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HUMANE INDIANA WILDLIFE SET FOR ENDANGERED BIRD SPECIES
RELEASE FRIDAY, AUGUST 14TH

Cedar Lake girls’ find leads to big day for Virginia Rails.

Thursday, August 13, 2020 --- Valparaiso, IN. They're the talk of the town, the two Virginia Rail chicks found in a Cedar Lake window well. The species is endangered in Indiana and their big day is tomorrow.

On July 2nd, two 11-year old Cedar Lake residents Lily Alexander and Aria Alfonzo found the chicks while on their routine window well check in their neighborhood. The two animal lovers have made it their mission to knock on neighbor's doors to ask for permission to check their window wells for trapped animals. Among their rescues, they've found snakes, mice, and frogs, and now, they can add the endangered Virginia Rails to their list. “We don't want them to die,” Lily said. Their rescues are typically released in nearby areas that seem appropriate for the critter, including streams or ponds. But the chicks, were a first for the pair.

According to Lily’s mom, Marjorie Alexander, the girls initially mistook the chicks for mice, a closer look revealed the truth. “When they picked them up, they realized they were birds,” Alexander said. Alexander contacted Humane Indiana Wildlife when the girls brought them home and asked for her help. “We had requested pictures of the chicks so that we could first determine how old they were, and what species they were,” said Nicole Harmon, Director, Humane Indiana Wildlife Center. “We received the photos and our team was ecstatic when we determined they were Virginia Rails, an endangered species in Indiana, and at that point, we focused on just preparing to receive them so that we could begin the process of rehabilitating them,” Harmon added.

For Harmon and her team, the Virginia Rail chicks would be a first for them too. Although Lily fed them water with a syringe before their hour-long ride to Humane Indiana's Wildlife Center, Harmon said an evaluation determined the chicks were dehydrated. “These marsh-dwellers are not only elusive, but they’re a very high stress species, and require special consideration,” she explained. Harmon said the Virginia Rail is able to feed itself at a very young age, making them a semi-precocial species. The key; however, was to find a mix of food that would entice them. A mix of blood worms, brine shrimp and mealworms seemed to do the trick, and the two were on their healthy track.

Since their arrival, the chicks are now weighing in at 82 grams. “It is suggested to release between 65-95 grams and 6-8 weeks of age, so they're quickly approaching their readiness for release,” Harmon explained. With permission from The Dunes National Park, the two are set for release Friday, August 14 on the Park's property. “I just love animals. Animals are a big part of my life,” Lily said. “I feel like we helped out the population of them (Virginia Rails),” Lily said. “It's those kids, these little girls, who will grow up and do amazing things for wildlife,” Harmon said.

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