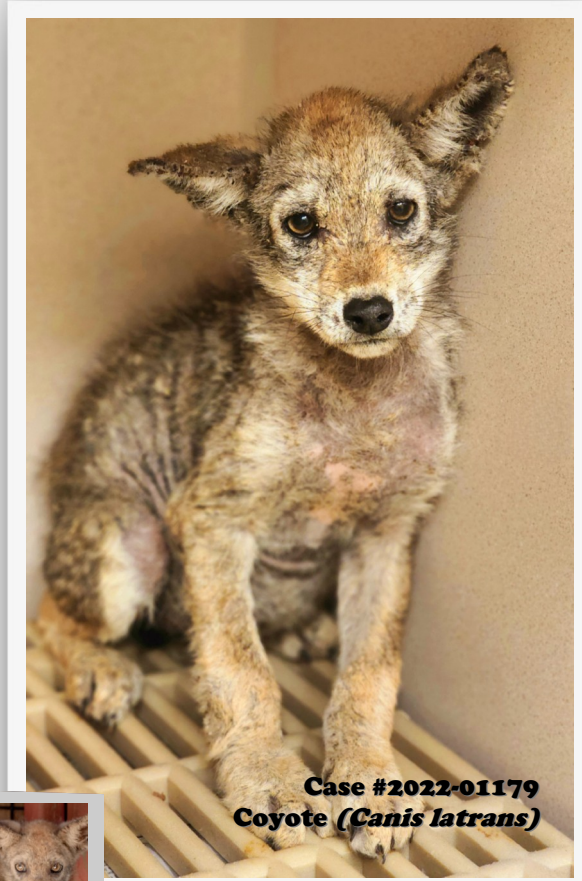
(Continued on page 10)

(Continued from page 9)

After being quarantined for possible HPAI exposure, surgery was performed and the wing was stabilized. A few weeks later the pin was removed from the healed fractures and, thankfully, the calluses had formed well without any complications. What followed was a month and a half of physical therapy and pre-release conditioning for this patient. It needed to have full extension of the wing and silent flight to be a candidate for release.

Finally, on October 2<sup>nd</sup>, after over four months in care, this patient was released near the location where it had been originally found.

The Associated Human Society in Forked River rescued a young coyote (*Canis latrans*) after it had been observed alone and suffering from mange for over a week. Case number **2022-01179** arrived for care on the 15<sup>th</sup> of June. The young animal was thin, dehydrated and covered in parasites, as well as suffering from sarcoptic mange.



Case #2022-01179  
Coyote (*Canis latrans*)

coyote was found limping inside of its enclosure. The left rear leg was swollen and the patient was unable to place weight on it.

Radiographs revealed a fracture of the distal physis (growth plate) of the left tibia and transverse fracture of the left distal fibula. Both of those bones are located between what would be equivalent to a human knee and ankle joint. The fractures were close to the lower joint and involved the growth plate. Wild animals need full function of all of their limbs to have a chance of survival and young animals need to be in peak condition to venture out on their own. Due to the grave prognosis for full recovery, and the certainty of a long, difficult and painful rehabilitation process for a young pup – without a good chance of success – the decision was made to end this patient’s suffering. It was humanely euthanized on July 30th.

So began the process of getting this young animal healthy. Supportive care initially of fluids and medications to treat the parasites and skin infection. Later, we moved on to a healthy diet and room to exercise and grow into a juvenile animal ready for a life in the wild. Unfortunately, this was not to be the case for this young patient.

One of the jobs that any wild animal has while it is in captivity is to do its absolute best to get out of the enclosure that holds it captive. This some times has disastrous results. At the end of July, about two weeks shy of being ready for release, the

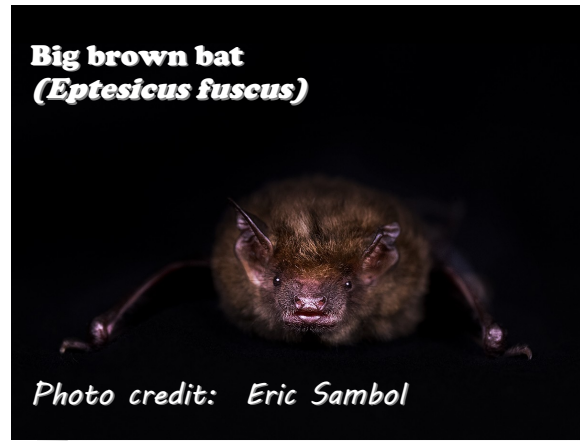
Case number **2022-02249** arrived on September 24<sup>th</sup>. The Northern harrier (*Circus cyaneus*) was a first-time species for the wildlife center. It was found by a Good Samaritan in a corn field, unable to fly. The initial examination revealed a patient that was very dehydrated and thin with a drooping left wing.

Upon further examination by the veterinarian, a fracture of the left clavicle (collar bone) was palpated. The left wing was bandaged in place to the birds' body to limit movement and allow the fracture to heal. While on cage rest inside, supportive care was provided to stabilize this patient.

When the bandage was removed a few weeks later, exercise was slowly added to care. Eventually, the harrier was moved to the large pre-release flight conditioning enclosure. After a few weeks, it was ready for release. It was successfully returned to the wild on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of November.



Those of you, who have read this publication in years past, know that I love bats! And, that love affair has not waned over the years. It has been difficult to watch populations decline as white nose syndrome has taken its toll on our only flying mammals. However, I have also been lucky enough to get to know the



state biologists who work with these species all year long. We have shared our mutual expertise and worked together to get these most delicate of creatures back out to do their job of being Mother Nature's ultimate bug zapper.

This is the time of year when people find bats in their homes. Do not panic! They like warm spots and they do not understand that you do not want to share your home with them. **Please do not put them outside.** It is too cold and they do not have a food source at this time of the year. They will expend too much energy looking for another shelter, which is rarely adequate for the winter. Bats need to overwinter with a rehabilitator until their natural migration or emersion time in spring.

Over the years we having lovingly dubbed these winter visitors as "freeloaders" During the winter season of 2021/2022, we overwintered 17 bats that had been found in client's homes or on the ground in yards on warm winter days. Until the warm months of spring returned, they got a meal every day and a warm place to relax for the winter. Our version of snow-birds.

