

WILDLIFE JOURNAL

2019 Annual Review

An Annual Publication of the Mercer County Wildlife Center

WHY PROVIDE HABITATS IN YOUR YARD



includes food, water, shelter, and space) can be critical to wildlife survival.

Here are some tips for improving your backyard winter habitat:

Food: One of the most popular ways to attract winter wildlife is the bird feeder.

Birds keep their bodies warm by shivering and using fat reserves, which requires a lot of energy from food. Keep feeders full, and clean by washing with a 9:1 water to bleach mixture at least once every week or so, to keep diseases from spreading. Provide suet and a variety of food sources in different types of seed-feeders.

A great way to provide food, as well as shelter and structure, is with native shrubs and trees that provide berries, nuts, or seeds.

(Continued on page 16)

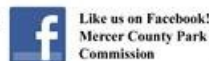
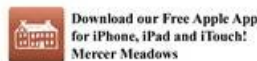
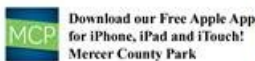
Both migratory and resident animals need places to live during the winter weather. Some of them continue to be active during the winter, while others need a place to hibernate. If you live in an urban area, you know that habitats for animals can be few and far between. By naturalizing your garden, you create a pocket of valuable space that can house local animal populations.

On a practical note, creating outdoor habitats can also deter animals from becoming household pests. For example, bats that have a place to roost around a pond are less likely to roost in your attic. The goal is to attract beneficial animals, as well as any that you find interesting and fun to watch.

Apart from putting bird feeders out, we do not often think about the importance of the backyard habitat for wildlife in winter. No matter where you live, your backyard habitat (which

what's inside

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Check out our new website!
www.mercercountyparks.org

Wish List



Dream List

\$

Office Supplies

Forever stamps – rolls or sheets
Copier paper: 8 1/2" x 11"
Printing services
Liquid Paper
Ink cartridges for
HP Office jet Pro 8100
HP Office jet Pro 8000
Canon MP620
Surge Protector Strips

Animal Care and Handling

Arm & Hammer laundry detergent
Bleach
Food storage bags-gallon size
Heating pads (without auto-off)
"Kennel Kabs" - any size
Paper towels
Pet bowls
"Pet Taxis" - any size
Receiving blankets

Animal Food

Wellness dry cat food
Canned Wellness Canine
Beechnut jarred baby food chicken -2.5 oz.
Gerbers jarred baby food bananas
Pedialyte

Medical Supplies

Fr feeding tubes: 3-1/2, 5 & 8
Gauze Pads: 4"x4" & 2"x2"
Non-adherent Pad
Hemostats
Kling Wrap:
1" x 60"
2" x 60"
3" x 60"
Latex exam gloves: medium and large
Nutri-cal
Vet Wrap: 2" & 4"
Tegaderm 1620

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 37 years, the Mercer County Wildlife Center has provided an invaluable service to County residents and to our surrounding communities. Last year, our staff and volunteers accepted and treated more than 3,100 birds, mammals and reptiles at the facility and handled more than 15,000 telephone inquiries from the public. As County Executive, I am grateful for the number of our residents who choose 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 Wildlife Center would not be operational were it not for this spirit of volunteerism.

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 backyard: the bald eagle, striped skunk, 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 unfamiliar animals and diseases that threaten our wildlife, as well as facts and insight from our staff and volunteers. Best wishes in the year ahead.

Brian M. Hughes
County Executive



HOW WE GET IT DONE...



COUNTY EXECUTIVE
Brian M. Hughes

**MERCER COUNTY PARK
COMMISSION**

James J. Schulz, Jr., President
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Dominic V. Longo
Kelly A. Mooij Esq.
Walter D. Smith
Aaron T. Watson, Executive Director
R. David Blake Esq., Park Commission Counsel

STAFF

Diane Nickerson, Director
Jane Rakos-Yates, Clinic Supervisor
Nicole Golden, Clinic Supervisor

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JillAnn Murphy, Treasurer
Linda Proefrock
Paul Renner, JD
Bruce Stout, PhD
Jodie Shuster, Executive Director WCF

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Jerome M. Glickstein, VMD
L. Paul Lanctot, VMD
Erica A. Miller, DVM
Paul Wagner, VMD
Jason Wilson, DVM

ART DIRECTOR/EDITOR : Jami Arbizu

2019 VOLUNTEERS

Clinic Supervisors - Staff

Lisa Hewitt
Adrianna Manchen
Megan Morici
Olivia Morpeth
Kristi Schollenberger
Kim Wickenden

Wildlife Technicians - Volunteers

Rosemarie Amato
Barbara Andrew
Michelle Appgar
Walter Appgar
Jami Arbizu
Heather Aupperle
Bonnie Baker
Kathy Bascio
Catherine Beans
Bob Bowden
Adrian Brown
Sam Brommer
Daniel Buckley
Reese Buckley
Susan Buckley
Karin Buynie
Kevin Buynie
Marjorie Caddy
Carla Carlson
Ann Church
Adam Clarke
Linda Covello
Joanna Coleman
Christa Cordero
Allison Crowell
Caryn Cullen
Kimberly Dawes
Joe DeCicco
Sabrina DeQuevedo
Nancy Derrico
Edward Dunner
Tom Elbersen
Kim Eschbach
Chuck Farina
Janet Ferguson
Alexandria Filipek
Sally Florio
Janet Forgiveve
Stephanie Foy
Cindy Friedman