*Look forward to seeing you here again next year!* 🐾

# NATURE'S CLEAN UP CREW (CONT.)

(Continued from page 1)

tuberculosis and rabies without getting sick (4).

To find an example of how much vultures can keep a population of animals and humans safe from disease, we can look across the globe to India. The declining Indian vulture population opened up a path for the spread of rabies amongst feral dogs. This resulted in a rabies outbreak that led to the deaths of upwards of fifty-thousand people (3). This is an extreme example, but it shows just how important scavengers are to the food-web.

In New Jersey, we see two species of vulture: the black vulture (*Coragyps atratus*) and the

turkey vulture (*Cathartes aura*). Distinguished by their white underwing wingtips and black heads, black vultures have an interesting relationship with their red-headed relatives. Turkey vultures, having an excellent sense of smell, are able to detect their next meal close to the ground, an ability at which black vultures do not excel. Instead, black vultures will stick to higher elevations, waiting for turkey vultures to lead them to a fresh carcass. Turkey vultures are a more solitary bird and once a group of black vultures manages to catch up to the feast, they are often able to drive away the turkey vulture and have the carcass to themselves (1).

In 2022, we saw a new challenge arise for vultures. Highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) is an airborne respiratory virus carried by and spread through populations of wild birds and poultry that persists and thrives in cold, wet environments (2). Although vultures are able to break down more bacteria and pathogens than

other animals, they are a primary target for this influenza alongside waterfowl and raptors. When a bird affected by the flu dies, the virus will stay on the body and spread to any scavenging birds that come to eat it (2). Large groups of black vultures have been found dead from HPAI. Hopefully, we will see a decrease in the spread of HPAI in the coming months and years. If you have poultry in your backyard, you can help mitigate the spread of HPAI by covering waste and compost piles, getting

**Turkey vulture**



# INTERN ARTICLE

BY CARLENE CHIANESE

rid of any standing water near your poultry houses, and by not leaving food out for wildlife (2).

Next time you see a vulture in the sky or on the side of the road, hopefully you will be able to recognize them as healthcare essentials who help us stay healthy and help our environments stay clean.

### References:

1. "Black Vulture Overview, All about Birds, Cornell Lab of Ornithology." Overview, All About Birds, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, [https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Black\\_Vulture/overview](https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Black_Vulture/overview).
2. "High Path Avian Influenza Confirmed in Black Vultures, Poultry Producers Encouraged to Take Precautions." State of Delaware News, 11 May 2022, <https://news.delaware.gov/2022/05/11/high-path-avian-influenza-confirmed-in-black-vultures-poultry-producers-encouraged-to-take-precautions/>.
3. "The Role of Scavengers: Carcass Crunching." National Geographic Society, 2 June 2022, <https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/role-scavengers-carcass-crunching>.
4. "Turkey Vulture Overview, All about Birds, Cornell Lab of Ornithology." Overview, All About Birds, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, [https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Turkey\\_Vulture/](https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Turkey_Vulture/). 🐾



For as long as I can remember, I have always had a passion for animals and nature. I knew that I wanted to work with all different kinds of species: mammals, birds, or reptiles. I am attending Mercer County Community College pursuing a degree in biology. As I was sitting in my normally boring chemistry class, the professor informed the class that there was a summer internship available at the Mercer County Wildlife Center. I practically leapt from my seat to get the flyer at the front of the room. I was extremely excited, applying right away and luckily, I was approved!

When I first started, it seemed like a hurricane of information and things to get done. My first few minutes in the raccoon room were hectic due to the hungry cries of various litters of kits

*(Continued on page 14)*



# INTERN (CONT.)

*(Continued from page 13)*

eager for their morning bottles. Cleaning and feeding were the main jobs when it came to these hyper balls of fur, and they could take up a lot of time in each of the intern's days. Working with the birds and reptiles was a bit more relaxing. Seeing the faces of the baby birds that relied on you for their survival was heart melting, and it felt so amazing to be able to feed them throughout the day.

After the first few weeks passed, some of the young raccoons were big enough to be placed in their outdoor enclosures. Working in the intense summer heat to clean and feed these raccoons was hard work, but it was rewarding to watch the raccoons as they ate their food, gratefully. Providing enrichment for the more rambunctious groups was also fun, and it was entertaining to see these intelligent animals figure out how to get hidden food items, as well as how to have the most fun playing with the new materials put in their enclosure.

I think the biggest challenge for everyone at the center this summer was trying to handle HPAI, or highly pathogenic avian influenza. Certain birds that came to the center had to be quarantined and separated from other animal species. All the waterfowl had to be kept out of the main building in the shed where the reptiles had previously been housed. We had to wear special booties and dispose of any materials used with the waterfowl.

It was exciting to come in each day and see what new creatures were waiting for us. I got to work with many animals that I had never seen up close. I was amazed by the ducklings and goslings because of how fast they grew. I was able to notice newly grown patches of primary feathers and their ever-increasing size each time I visited them.

The most rewarding part of the interning experience was being able to meet amazing and knowledgeable people that were like-minded and caring when it came to all these different animals. Learning about the different species that share their homes with us was very interesting and working hands-on with them was an invaluable experience. Going out to release the animals we cared for was very heartwarming and to this day I smile when I pass these locations when I am out and about. I enjoyed the work I did while interning at MCWC so much that I did not want it to end. I decided to continue volunteering so I could prolong this amazing experience. 🐾

*Editor's Note: Carlene has joined the seasonal staff at the Center for the 2023 season. Congratulations and welcome.*

## REDBELLY TURTLE

BY NICOLE GOLDEN

Redbelly turtles (*Pseudemys rubriventris*), also called northern red-bellied cooters or red-bellied turtles are a large fresh water turtle found in central and southern New Jersey. The word cooter comes from *kuta*, the African word for turtle. They are found in ponds, lakes and slower moving rivers with rocks and logs for frequent basking.

Redbelly turtles are the largest basking turtle and second largest turtle species in New Jersey. Females are larger than males, growing up to fifteen inches and weighing up to twelve pounds. Males have a longer tail and longer front claws. Adults have a dark colored carapace (top shell) with faint red lines on their scutes (the scales on the shell). Their skin color is very dark, in some cases black. Both sexes tend to darken as they age. Plastron color is typically



coral red or pink to yellow with darker blotches. Hatchling and juvenile redbelly turtles have a green carapace with yellow-green squiggly lines and a coral plastron with black splotches.

The lifespan of a redbelly turtle can reach into the fifties. Females mature later than males and may not be able to reproduce until they are thirteen to twenty years old. Clutch size is ten to twenty eggs that are buried in sandy areas on pond shores and river banks. Temperature dictates whether the hatchlings will be male or female. Warmer nesting areas produce females and cooler areas produce males. Females may lay one or two clutches of eggs each year.

All ages of redbelly turtles eat aquatic vegetation but hatchling and juvenile turtles also eat insects, invertebrates and occasional crayfish. 🐾



Female redbelly turtle with carapace injuries rehabilitated at Mercer County Wildlife Center. Although the injuries are still visible, the carapace has healed sufficiently to provide the needed seal to protect her internal organs. There will always be a shell deformity, but it will continue to remodel as new bone grows. While in care she produced eggs that the staff placed in a nest box to incubate. These are two of her hatchlings that were ready for release at the same time as the female.

## Remember, for all turtles:

- Never relocate a wild turtle. They have a small home range and will spend their lives trying to get back home.
- If you pick up an injured turtle, put it in a box with a clean towel, write down your exact location and call a rehabilitator.
- If you stop to help a turtle cross a road be aware of your surroundings, keep yourself safe and always put the turtle on the side of the road in the direction that they were headed.
- Never keep any turtle or wild animal as a pet.
- Always call a rehabilitator with any questions- we are always happy to help! New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife link to all NJ licensed rehabilitators: [https://www.njfishandwildlife.com/pdf/rehab\\_list.pdf](https://www.njfishandwildlife.com/pdf/rehab_list.pdf)





# FAREWELL TO OUR GOLDEN GIRLS

BY ADRIANA MANCHEN

Picture it: Texas, 1985. It was a Saturday night and a mother and a young girl sat down to watch a new TV sitcom. In that program, four very different women had come together to live in one place and their fictional adventures would impact the lives of millions of Americans for years to come. That show was the *Golden Girls*. That young girl, was me! Thank you Sophia Petrillo for helping me with my lead in line! The *Golden Girls* are going to be referenced a lot in this article. I hope you were a fan!

I absolutely adored the show and the entire cast. The circumstances that brought the characters together were not pleasant life occurrences, but they made the best of their individual situations and came together to become a family.

At MCWC we have a number of education animals that have ended up with us due to an unfortunate incident. All of our education animals, for the most part, came to us either through an injury or by confiscation from someone who was illegally keeping them. We see them as vital to our mission and regard them as very important members of our facility. Much like the *Golden Girls*, their worlds were turned upside down by certain events, but we tried to restore routine and normalcy to their lives once they found a home at MCWC.

Times have sure changed since the show's debut night. Our world has since lost Bea Arthur (Dorothy Zbornak), Estelle Getty (Sophia Petrillo), Rue McClanahan (Blanche Devereaux), and Betty White (Rose Nylund) - all the main cast of this groundbreaking series. These last two years have brought about much change at the wildlife center, as well. Starting in March of

2021, we began to lose a cast of our very own, with the loss of our long-time resident and spitfire turkey vulture. Then in 2022, we lost five more beloved education animals. Three of these individuals had served as ambassadors for their species for more than two decades. Each of these deaths felt like the end of an era. With such huge losses, we thought it was very important to acknowledge each of these incredible animals and all they did for education and conservation during their lifetimes.

Many of you who read this article will have a connection to some or all of these individuals. In order to pay tribute, I thought it might be interesting to compare each of these education ambassadors to a beloved *Golden Girls* character. It seems fitting as I am writing this one year to the day that the world lost our last remaining human *Golden Girl*, Betty White. If you were a fan, you most likely know she was a lifelong animal lover and animal welfare advocate. I am hoping she would have approved!



Our tough cookie, turkey vulture 1996-01070,  
(Continued on page 18)

(Continued from page 17)

was the most like America's favorite senior, Sophia Petrillo. She arrived at the center as a fledgling in 1996 after a gunshot had shattered her left humerus and then - shortly thereafter - was subsequently hit by a car, which fractured her left radius and ulna very close to her wrist joint. Talk about a tough gal! She was a favorite at education programs and was able to help educate tens of thousands of people during her time as an education ambassador. She reserved all her good behavior for public presentations and was known as a force to be reckoned with in her enclosure! She was persistent and sassy and sometimes cranky. We all loved her though because she was a riot! She lived to peck at ankles. As she aged however, we would often find her lying on her back unable to right herself. Our wonderful volunteer, Kevin Buynie, built her an easy to navigate enclosure that would keep her safe from falling. Eventually, the old injury that she was initially presented with started causing more problems. In March of 2021, at the age of twenty-five, the difficult decision to humanely euthanize her was made due to advanced arthritis at the wrist joint. This was an extremely painful condition and was causing her secondary problems such as wounds on her back from flipping over. We all still miss her antics and her very lively nature.



Great-horned owl 1994-01158 was the most like Dorothy Zbornak. She was serious, tall and lean

in appearance, and an educator. She was all business and was easily annoyed, just like Dorothy, too! This bird was used in a multitude of education programs at MCWC from 1994 to 2019. During her time with us, she may have impacted as many as 137,000 people and maybe more! However, she had a whole other life before she reached our center. She was admitted to the Wildlife Center of Virginia as a juvenile in 1980. She had been found in Augusta County, VA unable to fly. A left wing injury restricted the full range of motion needed for flight and a decision was made to send her to a zoo in Maryland. The zoo had her for 12 years before sending her back to the Wildlife Center of Virginia. Then, in 1994, she came to live with us and continue her career as an educator. Who knows how many people this bird helped educate with both places combined! The number could actually be in the hundreds of thousands for her entire lifetime! She ended up passing away in her enclosure from cancer in May of 2022. She had lived 41 years and worked as a teacher for all but the last two years of her life.