Susan Gallagher
Sandy Garrison
Gabrielle Gardner
Alexa Giannella
Jennifer Giannella
Joanne Glover
Helen Golden
Joseph Gresko
Robin Haines
Marie Hendricks
Amanda Hummel
Jennifer Jones
Tom Kane
Lois Keats
Brian Kobren
Cheryl Kobren
Kyle Kokotajlo
Mihira Konda
Nettie Krolkowski
Diane Kumnick-Turner
Elizabeth Kuziel
Tyler Landolfi
Jan Lilly
Marwan Malloy
Kim Mancuso
Michele Mariano
Rebecca Mitchell
Sheryl Moncrief
Elizabeth Moran
Beth Morpeth
Wendy Most
Marc Naids
Anne Nini
Barbara Nunn
Kris Orr
Jeanne Out
Suzann Ordile
Bernadette Palmarini
Jessican Palmarini
Geoffery Peters
Don Pfau
Jeffrey Powers
Janice Quillia-Budd
Teal Ranney
Marsha Regn
Shari Rexroad
Tim Richards
Sussi Riggleman
Lynn Rochard
Sam Rosen
Claudia Rutt

Marilyn Sanders
Eileen Shellengerger
Joseph Schmeltz
Elizabeth Schroeder
Bruce Scully
Susan Scully
Karen Seehausen
Barbara Solem
Jodi Specter
Patricia Stalter
Tim Steinbeiser
Frank Stillwell
Ben Strauss
Jean Strauss
Aggie Szilaggi
Cathy Szur
Kathleen Tarangioli
Lorrie Topolin
John Vanellis
Harvey Walker
Barbara Warfel
Robert Weston
Mary Anna White
Janet Williams
Kathryn Williams
Brett Wilson
Mary Wood
Christine Wooden
Anne Wysocki
Darren Zatuchney
Sharon Zimmerman

**Spring/Summer/
Fall Interns**

Elizabeth Bukovec
Alyssa Dalrymple
Susanne Dapparich
Dawson Demi
Faith Edwin
Nikki Harley
Katie Kearney
Thomas Lavery
Kim Mancuso
Jacob Miranda
Marcia Minunni
Shannon O'Mara
Faith Paul
Erin Payne
Ashlyn Rogers
Justine Smith
Amber Wiseman



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



A Note From The President

Wildlife Center Friends is a non-profit organization that assists the Mercer County Wildlife Center. While you may not see the board members around the hospital often, they are working 'behind-the-scenes' to further the mission of the Center. Hopefully you have seen our beautiful mail pieces that we send out twice a year that help us raise most of our funds each year. A very talented and generous photographer, Eric Sambol, has captured the beauty and mystery of some of the Centers educational animals and has allowed us to use the images for a variety of purposes. For more information on a true friend to the Center, please visit: <https://www.ericambol.com/>

Since the last newsletter, we have welcomed two new members to our Board.

JillAnn Murphy has joined us as our Treasurer. She is dedicating many hours to makes sure that we remain financially sound and meet all of our reporting requirements. I want to thank Rebecca McCorry for her years of dedicated service to the Center and the Friends. We wish her well as she starts a new chapter of her life in central Pennsylvania.

We would also like to welcome Linda Proefrock, who some of you may know as a former animal volunteer with the Wildlife Center. She is now lending her expertise to the Board. So far shebrought several creative ideas to the Friends including new opportunities for collaboration for grant making and project management for events.

Once again, I want to thank Jodie Shuster, our Executive Director who works tirelessly for Wildlife Center Friends. Her energy, her creativity and dedication are at the heart of the Friends' efforts. Jodie has compiled a wonderful summary of some of the projects that Wildlife Center Friends has supported this year. Please read her article for details.

I also want to thank our incredible Board Members for volunteering their time and their talents.

Of course, we all know that the heart of the Mercer County Wildlife Center is its Director Diane Nickerson, her full-time staff, seasonal employees and many volunteers. Your dedication to rehabilitating wildlife is truly amazing!

Sharon Lauchaire,
President, Wildlife Center Friends

OBSERVATIONS

BY DIANE NICKERSON



2019 was a year of new adventures! This newsletter is full of all of the new things we were able to accomplish this year. New species, new successes, new volunteers and new programs while at the same time treasuring all things that remain the same.

Looking back at our caseload for 2019, 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 6 to find out about all of the interesting patients.

As always, our new volunteer article (page 13) shines 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. Our college interns, not to be outdone, are also now regular contributors to the newsletter. They have a unique perspective and a twelve-week crash course. Look to page 17 for this feature.

This year marked the start of collaboration between the Wildlife Center Friends, the Mercer County Park Commission, Conserve Wildlife Foundation and PSE&G. The Eyes on Eagles program began in the winter of 2019 and will continue for the foreseeable future. Information about this program can be found on page 22.

Again, I would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to Ron Kobli, owner of the Decoys and Wildlife Art Gallery in Frenchtown. Ron holds an open house every year on the last Sunday in February. He invites us to come, present education programs, solicit donations and memberships and sell raffle tickets. At the end of the day he donates pieces from his gallery for the raffle. It is always a great afternoon of old friends, tasty refreshments and making of new acquaintances. We will look forward to seeing everyone next year on **February 28, 2021**. Many thanks to Ron for introducing us to possible, new supporters and the many gifts he sends our way.