Great-horned owl 1997-00318 was our resident surrogate owl. She raised over 150 great-horned owl nestlings and because of her good-nature with owlets in need, I would liken her most to Rose Nylund, the sweetest and kindest of the *Golden Girls*. She was however not at all ditz! This owl came to us with a luxated right proximal radius (dislocated elbow) in May of 1997. This injury left her with an inability to fly properly and she was initially slated to become a second great-horned owl education ambassador. However, this bird did not take kindly to people and Diane decided to try her out in another role when a great-horned owl nestling showed up at the center one day. The introduction went swimmingly and a new job for her was found! This owl was found in Bucks County, PA and was at least twenty-six years old when she passed away in her enclosure in May of 2022. She was an invaluable member of the rehabilitation team and will be greatly missed as we enter our first season without a surrogate great-horned owl in

over two decades. She taught so many how to just be wild owls.

Southern flying squirrel 2015-01118 arrived at our center in 2015. She was a lot like Blanche Devereaux. A true southern belle, she was charming and fast, but in a different way than Blanche! Everyone loved this tiny fur ball and she would attract many visitors (usually people bringing in patients) to the education room before the room was blocked off during Covid. I feel like many of these people would find some solace in her after having dropped off a severely injured or displaced young animal. She was known for daintily snatching snacks from her caretakers' hands when offered a treat and was especially fond of blueberries and almonds. She had been inappropriately kept as a pet after her mother was killed in a wood chipper in June of 2008 in Middlesex County. She came to live at the center when she was seven years old. She was humanely euthanized in August of 2022 after weeks of presenting "odd" behaviors and a very large tumor had been detected in her abdomen. She was fourteen years old at the time of her passing. She was a tiny, but very charismatic girl and looking at the empty enclosure was deeply saddening. The enclosure has since been cleaned out and stored, but staff and volunteers continue to fondly recall this delightful little squirrel.

The *Golden Girls* relied on a ton of supporting cast members and our next two education ambassadors kind of fit that role because neither ever had a chance to go out on program here at the center. Red-tailed hawk 2020-00183 came to the center as an education ambassador retiree in March of 2020, at the start of the pandemic. She was most like Sophia's sister, Angela Vecchio, played by Nancy Walker. This is because she was only with us for a very short while and was an older bird. She had a permanent wing injury and was 30 years old when she first got to experience life outdoors when she was placed with our center. She took to the outside environment from the get go. Wind, rain, sun, sounds – all that could be scary if you had not experienced living



outdoors before, but it was not to our girl. She seemed perfectly content experiencing all the enrichment nature had to offer. She passed away in January of 2022; she most likely succumbed to advanced renal disease and died peacefully indoors overnight. She was a tremendously sweet and strong red-tailed hawk and was so tolerant of her new people, her new place, and handling, especially early on when we worked to improve some long-standing health issues. It is never easy seeing an older, seasoned ambassador go.

Last, but not least, we said goodbye to Virginia opossum 2020-01897 in May of 2022. He came to the center after being found in Burlington County in July of 2020. At the end of the *Golden Girls* series, Dorothy ends up marrying Lucas Hollingsworth, played by Leslie Nielsen. Lucas was a pleasant character and had bright, white hair, just like our little guy! Of course, in our opossum's case, he had leucism (partial loss of pigmentation resulting in his white hair)

*(Continued on page 20)*



to prevent him from having further pain and complications with his neck and over supination of the front foot. We really wished we could have had his moment to shine with our education programs, but time was not on our side here. Opossums only live one to two years in the wild and three to four years in captivity if they are perfectly healthy and suited for the environment to start. However, for the period he was with us, many visitors did have the chance to learn about leucism and the

importance of camouflage when they visited him in the Outdoor Education Environment. He turned out to be a great education animal within the OEE for the short while he was with us and is often recalled fondly to this day.

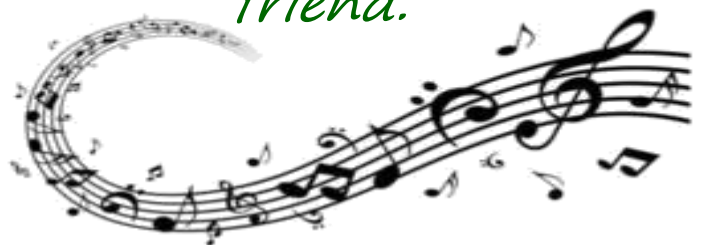
## GOLDEN GIRLS (CONT.)

*(Continued from page 19)*

and would not have survived in the wild for long as a completely uncamouflaged animal. For this reason, he stayed on as an education animal. His white hair brought on a slew of nicknames, even though that is very much frowned upon at our center. This is because we want to discourage our education animals from being seen as pets in any manner and want everyone to continue appreciating them for the wild animals that they are. Nevertheless, this individual ended up with some nicknames. There was Snowball, Casper, and my personal favorite, Anderson Cooper. Anderson, if you ever read this, please do not be offended. It is a true compliment to share a name with an opossum. At least we think so! Unfortunately, our opossum developed spondylosis (a condition in which there is abnormal wear on the cartilage and bones of the neck) in early 2022 and the decision to humanely euthanize him was made

These last few years have been such a whirlwind, but we did not want more time to go by before remembering every one of these very special animals. They will live on in our memories forever. We had to say goodbye to the *Golden Girls*. Now, we must say goodbye to our former education ambassadors. We will miss you dearly. You all have certainly given us some of the biggest gifts. Rest in peace everyone. 🐾

*“Thank you for being a friend.”*



# ANOTHER 1st Year Volunteer

BY LAUREN WALLIN

Prior to my retirement, I had thought about the kinds of things I would like to do with my free time after I officially left the workforce. I knew I wanted to be a volunteer somewhere. It was important for me to do something that was productive, meaningful, and provided me with a sense of purpose.

Becoming a volunteer at the Mercer County Wildlife Center came to mind. I had been there a few times in the past to bring injured birds and I had called there periodically with wildlife related questions. I looked at MCWC website and made my decision to apply as a volunteer, and I am so glad that I did.

On orientation day, the staff provided all the ins and outs of the job to the newest group of volunteers, of which I was now a part. They wanted to ensure that everyone who volunteered had a good understanding of the kind of work to which they were committing, and to provide an off ramp for anyone who decided that it might not be a good fit.

They carefully explained that the ultimate goal for each and every animal in the care of the center was for rehabilitation and release, whenever possible. They emphasized to our group how important it was to not encourage bonding or imprinting on us, and to give the animals their privacy behind the center's "no peeking" shades hung on the doors of their temporary interior housing.