As always, more thanks than I can express to our volunteers. They show up week after week, month after month, and many, year after year. We could not do our work and be successful without them. Thanks to their efforts, MCWC treated 3,128 new patients, encompassing 134 species, during 2019, releasing 69% back into the wild for a second chance. In total, our volunteers provided over 15,000 hours to MCWC and the native wildlife of New Jersey. Big thanks also to our volunteers who do not have the ability to commit to animal care. They write thank-you letters, organize and run events, staff the board of directors, design publications, handle donations and stuff envelopes. We would be lost without their help, as well.

Finally, thanks to you, our members. We spoke to over 14,000 of you this year by telephone, trying to answer your questions and concerns about your wild neighbors. We also visited your schools and civic groups and reached out to about 40,000 of you with our education programs. We continue to be here to serve you because you care enough to be there to support us.

from the
director





PATIENT LOG

MCWC TREATED 3,128 ANIMALS DURING 2019

The first noteworthy case of 2019 came in the form a very young coyote (*Canis latrans*). Case number 2019-00805 had first been seen by homeowners on the 15th of May. They had heard multiple gunshots and became aware that the neighboring farmer had killed a female coyote and was trying to kill her pups as they ventured out of the den in search of food. The homeowners started trying to bribe the pups with chicken livers in an attempt to trap them and potentially save their lives.

On the 21st of May they were finally successful in catching the sole survivor. He arrived hypothermic, dehydrated and emaciated. He weighed in at 2.95 kilograms, which converts to 6 lbs. 8 oz. – a little more than a bag of sugar. Our job was not a difficult one. He needed to gain weight and mature. In addition to feeding him to increase weight, we also needed to get rid of the internal parasites that he had acquired during the week and a half without a parent or siblings. He also had a nasty case of ear mites that needed to be addressed.



Case# 2019-00805 Coyote (*Canis latrans*)

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

Over the course of the next eight weeks he gained weight and became appropriately wary of his surroundings. On the 19th of June, when we moved him into a pre-release conditioning enclosure for the final phase of rehabilitation, he weighed in at 6.8 kilograms (about 15 lbs.). During the next two months he developed and practiced hunting, evasion and denning skills.

On a sunny mid-August morning, he was taken to his new home, an appropriate distance from the farmer who had wanted the coyotes dead, and released. Park Commission Executive Director, Aaron T. Watson oversaw the release. Twelve weeks of good food and physical conditioning, weighing in at 25 lbs., and he was on his way!



In 2019, two pair of nesting bald eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) chose the County Parks as their new home. We wanted to take advantage of the educational opportunity that this provided. Made possible through the generous support of PSE&G, the Mercer County Eagle Cam is a partnership between Mercer County Parks, Conserve Wildlife Foundation, and the Wildlife Center Friends. PSE&G provided a grant for public programming and education outreach to area residents. Mercer County

Park Commission and Conserve Wildlife Foundation staff and volunteers have provided free school field trips, in-school programs, adult lecture series and public nest-viewing opportunities.

The Mercer County Eagle Cam is a partnership between Mercer County Parks, Conserve Wildlife Foundation, and the Wildlife Center Friends . Made possible by a grant from PSE&G

As wild animals tend to do, the pair of eagles at Mercer County Park decided that they no longer wanted to use the nest with the camera and made a new nest about 200 feet from the original nest! Whether the original pair did not like the intrusion to their privacy with new camera or if this was a new pair of eagles is still a question. While the new nest was wonderful for viewing from the lakeshore with binoculars, the construction left something to be desired. As the season progressed, one side of the nest developed a distinct sag! So much so that on the 12th of June case number 2019-01398, a bald eagle nestling, very unceremoniously rolled out of the drooping side to the ground below. New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife (NJDFW) volunteer nest watcher, Kevin Buynie, was dispatched to try to locate the youngster. It was located, perched on a log, between the old and new nests. A little dazed, but outwardly, no worse for the mishap.

Upon arrival at the wildlife center, it was examined, x-rayed and provided with fluids. Immediately, in coordination with NJDFW, plans began to get the nestling reunited with its sibling and parents. Easier said than



Aaron T. Watson, Executive Director Mercer County Park Commission



done - considering the condition of the nest. If an attempt were made to re-nest in the sagging nest, it was probably going to damage the nest further. Or, the nestling would end up on the ground again.

It was decided that the nestling would go back to the original nest – the one with the camera. The nest was in good shape, close to the current nest and it could be unobtrusively monitored via the camera. On the 25th of June Kathy Clark and John Hilferty from the NJDFW organized the re-nesting process. John climbed the tree and he and Kathy set up the lines to the nest that would be used to transport the nestling back to the nest. Federal and state identification bands were put on its legs, photo ops were had and then it was back up to the



E89 perched comfortably at the original “sagging” nest

nest. A “buffet” was placed in the nest just in case it took the parents a day or two to locate the nestling in the old nest.