They also emphasized that the primary responsibilities for first year volunteers was to clean cages, do laundry, wash food bowls and utensils, and prepare meals for the various animals.



On my very first day, I knew I had made the right decision to become a volunteer. It is a very busy place, especially during the summer. While you are there, you are constantly working and moving. You become a sort of mini-chef as you help prepare the fruit, vegetables, meat, fish and other ingredients that go into the food bowls for the various animals, birds, and reptiles. You do more laundry and wash more dishes than you ever would have imagined you could. When cleaning cages the work is often stinky or messy or both. (Afterall, what goes in, must come out).

But while doing these various tasks, messy or not, I feel their importance and am glad to be part of a team of people who share the same joy and level of commitment for the care of these very special animals.

I experienced many new things during my first year as a volunteer, each of them wonderful in their own way. To mention a few at the top of my list, first and thanks to Kim Dawes, I learned a lot about hummingbirds and got to see them up close for the first time. As a result, I was able to attract them to my own yard and they came every day until the end of the summer. I am looking forward to seeing them come back when the weather gets warm.

*(Continued on page 22)*

(Continued from page 21)

One other experience was when I did a release of a Northern flicker. Following its successful rehabilitation, I took it over to the spot where it had been found. Letting it out of the carrier and watching it fly away and up into the trees was such an amazing thing to see.

I learned many new things during my first year as a volunteer, too. One of them is understanding how important it is to continue the work of educating people about wildlife. There are many well-meaning people out there who want to help a wild animal. But they do not know that they may cause more harm, like taking a fawn off by itself, because they think it was abandoned by its mother.

Likewise, there are other people, maybe not so well-meaning or knowledgeable, who think it is great to keep a wild animal, such as a raccoon, as a pet.

My final thought is to say that my first year as a volunteer has been such a wonderful experience working with the dedicated staff and volunteers at the Mercer County Wildlife Center. I gained a broader understanding of some of the wildlife living right around me and had so much fun doing it! I am looking forward to coming back and doing it, again. 🐾



## MCWC OUTDOOR EDUCATION ENVIRONMENT



The Mercer County Wildlife Center's Outdoor Education Environment is open for self guided tours.

**Wednesday-Sunday  
10AM-4PM**

*Free Admission*



**Mercer County Wildlife Center - 1748 River Road, Titusville, NJ 08560 (609)303-0552**

# THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS A SEAGULL

BY JANE RAKOS-YATES

What?! Seagulls are those white birds at the New Jersey beaches that steal your sandwich if you turn your back, right?

Well, yes, but not really. Seagull in the dictionary is defined as "any marine species of gull". The correct term for those white beach birds is "gull", without the "sea". The term "seagull" is slang and often conveys a negative connotation.

Negative labels such as, *rats with wings* or *thugs of the bird world* give gulls a bad reputation. Yes, they will take your French fries and bully other birds for that spot on the beach. But, are they actually mean and bad mannered OR intelligent and adaptive?

As it turns out, a little of both. Research has proven that gulls are among the most intelligent and adaptive of the seabirds. Bad manners and bullying other birds are conclusions from a human's point of view. From a gull's perspective, they are only taking advantage of a productive situation: Gulls have learned that a beach full of people equals human food being eaten all day. Which in turn, will mean – surely - there will be food left behind or in the trash can. No need for using energy to forage for food or scour the sky for hours looking for a meal. They have also learned if they stand there looking sideways at you (they never look you in the eye) long enough, you might share your meal with them. Bingo! The only work involved is claiming and protecting a beach spot from other gulls. Easy meal. Intelligent. Adaptive.

Being a beach bird nerd, myself, I have witnessed gulls using other special skills. I have watched them find clams and mussels at low tide and drop them from heights onto docks, sidewalks and roofs, to access the flesh inside.

They put bread crumbs on top of the water surface to attract fish. They steal food from other birds for an easy meal (eagles, osprey, and hawks steal food, too). Trying to take a fish from an adult bald eagle takes guts! (I have seen it). Add courage to intelligent and adaptive. During the colder months when the New Jersey beaches are empty, gulls will, of course, migrate to other warmer beaches to test their skills with the southerners. Same motives apply, only now they can take advantage of hundreds of drunk spring break beachgoers. Jackpot! Add social to intelligent, adaptive, and courageous.

Let us face it, gulls are amazing birds. Now that you have learned that they are intelligent, adaptive, courageous, and social, might you cringe slightly or raise your eyebrows the next time you hear someone refer to a white bird on the beach as a "seagull"? That is always my reaction. You have my permission to correct them with confidence that there is no such thing as a "seagull"! 🐾

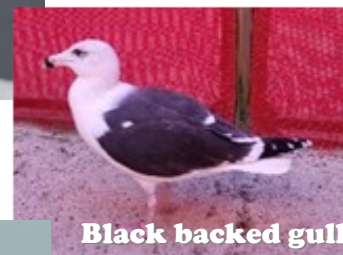


Photo credit:  
Cornell Labs

# EYES ON EAGLES

BY DIANE NICKERSON

In 2018 Mercer County Parks located the first bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) nest in our parks. The nest was securely out of public view and produced one healthy chick that fledged (left the nest) in early July.

In cooperation with the New Jersey Fish and Wildlife Endangered Species Program (NJENSP), the Conserve Wildlife Foundation (CWF) and PSE&G, the Wildlife Center, the Park Commission and the Wildlife Center Friends worked to develop an education opportunity for the residents of Mercer County. The goal was two-fold. First, to keep the eagles safe and undisturbed and, second, to allow the residents to learn more about our newest neighbors. *Eyes on Eagles* was born - or hatched!

With funding from PSE&G, a nest camera was installed in the fall of 2018, prior to the nesting season. It had a great view of the nest and the lake. Volunteer training began and education plans started. And then, during the 2019 nesting season, the eagles moved to another location! No where near the camera. However, in a better location for public viewing from a distance with binoculars and spotting scopes. The nest produced two chicks that fledged at the end of June.

Also, in 2019 another nest was located in Mercer County. That nest also produced two chicks who successfully fledged at the end of June. In 2020, as with the rest of the world, the program came to a screeching halt. We managed a couple of virtual programs but nothing in person. The eagles did not care about our program. They continued with their mating and nesting. Both nests were successful. Each produced two chicks that fledged in the middle of June.