The nestling immediately moved out to one of the branches above the nest to survey the new surroundings. Everyone kept an eye on the nest



Case# 2019-01398 a.k.a. E89

cam for the next 48 hours. And then the nestling disappeared! Kevin went out to look around in case it had taken another nose dive. Remarkably, the nestling had made its way through the branches back to a branch near the nest from which it had tumbled!

Over the next week, the two siblings jostled for space in the falling down, dilapidated nest and took turns on branches. Then they fledged. They were seen on and off for the next month or so. We are anxious to see if E89 – the green New Jersey identification band number placed on the nestling – returns to Mercer Lake in the spring.

Woodchucks (*Marmota monax*) were presented this year for some unusual reasons. In the first instance, the clients had spent a few days trying to trap it in order to get it some help. They had observed it wandering around near their grill with something hanging from its neck and being bothered by flies. They were finally successful in their trapping efforts and case # 2019-02876 was brought to us on the 9th of October. After sedating the woodchuck, we discovered

a plastic six-pack ring embedded around its neck. The plastic had been there for quite some time judging from the damage to the patient's neck. It was carefully removed and the wounds were debrided and cleaned. This process continued every other day for two weeks and then once a week until the patient was moved outside to a pre-release conditioning enclosure.

Happily, for the woodchuck and for us, the fall weather was warm and we were able to return it to the client's yard. On the 20th of



Case# 2019-02876 Woodchuck

PATIENT LOG



November it was released back into its territory to settle down for the long winter's nap of hibernation.

Case number 2019-03010 arrived on the 6th of November. The woodchuck had chosen a less than ideal place to hibernate – albeit a very warm place for the winter season. The homeowner regularly fed the wildlife in his yard. Apparently, not wanting to stray far from the free food, the woodchuck looked for a place close by for the winter. The engine compartment of the Honda had probably looked very cozy. At least until the car was started and the engine reached about 200 degrees Fahrenheit! The woodchuck arrived at the wildlife center with burns to her face, lips (yes, woodchucks have lips!), all four feet, tail and abdomen. Thus began a daily regimen of wound treatment, antibiotics and pain medication. Initially, as with all burn victims, supportive fluids were administered.

Very often, outdated or left over (human) hospital supplies are donated to the Wildlife Center. Many times we look at the items and



On the mend!

The Saturday before Christmas brought us our last noteworthy case for 2019. One of the sergeants from the Mercer County Correction Center arrived in our lobby requesting help for a black vulture (*Coragyps atratus*) caught in the fence around the facility. We grabbed a few towels, some leather gloves and a carrier and headed up to the top of the hill. Over the years we have become accustomed to assisting wildlife that gets caught between two of the chain-link fences. It is usually just a matter of convincing them which way is the easiest way out.

Imagine our surprise to find case number 2019-03110, hanging by one wing, skewered on razor wire about 25 feet above the ground over and open gate! I am not going to go into details regarding the process of extricating the bird from its predicament. Suffice it to say that it involved two ladders, two pair of knocking knees, some skill and tremendous good fortune!

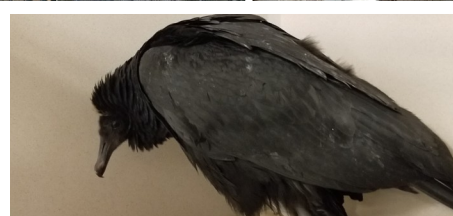
Our good fortune continued as there happened to be not one but two veterinarians at the center working with veterinary students that day. While Dr. La'Toya Latney worked with the students on some over-wintering turtles, Dr. Erica Miller examined the vulture. Amazingly, there were no broken bones or dislocated joints. There was a pretty nasty laceration on one foot from the razor wire that required a few sutures. The injury that was most concerning was the lack of circulation to the tip of the wing from which the bird had been hanging. It was very cold and swollen. If circulation could not be restored before too much muscle and tissue damage occurred, the bird would not be releasable.

wonder how they will ever be used in animal care. We all develop a little bit of a "McGyver" sense of inventiveness. And so, the pink, padded finger bandages we received became perfect paw bandages for our little burn victim.

By the end of December, she was more than ready to be away from us and outside to den for the rest of the winter months. However, she had different plans! In less than a week she had excavated a hole in the side of the outdoor pre-release conditioning enclosure and had made her choice regarding where she was going to spend the rest of the winter. It was **not** going to be in the cozy place we had provided – she was going home. Thankfully, for all of us, home was only about a mile away.



Case# 2019-03110



Thankfully, a week of bandage changes, pain medication and physical therapy did the trick. A week after it arrived it was moved outside to a pre-release conditioning enclosure. And three weeks after that, the sergeant who found the bird in distress came down to the center and watched the release.

The New Year was off to a good start!



MCWC OUTDOOR EDUCATION ENVIRONMENT

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

September - April:

Thursday-Sunday 11AM-3PM

May - August:

Wednesday-Sunday 10AM-5PM



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

1st Year Volunteer

BY TAYLOR STERNOTTI

My love of learning brought me to volunteering at Mercer County Wildlife Center. As I entered my late twenties, I realized within myself, that I did not feel fulfilled unless I was working as a volunteer, giving of my time for someone who needed it. Through a friend, I found this volunteer opportunity.

Growing up, my mom worked at a zoo so I would often spend my early weekend mornings working with her to create meals, clean cages or

just simply hang out with the friendly spider monkey. Tina, I thought to myself, "How different could this be at the wildlife center?" Way different! What I had failed to understand was that animals in a zoo were used to interaction and it was encouraged to handle them. This was the exact opposite. The center's number one goal is to release the animals back into their habitats - so, it is essential to handle them at a minimum. Do you know how hard it is not to talk to the cutest little fawns you have ever met??

I spent the first few months of the Wednesday night shifts cleaning anything I could find. I do not think I have ever done so much laundry. If only my family knew how many loads of laundry I was capable of completing in a four-hour period. My friends did not understand why I was giving up my only day off to spend four hours a night cleaning and doing laundry. But, I did not mind.

Then one Wednesday night, when I assumed I had finally managed to prove myself to the staff members, I was introduced to the bird room where I would start feeding birds around the clock. They got fed every hour. So, basically, by the time I had finally finished a round of feeding, it was time to start it all over, again! But I loved every minute of it. Every Wednesday from then on, I would be learning something new.



Taylor Sternotti

1st Year (cont.)

Here are a few of my favorite learning experiences from this season:

1. Birds have an airway opening (glottis) where one would think their tongue is located. This airway should never be blocked with the food we were feeding them. This made for some super nervous days when I had first started working with the birds.
2. Squirrels in New Jersey have two nesting seasons: spring and fall. When bottle feeding young squirrels, they hold on to the syringe and stare up at you like the cutest little baby you have ever held in your life.
3. Raccoons may just be the most mischievous animal I have encountered. They peer at you through the cages, holding on to the walls with their little hands... as if they were in jail! I am pretty sure they are capable of looking into your soul, though I have yet to prove this. Also, raccoon poop may just be the smell of my nightmares.
4. Wood ducks can jump really high and can perch onto tall branches. So even if a naive first-year volunteer thinks that she can take the lid off of their enclosure and they can not jump out, she would be mistaken.

These last few months volunteering at the center have been incredible and I have witnessed the full-time staff members spend so much of their time working with the animals. If only animals could talk, then the staff members may just hear the impact they have on so many of them. I am forever grateful for the kindness and experiences (past and future) that the people and patients of MCWC have given me and I cannot wait to come back in the spring time to learn and experience even more!

TURTLES

BY NICOLE GOLDEN

Editor's Note: The last Wildlife Journal ended with over-wintered turtles still in care and a look forward to 2019. Here is the update to our turtle story.

We are happy to report that all of our hatchlings that were over-wintered were successfully released! Each clutch of turtles was released at the location the mother was found. This ensures that the habitat is appropriate for the type of turtle being released, minimizes the potential spread of disease and maintains the species gene pool.

Calendar year 2019 brought a grand total of 517 turtles; 180 adult turtles and 337 eggs harvested from deceased females. The species admitted were red-bellied turtles (*Pseudemys rubriventris*), Eastern box turtles (*Terrapene carolina*), diamond back terrapins (*Malaclemys terrapin*), common map turtles (*Graptemys geographica*), Eastern painted turtles (*Chrysemys picta*) and snapping turtles (*Chelydra serpentina*). Of those presented for care, 82 adult turtles were released and 16 are being over-wintered. The over-wintered adult turtles are scheduled for release. Of the eggs harvested, 154 of the 337 eggs hatched and were all released two weeks after hatching. This is a large increase from last year's numbers of 203 total turtles- 153 adults and 50 eggs.

Our new "Shell Shack" is finished and ready for our spring/summer busy season. With a total of 517 turtles and eggs admitted in 2019, we anticipate needing our new building in 2020! We also hope to have a dedicated enclosure this spring for turtle egg incubation that will closely mimic the areas female turtles would lay their eggs. Each species has their own specifications for nesting areas that have an even better success rate in the years to come.



Eastern box turtle hatchlings

Snapping turtle hatchlings

Test your turtle vocabulary with the word find! All words are turtle related. They can be forwards, backwards and vertical-none are on the diagonal. Good luck and have fun!

- TORTOISE
- BEAK
- INCUBATION
- CHELONIAN
- TERRAPIN
- CARAPACE
- CLUTCH
- REPTILE
- RED BELLIED
- SKULL
- HATCHLING
- TERRESTRIAL
- MUSK
- PLASTRON
- GRAVID
- AQUATIC
- BOX
- SHELL
- EGG
- OMNIVORE
- PAINTED
- SCUTE
- CARNIVORE
- WOOD
- KERATIN
- BASKING
- SNAPPING
- BRIDGE
- HERBIVORE
- MUD
- HIBERNATION
- SPOTTED
- WORM
- BOG
- SPINY SOFTSHELL
- MAP

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HABITATS (CONT.)



(Continued from page 1)

Here are a few examples:

- ✿ Eastern red cedar is a favorite of cedar waxwings.
- ✿ Squirrels and other small mammals eat eastern white pine seeds.
- ✿ Black-capped chickadees and ruffed grouse eat eastern hemlock seeds.
- ✿ Deer and other mammals eat soft fruits like



Source: Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR)

persimmons or wild grapes that may persist through the winter.

- ✿ Wildflower seeds from rudbeckia (Black-eyed Susan), goldenrod, and native roses can be important sources of nutrition.