In 2021 the nests were again successful. The original nest produced three chicks and the second nest produced two. The first nest got a late start and thus, the chicks fledged late, in mid-July. The second nest got an earlier start and those chicks fledged in mid-June.

Talks began about putting a camera on one of the new nests. The climber from CWF assessed both nest locations in the late summer of 2021. It was determined that neither nest tree was suitable for a camera. Either tree branches blocked the view or the tree was not safe to get the camera in a workable location. There had also always been a secondary wish to add the Mercer County eagles to the NJENSP database by doing examinations, getting measurements and blood samples, then placing identification bands on the chicks. In order to accomplish that, someone needs to get to the nest and safely get the chicks to the ground and the veterinarian!



Again, both nest trees were checked for climbing safety. The first nest was not accessible. The second nest, with a little creativity, was able to be fitted with climbing equipment. The equipment was put in place in the late summer of 2021 and we crossed our fingers for nesting success in 2022.



Unfortunately, the original nest was not used in 2022. Maybe such a large group of nestlings the previous year encouraged them to take a year off! We are hoping for them to return for the 2023 nesting season. The second nest was successful in producing two chicks in 2023. On a beautiful day in mid-April a banding trip was scheduled. The biologist from NJENSP was surprised to find a single chick in the nest. Evidently, one of the chicks had fallen or had been predated. There had been a strong storm a few days earlier and we were all suspicious that if the chick had landed on the ground, the water would have swept it away.

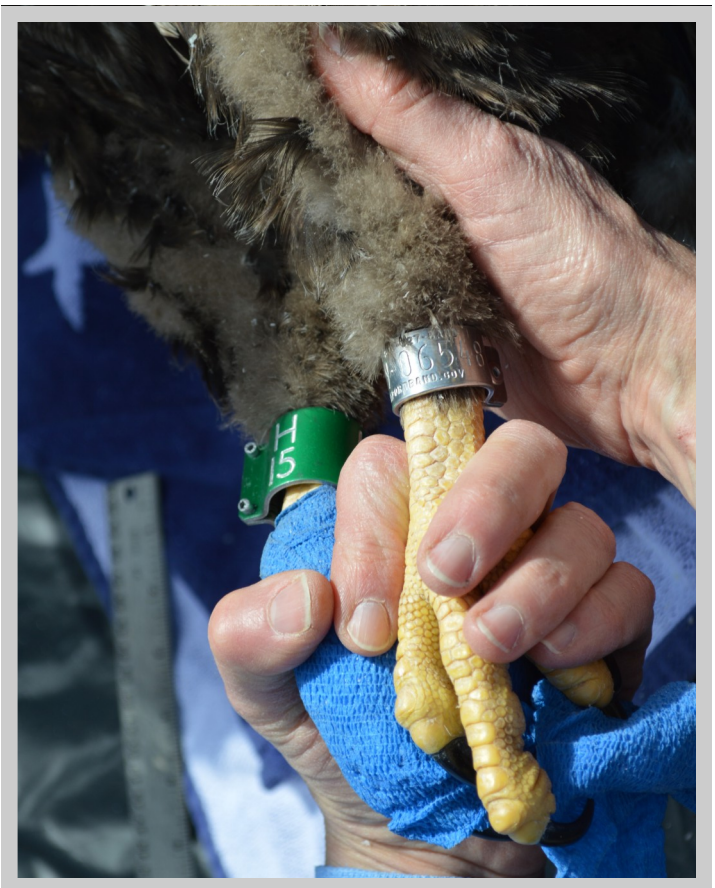
undisturbed. He got a reward for his efforts and had his photo taken with the chick before it was replaced in the nest. The chick was also fitted with a green New Jersey identification band and a silver one from the United States Fish and Wildlife Service. This marked the first time an eagle chick from a Mercer County Park nest had been examined and banded.

As an aside, this chick tried to fledge a few weeks early and was found on the ground by NJENSP volunteer nest watchers, Kevin and Karin Buynie. It was brought to the Center for radiographs and a veterinary exam. With a clean bill of health and no injuries, it was returned to the nest a few days later. It managed to stay put until it fledged in mid-May.

We look forward to the adult birds returning to both nests this year to continue the *Eyes on Eagle* program and to possibly band more chicks to add to the state database. 🐾



The second chick was strong and healthy. It was placed in a duffle bag and safely transported to the ground for its physical and banding. Park Ranger Springsteen noticed a person climbing the tree from a distance and arrived to investigate. The Rangers are all aware of the proper distancing from the nest and work diligently to keep the eagles safe and



# “WHAT CAN I DO?!”

BY KRISTI SCHOLLENBERGER

Many animals presented for care come with the question “Can I do anything to prevent this.” In some cases, the answer is yes. There are some very easy and inexpensive ways to aid your wild neighbors.

## **Window strikes:**

Flying into glass doors and windows can cause a variety of injuries for birds ranging from slightly stunned to fractured bones and head trauma depending on the velocity of the strike. Humans learn to associate the visual cues of window frames as an indication of a glass barrier, birds do not and will try to fly straight through. To know if you have a window that is a hazard to birds, you need to think like a bird! Go outside and look through your window, if you can see sky and trees reflected in the glass, the birds will, too. This will lead the birds to assume they have a clear flightpath. You will need to do this several times over the course of a day and for the different seasons as the changing light will affect what the glass reflects. There is a wide array of solutions for this problem ranging from very expensive, (replacing the glass with one of many bird-friendly ultraviolet, patterned glass options or adding bird netting to windows), to the do-it-yourself variety. The easiest fix is to keep curtains/blinds closed for the part of the day when the lighting would be an issue and to turn off all lights in rooms that are empty. Beyond that, there are many commercially available products including tapes and decals that can be applied to windows to help the birds see that there is a solid surface. Look for products colored in an ultraviolet spectrum, as this will be transparent to our eyes but visible to birds. One or two decals will not do the trick; you will need to cover the surface of the window with a spacing of less than a hand's length

between them (spaces not larger than a 2” x 4” square recommended) so the birds do not try to fly in-between. If you are feeling a bit more artistic you can use window paint to create your own bird warning, just be sure to cover the window and not leave areas of transparent glass.