Water: Birds and other wildlife need access to water in winter or they risk dehydration. Provide clean, unfrozen water for your backyard visitors by trying a heated bird bath or changing water often.

Shelter and Structure: Shelter and structure are important to wildlife. Consider providing safe, protected refuges at various levels for wildlife.

Conifers provide thermal cover in the winter since they do not lose their needles. Other forms of cover include brush or rock piles. They can be as small as a few feet wide but can provide shelter for garter snakes, lizards, salamanders, and toads.

By avoiding cutting back vegetation in the fall, and leaving your yard a bit "messy," you can provide structure. Amphibians and small mammals can hide under unraked leaves and ground covering plants. Birds make use of seed heads left on flowering plant stalks, and other birds and mammals will use taller trees and shrubs.

Providing structure at varying heights gives more places for prey to hide from predators, too. As a bonus to providing winter habitat, these beneficial critters are likely to frequent your yard in the spring and summer, as well.

Space: If you have neighbors, consider partnering to create complementary wildlife habitat throughout the neighborhood.

Connecting hedgerows with neighboring brush piles is a method to expand backyard wildlife habitat. One neighbor may be able to provide water, while you may be able to provide conifer cover, for example.

SUMMER COLLEGE INTERNSHIP

BY NIKKI HARLEY, INTERN



Over the past three summers, I have had the privilege of being an intern at the Mercer County Wildlife Center. Although I have spent quite some time interning, no two days are alike and I still learn something new every day that I am there. My main responsibilities include diet preparation, feeding, and handling the animals. I am constantly bouncing between rooms bottle feeding the raccoons and fawns, syringe feeding the bats and squirrels, and gavaging the baby birds. I have also learned how to tube feed raptors and raccoons. I like to joke that I am the "raccoon lady" as I can always be found taking care of a raccoon in some capacity. I spend many hours bottle feeding raccoons, some slurping down the entire bottle in five minutes while other fussy ones taking an upwards of thirty minutes of trying to get them to take just one sip. I am in the raccoon nursery so often that I can usually recognize each raccoon by their face.

When I am not feeding animals or spending time with the raccoons, I can usually be found up in triage. As my experience with wildlife has grown, I am able to help triage our incoming patients by evaluating their overall health, looking at their body conditions, making sure all limbs can be properly extended and function, palpating for fractures, etc. I also have helped place animals under anesthesia to take x-rays, which is one of my favorite parts of my job. From there, I will help administer medications for pain or infection if necessary and make sure that the animal is warm and hydrated with fluids. I have also assisted in humane euthanasia for our patients that come in under critical condition. Cleaning is of course another

important aspect of my job. It may not be the most glamorous, but cleaning is important as dirty enclosures can impact the animals' health.

One of my favorite things about working with wildlife is getting to know each animal. Although the staff works hard to ensure that we do not socialize or get too attached to our rehabilitation animals, you cannot help falling in love with their adorable faces. I do not think a lot of people realize how much personality the



Nikki Harley

creatures we see in our backyard have. Every animal has their own preferences and quirks, and they are not afraid to let you know them. Being able to watch an orphaned animal grow up and thrive, especially the ones who you work closest with or the ones who you did not think would make it, is one of the best feelings. The opportunity to release them back into the wild is a such special experience.

I have been extremely fortunate that Jane, Diane, and Nicole have entrusted me to run a vaccination and deworming program for several of the species we treat at the center. To ensure herd health in the facility, all of the raccoons,

SUMMER INTERN (CONT.)

skunks, red foxes, and coyotes receive a series of canine distemper vaccines. The raccoons and skunks receive an additional feline panleukopenia series. This past summer, I began vaccinating our raptors for West Nile Virus due to the virus' prevalence in the summer of 2018. With the exception of raptors, all of the species that I vaccinate also are dewormed for internal parasites. I also follow a deworming protocol for woodchucks and white tail deer fawns.

All of my experiences at the wildlife center have not only solidified my desire to pursue a career in veterinary medicine, but have directed me to want to specialize in wildlife and exotic animal medicine. The unpredictability, mystery and personality that comes with every wildlife patient makes every day exciting. I hope one day that I will get to be one of the veterinarians that donates their time to one of my favorite places and somewhere that I consider my home, the Mercer County Wildlife Center.



THE DEVELOPMENT OF A VOLUNTEER-POWERED ENRICHMENT PROGRAM

BY ADRIANA MANCHEN



It is no surprise we love wild animals here at Mercer County Wildlife Center. As wildlife supporters, we get a kick out of watching the chipmunk that shares our yard space with us. As clinic staff and volunteers, we are deeply concerned when we admit an avian patient that just took a nosedive into a second story window.

We do everything we can for our patients when they come into the center and we do our very best to properly care for the ambassador animals that call the center home. We scour resources looking for the most current information on diets, veterinary treatments, and housing recommendations.

What is not as often recognized is that we are also concerned with the mental well-being of the animals. Much of what we do with housing is based on what will make the animals feel most comfortable during their time here. Hide boxes, perching, pools, and other furniture (sounds a bit odd, but this is the technical term) are all forms of environmental enrichment upon which we have always heavily relied at the center.

The use of enrichment is defined as a process that ensures that the mental and physical needs

of an animal are being met by offering options for species-appropriate behaviors and choices. Animal care facilities now widely embrace enrichment as an essential component to the overall care and welfare of an animal. At the wildlife center, furniture items are utilized in such a way that will encourage each animal to behave as it normally would in the wild. Additionally, novel and natural food items, visual stimuli, and if appropriate, "roommates" are used to help animals cope with the time they spend in our care. The center has always placed an emphasis on understanding the natural history of each species for which we care. In doing so, we help alleviate unnecessary stress and, hopefully, hasten recovery.

Although we have always strived to provide enrichment via enclosure set-ups and diet presentation, it was not until the winter of 2017 that we began to take steps to formalize the enrichment program. A formal program would allow us to recruit the help of volunteers and put animals on a regular enrichment schedule. Diane Nickerson only asked that volunteers commit to an extra enrichment shift on top of their regular weekly four-hour animal husbandry shift.

A small band of tenacious and dedicated volunteers was put together and we met regularly as a committee to come up with the formal program. It was our goal from the beginning that both education animals and rehabilitation patients be included in our plans. Over the course of six meetings and one field trip, our committee came up with what would be the basis of the program. In April of 2018, enrichment started to go out to animals on a regular schedule. We were very much in a pilot program throughout that first year. Most, if not all the items we used that summer, were constructed using materials that would have otherwise gone into recycling or garbage containers. This remains true to this day!

In December of 2019, we wrapped up the

second full season of the newly established enrichment program. We ended the year with ten active volunteers and a few others have inquired about joining the 2020 enrichment volunteer group. The full-time staff and volunteers have been extremely supportive of the program. Often, I will hear feedback on how the animals are interacting with their enrichment items and many other volunteers now bring in materials for the enrichment volunteers to utilize when they are working on enrichment.

I was curious about how this year's enrichment volunteers felt about the program. So, I decided to ask, and this is what they had to say:

Q: Why did you decide to volunteer for the enrichment program?

Mary: I thought it would provide an opportunity to witness behaviors up close and learn more about the natural behavior of the animals in the wild. I also wanted to be part of the effort to give the animals, who are recuperating or living in environments quite unlike their natural habitat, the chance to practice their inherent skills or at least be diverted.

Amanda: As a college student studying wildlife conservation, I decided to volunteer to gain an understanding of how enrichment is used to bring out the natural behavior of an animal and how this might differ between species. I wanted to learn more about the animals that stay at the center, and the enrichment program was a great opportunity to help give the education animals some of what they are missing from no longer being in the wild.

Q: Have you learned about the natural history of the animals to which you have been assigned because of enrichment?

Reese: I would say I have. One thing that stands out to me is the behavior of the American crows while being a participant in the enrichment program. They are known to be rather mischievous creatures to the public, so it is very exciting to be able channel that mischievous behavior into a more playful one.

They can rip and tear the items we give them to their hearts' content in a safe environment! I loved how these intelligent birds started to recognize my brother and I as we became associated as being the "toy bringers" to them. They would brim with such excitement; it was so cute!

Kim: Yes! I have learned about flying squirrels, box turtles, owls, and fox kits. Not only did I need to research their natural history, but I had to investigate safety concerns and ideas for enrichment from other established enrichment programs at other wildlife centers.

Q: What is your favorite animal to enrich and why?

Amanda: I really enjoyed working with the education skunk. She would usually be making a mess of whatever I put in her enclosure before I made it out the door. It was nice getting to see her have fun.

Mary: This is a tough question. It is so rewarding to see any animal, rehabilitation or education, utilize whatever item he/she has been given. But if I had to choose a favorite, it would be the juvenile raccoons! They are so easy to please, and it is so much fun to watch them tumble around with their new "toys" in hand. I know that they are developing foraging skills necessary for their life in the wild.

Q: What is your favorite enrichment item to make or give out and why?

Beth: I think my favorite item to give out is for the American crows: a shoe box filled with standing ½ toilet paper rolls to make lots of little compartments. Then I put bits of food items in the compartments and stuff crinkled paper or turf in each roll. The crows pull out the paper and turf to find their food. It is really a blast to watch them throw the paper and turf around. As they are finding their food, they play with the toilet paper rolls and toss them around. The crows always enjoy their enrichment!

Sharon: My favorite items to make and give out are foraging items such as our pumpkins with big holes where we remove some of the innards

then add strawberries, peanuts etc. I also enjoy handing out food items placed in cardboard or paper that must be searched and unconstructed in order to get to the food. I feel this helps our young patients practice how to survive once they leave our care since they have no mother to encourage the skills for finding food.

Wendy: I like making the bags with paper and fruits and/or nuts for the animals to open up... especially the raccoons!

Cheryl: My favorite enrichment items to make are foraging items. I felt I was the most successful with materials for our skunk because she was interested and engaged for the longest amount of time, unlike the raccoons whose curiosity had them rambunctiously tearing up all the materials in five minutes. I can only guess, but I believe the mint sprigs I put into a paper bag with mealworms and peanuts acted like catnip for the skunk!

Q: What is the most interesting thing you have seen/experienced from being involved with enrichment?

Beth: I think the most interesting thing I have experienced is how much I enjoy enriching the animals and watching them with their items! It is so satisfying when you think of an enrichment item, and it ends up being successful. I feel like I am doing something special to contribute to their natural behavior and sensory stimulation.