## **Glue traps:**

These traps are primarily intended for nuisance rodents but are indiscriminate in who gets stuck. From squirrels to bats to birds to snakes, there are unintended victims. Animals succumb to dehydration, starvation, or stress from being stuck. Of the ones who survive long enough to be rescued, many have catastrophic injuries. Effective rodent control involves eliminating the source of the attraction and sealing holes and openings to keep them out. Poison bait traps should also be avoided. Mice and rats do not ingest a high enough dose of poison to die immediately. Some poisons are not lethal until a day or two after ingestion. During this time the poisoned animal becomes an easier prey item for foxes, hawks, owls and even domestic dogs and cats. All of which will be adversely affected by the poison. If traps are the only solution there are humane options that do not involve glue or poison.

## **Spotted lantern fly (SLF) traps:**

While we applaud the enthusiasm with which the community has launched into the campaign against the invasive SLFs, we urge caution in the use of the glue tape traps. As with glue traps used for rodents, SLF glue-based traps often catch the wrong species. Nuthatches, woodpeckers and wrens rank high among the list of victims, but these traps are also



detrimental to many advantageous insect species including honey bees. There is not a 100% safe way to use a glue trap, but the hazards can be minimized by covering the sticky tape with very small mesh wire or ½ inch hardware cloth. This allows the SLF to crawl into the trap but will reduce the unintended bycatch. A better alternative is circle traps. These are made of plastic-coated insect screening and no sticky material. The SLF crawl up into the trap and end up in a closed collection container. Circle traps can be purchased or you can make your own. Many websites offer detailed instructions.

## House finch conjunctivitis:

This eye infection is caused by the *Mycoplasma gallisepticum* bacteria. It is most common in

house finches (*Haemorhous mexicanus*) but also reported in American goldfinches (*Spinus tristis*), evening grosbeaks (*Coccothraustes vespertinus*) and purple finches (*Haemorhous purpureus*). Infected birds will have red, crusty eyes. As the infection progresses the eyes will become swollen and eventually will be completely closed.



Avian conjunctivitis is treatable with antibiotics and supportive care. This bacterium is highly contagious between birds and bird feeders can increase the transmission rate. Infected birds rub their eyes against the feeder, the bacteria are now on the feeder and can spread to the next birds to visit. To help prevent the spread, bird feeders and bird baths should be cleaned at least every seven to ten days. They should be completely emptied, scrubbed to remove any caked-on bits, washed with a 10% bleach solution (nine parts H<sub>2</sub>O: one part bleach), rinsed and dried completely before refilling. Removing seed and feces from under feeders will also aid in prevention. If infected birds are visiting your feeders, the feeders can be removed for 14 days to disperse the population and reduce the infection rate. They should be thoroughly cleaned before they are refilled.

Not all negative interactions between people and wildlife can be avoided, but with a little forethought and some basic fixes we can be better neighbors for our native animals. 🐾

*Editor's note: After many years as a volunteer and then a seasonal staff member, Kristi joined our full-time staff in July. We are very happy to have her on board!*

# How to determine if a squirrel needs your help

## I found a young squirrel...

Grey squirrels nest twice a year - in late winter and summer. They commonly have litters of three or four pups. Infants' eyes open at four weeks. They may begin exploring outside the nest by six weeks and are weaned by ten weeks. Infant squirrels have the best chance of survival when they are cared for by their mother.

If you find an infant squirrel, use the following chart to guide your choice of intervention.

Remember to wear sturdy gloves anytime you handle wildlife. Do not give food or water to injured or orphaned wildlife.

### START HERE

Do any of the following apply to the squirrel?  
 - It is bleeding, has an open wound, or has a broken bone  
 - It has been in a cat's or dog's mouth  
 - It is covered in fly eggs (look like small grains of rice)  
 - It is cold, wet, or crying non-stop

**Yes** → The squirrel is likely injured or orphaned. Take it to the nearest permitted wildlife rehabilitator.

**No** → If the squirrel is uninjured, the next step is to identify its age to determine if intervention is needed.

Does the squirrel ...  
 - have a fluffed out tail?  
 - have a body longer than six inches (not including tail)?  
 - approach humans or pets?

**Yes** → This is a **JUVENILE** squirrel. You do not need to intervene. Even at the young age of 10 to 12 weeks the squirrel is independent. If the squirrel is approaching humans or pets, try to scare it by making loud noises when it comes near.

**No** → This is an **INFANT** squirrel. You will need to guide it back to its mother.

**CONGRATULATIONS!** You helped to reunite an infant with its mother. Thank you!

Has the mother returned to care for her infant?  
**Yes** → **CONGRATULATIONS!** You helped to reunite an infant with its mother. Thank you!

**No** → Observe the infant for the next 6-8 hours of daylight. Re-heat the rice every two hours.

**ONE**  
Place uncooked rice or birdseed in a sock and warm it in the microwave for 20-30 seconds. Wrap the sock in a soft towel and place it with the infant in an open container (i.e. a box). **DO NOT GIVE THE INFANT FOOD OR WATER.**

**TWO**  
Return the squirrel to its nesting tree. This should be a tree in the immediate area where the squirrel was found. If you do not know which tree the nest is in, or if the nest was destroyed, then choose a tree closest to where the squirrel was found.

**THREE**  
If the infant's eyes are **OPEN**, place it on the tree trunk and encourage it to climb. If it does not climb, attach the open container to the tree.  
 If infant's eyes are **CLOSED**, attach the open container to the tree.



Eastern gray squirrel neo-nate

# A RETURN TO NORMAL

BY KIM DAWES

I am starting to wonder if I can remember what “normal” is. Is normal just not wearing masks? Is normal gathering with friends and family and coworkers without being nervous? Is normal just living your life without thought of you or your loved ones getting sick?

I was very excited this year to experience a small part of normal and take on new volunteers at the center. It had been three (3) WHOLE years since we had new volunteers at The Mercer County Wildlife Center. I was hired at the end of 2019 as a volunteer coordinator. I could not wait to start volunteer orientations, scheduling, and training... to meet all the new volunteers and introduce them to our fantastic center. I was terrified. I was excited. I was ready. That March, COVID hit, and the entire volunteer program was shut down.

Although we were able to bring back veteran volunteers late in 2020, it was a lot of work for a small number of dedicated volunteers. It was not until this year, 2022, that we safely brought new volunteers back to the center. This was it. We were finally doing it. Orientations were held outside under our pavilion. Because we knew we would be outside, we tried to move the dates to the first week in April (instead of March) because it would be warmer. It was not warmer. I remember standing outside, shivering through our orientation presentation. Watching fifty (50) new volunteers shiver in their coats, hats, and gloves. We could not feel our fingers, and we could see our breath, but we were safe, and we were there.

*We were very excited to see 50 potential new volunteers!*

Orientation is a chance to see what we do, give information about what is expected from volunteers, and answer questions. It is only a fit for some. We had 35 people sign up for a shift. Scheduling was the challenge I imagined it to be – but, it turns out, I adore training and teaching. Being surrounded by new people and personalities makes everything exciting again – even cleaning a cage or doing laundry. Smiling and laughing with new friends – even if they are wearing masks and I can only see their eyes.

They say volunteering is associated with better perceived mental health and quality of life. I absolutely agree with that. Being surrounded by people willing to sacrifice their own time for the benefit of wildlife, and our center does the same for all of us (staff) around them. Our center is alive again. This is our new “normal,” and I will take it. 🐾

**If you are interested in volunteering at our center, please email me at [mcwcvolunteers@gmail.com](mailto:mcwcvolunteers@gmail.com)**



# ENRICHMENT

BY SUSAN BUCKLEY

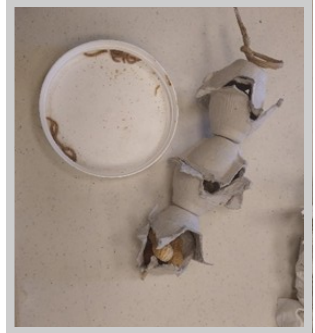
We share our planet with millions of plant and animal species, and the variety of wildlife enriches our lives in so many ways. Nature is a source of inspiration and essential for all goods and services that make our lives possible. At the Mercer County Wildlife Center, we are constantly being enriched by the variety of animals and the rehabilitation challenges they present.

Care comes in many forms at the center. Medical care, feeding, and maintaining a clean, safe environment are essential. However, the rehabilitation community has more recently focused on the need for enrichment as well. Enrichment is *"a process for improving or enhancing animal environments and care within the context of their inhabitant's behavioural biology and natural history"* (**AZA Behavioral Advisory Group**).

Enrichment is designed so that animals in a captive setting can engage in activities similar to their counterparts in the wild. Foraging for food is an example of a behavior necessary in the wild. For our rehabilitation animals, enrichment focuses on activities they must be able to do in the wild.

For our education ambassador residents, who for medical or behavioral reasons are not able to return to the wild, it involves keeping them from getting bored.

The center has an enrichment committee made up of staff and volunteers who have received special training in enrichment development and application. Enrichment committee members are assigned specific education ambassadors or participate in the enrichment of the patients being rehabilitated. Each animal's enrichment is recorded, and success or failure of the items are



monitored. Volunteers are tasked with creating items of interest for the animals from mostly repurposed

or recyclable household items. Due to the Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI – see article on page 1) threat, we are no longer using natural items, and have resorted to creating items from paper, paper towel and toilet paper tubes, egg cartons, boxes, bags, and many other similar items.

Some animals are more easily enriched than others. Crows are smart and curious, and



actively engage with new items placed in the enclosure, often attacking them before they are in place. The barn owl, who is nocturnal by nature, seems bothered by the day time intrusion and rarely engages with the enrichment.

Our enclosures have been made more enriching with furnishings, such as firehose braids, buckets, ramps, perches, water areas and even a fake Christmas tree (ambassador Eastern screech owl). Perches can be wrapped in the ever-popular paper, to change the texture and provide a material with which to interact, i.e. destroy.

There are six types of enrichment. As mentioned earlier, *foraging* is an enrichment that serves both education ambassadors and rehabilitation animals. Food is hidden in an enrichment item, frozen in ice or we may offer a novel item. *Sensory* enrichment may involve a new scent or new texture. *Environmental* enrichment involves a new item in the enclosure. *Manipulative* enrichment is in the form of items, with which the animal interacts, such as a paper sculpture to shred. *Behavioral/Social Activities* provide the animals opportunities to engage with other animals or handlers. We are investigating the use of recordings of like species to enrich our education ambassador birds. *Occupational* enrichment promotes psychological well-being and can involve puzzles and foraging.

Enrichment for the education ambassadors also enhances the visitor experience to the Outdoor Education Environment as the animals show more natural behaviors and are much more active. If you visit the, look for items that enrich the animals.

The team's creativity has been amazing and even though the animals may be unimpressed, (barn owl I am talking to you), our fellow enrichment team members are amazed. We share our ideas, our successes, and any

information we find online with each other. Like all the other care at the center, this is definitely a group effort.

The Wildlife Center is always looking for new enrichment ideas and trying new things to make the lives of the animals in our care a little better. Feel free to experiment with your own animals enriching their lives with a little creative flare! 🐾





The box turtle has been taken outside, provided with a separate bin with novel contents and had items added to the enclosure. A brush for shell stimulation, ball for sensory color enrichment and possible interaction and a novel egg carton hide space.





Juvenile Virginia opossum


# Help Us Help You




- If you find an animal in distress, please keep it warm and quiet.
- Handle the animal as little as possible, keeping it away from pets and children.
- Any attempt to feed or force water may not be in the best interest of the animal.
-  Call the Center at (609) 303-0552. An animal may not actually need assistance, and bringing them in may cause them more harm.
- Although the Center will gladly offer referrals, domestic animals cannot be accepted as patients.
- Unfortunately, the Mercer County Wildlife Center is not equipped to provide a pick-up service.
-  Remember...an animal in distress may not know that you are there to help. Extreme caution should always be used when assisting an injured animal.

 Download our Free Apple App for iPhone, iPad and iTouch! Mercer County Park

 Download our Free Apple App for iPhone, iPad and iTouch! Mercer Meadows

 Like us on Facebook! Mercer County Park Commission

 Follow us on Twitter! @MercerCoParks

 Check out our new website! www.mercercountyparks.org