Sharon: I had previously, over years of volunteering, observed weather - such as excessive heat, cold, and rain - change eating and exercise habits. This program reinforced that fact and has taught me more of what to expect and why, regarding weather.

Q: Which is the most challenging animal to enrich and why?

Amanda: I have found the owls to be the most challenging. Most of what I put in their enclosures remain untouched for the week, and it is difficult to come up with new things they might be interested in inspecting.

Mary: Definitely the owls! They do not seem to be interested in non-food items, and even with

food, they do not seem to find it natural to search for food in the various containers we can provide. They can surprise me, however. It was very rewarding to hear that one great horned owl had poked several holes in the head of cabbage he was given! He obviously had a few moments of diversion as he tried to "kill" this food item.

Q: What are the biggest challenges with the program itself?

Sharon: I enjoy all challenges presented as I love trying to think of new ways to present enrichment. The only downside is when it comes time to put enrichment down and start my regular shift. But it is actually not bad at all, since I love what I do during that time, too! I do think we should pay more attention to the recording of enrichment item results, as the volunteer who provided the item is very interested in how it worked or did not work. I know that is an end of the day thing, but results of what we are doing is crucial to the program.

Beth: I agree with Sharon. Enrichment results are not always recorded the following day so one is not always sure if the item was successful.

Cheryl: I felt the biggest challenge was time management during the height of the busy season. You made it convenient for us to piggyback our shifts, but there just was not always enough time. It was also a creative challenge to come up with new and intelligent enrichment ideas. Fortunately, the committee was helpful with sharing ideas and making great samples to try.

Q: Is enrichment what you expected? If so, why or if not, why not?

Diane: Enrichment is more than I expected! I enjoy the proximity to the animals and love to watch and study their reactions. It is also a challenge for me to create enrichment that is unique each week!

Kim: The enrichment was not at all what I expected for owls and crows. One week they

might engage with the enrichment and then not engage at all for subsequent weeks. Raccoons and foxes seem to reliably engage and make a joyful mess!

Reese: It is, while at the same time it is not. To give more insight, I knew we would be reusing/recycling items and constructing them into an implement for the animals to explore, but I did not expect it to be such a challenging process creatively. I would even credit it to helping improve my problem-solving skills!

There you have it – a glimpse into the program from the people that power it. Our enrichment program has grown steadily these past two years and I cannot wait to see what it will grow into over the course of the next few years. I feel very lucky to be working with such committed and creative enrichment volunteers. Regular enrichment would not be possible without their help.

This year, the center admitted over 3,100 animals, leaving staff eyeball deep in clinic work. Now that we have a group dedicated to enrichment, we can rely on these amazing and giving people to provide the additional mental and physical exercise that is an essential component of proper animal care. Thanks to them and the unwavering support of the full-time staff, education animals and rehabilitation patients can now enjoy a steady supply of enrichment. And it is no secret, watching them interact with the items they have been given is very rewarding and a ton of fun!



A LETTER OF GRATITUDE

FROM JODIE SHUSTER, *EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, WILDLIFE CENTER FRIENDS*

As we closed out 2019 and reflected back, it was a certainly banner year for several reasons. Not the least of which was the record number of animals that came through the Wildlife Center. Well over 3,100 came into the Center for treatment.

As we take a closer look at this number, it becomes apparent that people are becoming more informed about wildlife and through this education are becoming more and more connected to the animals that live in their own backyards.

The number of people who are actively becoming stewards of wildlife has increased. When I think of over 3,100 animals coming into the Center in 2019, I think of the men and women who take time out of their day to rescue these animals and bring them into the Center. We call them, "Rescuers." This year we took the occasion of our annual Fall Harvest Celebration to honor all the Rescuers that make all this possible.

Our 2019 Fall Harvest Celebration included an art auction and a dedication to all the people who care enough to bring us animals in need. It was rounded out with a beautiful and delightfully yummy spread of food and cozy warm cider graciously donated by Doreen Masset of Inn of the Hawk in Lambertville, New Jersey and wine provided by Paul Renner of Classen Consulting, LLC.

2019 also saw a very special relationship blossom between PSE&G, Conserve Wildlife Foundation of New Jersey, Mercer County Park

Commission and Wildlife Center Friends. PSE&G generously provided a grant for all of these organizations to come together to launch an "Eyes on Eagles" program, located in Mercer County Park in West Windsor, New Jersey.

This extraordinary program will allow the public to view, through live streaming camera technology, the nesting pair of bald eagles in the Mercer County Park. Bald eagles are extremely sensitive to human disturbance, so this non-intrusive way of getting close to the animals helps people become more familiar with the nesting habits of bald eagles and form a connection with local wildlife. Cam footage can be found at:

www.conservewildlifenj.org/education/mercerc.

2019 was truly extraordinary and filled with hope. All of this could not have happened without our donors, rescuers, volunteers and the staff of the Mercer County Wildlife Center. Each year, I am reminded of the generosity of spirit of all the people involved and I remain grateful. I am grateful that every day I get to work side-by-side with such incredible people ensuring that the mission of the Mercer County Wildlife Center will continue for years to come.

Thank you for a great year!

Wishing you abundant health,



Jodie Shuster

*Executive Director,
Wildlife Center Friends*






3 Cuts Can Stop This





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.

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