March 2005

Edition

Featured: Beaver

NEBRASKA WILDLIFE REHAB, INC.

The Critter Chronicle

The Future of NWRI

It is springtime, and within just a few short weeks, our volunteers will begin caring for some of the thousands of baby animals we will receive this year. Unfortunately, Nebraska Wildlife Rehab is currently at a crossroads. We are desperately lacking the volunteers needed to continue in our current capacity, and hope that you or others you know can help. For the past several years, a very small group of volunteers has handled all of the administrative duties for NWRI, in addition to managing several of the animal teams. This year, several of these leaders had to scale back their involvement for personal reasons. The loss of these people has created several holes in our organization that will limit our ability to care for wildlife in 2005. We are facing the closure of several teams for the 2005 season, including the raccoon, rabbit, songbird, game bird and miscellaneous mammal teams if additional volunteers are not found soon. Because of our need to focus on the day-to-day operations of the organization, our plans to build an educational and rehabilitation center have had to be put on hold indefinitely. A future center is vital to our mission, and we welcome anyone with the available time and energy who can help us care for wildlife and meet and exceed our future goals.

As always, we are in need of volunteers to care for animals, and volunteers to provide many of the administrative functions that keep this organization afloat. Volunteers who cannot care for animals in their homes can help keep these endangered teams in action by administering the hotline for a species, transporting animals for the team leaders or soliciting and distributing donations.

Although we have requested volunteers in the past, at no time have we needed people willing to donate their time more than we do now. Whether you can donate just a few hours a month, or a few hours a day, please take a moment to review the information below, and let us know by calling Laura at 960-4366 if you can spare some time to help make NWRI a continued success.

NWRI currently needs volunteers to help in the following areas:

Fundraising: You bring your ideas, have fun, and raise money for the animals! Some ideas for fundraising in the past have been to coordinate a poker run, fundraising through Panera bread, or hosting a chili or spaghetti dinner. Several people are needed to make fundraising a success, and we welcome as many people as possible that can help us with this endeavor.

Grant Writing: Not only does NWRI need general operating funds, but we would also like to expand our education programs, and receive grants to purchase radio-tracking equipment to track our large carnivores after release, and a Web cam for our resident bobcat. We also still plan on building a wildlife rehabilitation and education center in the future. Grant writers and fundraisers are welcome additions to our team as we work towards this goal!

Volunteer Coordinator: NWRI frequently receives calls from people interested in helping our organization; however, in the summer, our team leaders are frequently too busy to visit at length with people regarding their interests. A volunteer coordinator would help us quickly address the interests of the people who contact us, and put them to work helping NWRI.

Hotline: Answering calls on our hotline frequently takes more time than our team leaders have in the summer when caring for baby animals. If you can't take animals, but would like to help coordinate their pick-up and care and educate the public, maybe the hotline is for you!

Web Master: NWRI would like to build a new Web site at our new domain name. If you have the skills to design a professional, efficient Web site, we would love your help!

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Donation Pick-Up: This position currently involves picking up donations at two sites one morning per month, and delivering them to a site where they are needed. This generally takes about one to two hours. If we receive several volunteers, we could either make this job less frequent (i.e. once every six to eight weeks), or begin picking up donations from additional sites.

Animal Transportation: If you can't have animals in your home, but would still love to interact with them, we need volunteers to pick-up animals at the Nebraska Humane Society and deliver them to caregivers. This job is crucial as it allows caregivers to spend more time directly caring for their animals. This job can be as infrequent as one afternoon per week.

Animal Caregivers: As always, we need people willing to learn how to care for wildlife. We also need current animal caregivers to step-up to the plate and take on some co-team leader or team leader duties.

We are asking that if you volunteer with NWRI, that you consider a two year commitment, with a minimum commitment of one year, for the betterment of our organization.

Upcoming Events

Sandhill Crane Migration:
From now until early to mid-April, sandhill cranes will be stopping along the Platte River in Nebraska on their annual migration north. It is said that the viewing is best between Kearney and Grand Island. Take an afternoon to view the cranes as they travel in the thousands through our state. The sight is breathtaking!

Sunday June 12, 2005 at 1:00 PM: General Membership Meeting
All of our members are invited to attend a general membership meeting in the auditorium at the Nebraska Humane Society, located at 90th and Fort in Omaha. Denise Lewis from Raptor Recovery Nebraska will be giving a presentation about Nebraska's native raptors, and will have several of her birds with her for display. This is a great opportunity to get to know NWRI and other members. Refreshments will be provided.

Thanks to Our Many Friends and Donors

NWRI is deeply grateful to the following individuals, foundations, and businesses for their contributions to our work in providing medical management and compassionate care for the injured, sick, and orphaned wildlife that come to our volunteers.

Jack and Lynne Baldwin
Colleen Haley
Teresa Hunzeker
Greg Kluck
Kuba Travnicek
Alexandra Penny
Mary Lou Chapek
Tom & Suzanne Moore
Central High School National Honor Society
Wal-Mart—128th and L Street
Target—178th and West Center Road

The Incredible Beaver

Beavers are found throughout all of North America except for the northern regions of Canada, the deserts of the southern United States, Mexico, and Florida.

Beavers are primarily aquatic animals, and the largest rodents in North America. They have a waterproof, rich, glossy, reddish-brown or blackish-brown coat. The underhairs are much finer than the outer, protective, guard-hairs. The ears are short, round, and dark brown in coloration. A beaver's hind legs are longer than its front legs, making its rear end higher than the front when it walks.

Beaver skulls and teeth are disproportionately large. This anatomical design is crucial for cutting through hard woods like maple and oak. Most notably, the upper incisors, bright orange in color, are at least 5 mm wide and 20-25 mm long. These teeth grow throughout the animal's lifetime and are necessary for its survival, just as its closable nostrils, closable ears, and transparent eye membranes are necessary for its aquatic existence.

Both male and female beavers also have anal glands and castor glands. Both sets of glands lie at the base of the tail, which is possibly the most defining characteristic of the beaver. The tail is broad, flat, and covered in large blackish scales. Secretions from the anal and castor glands are used in scent-marking, and give the beaver its odd odor.

Beavers live in lodges, of which there are three types: those built on islands, those built on the banks of ponds, and those built on the shores of lakes. The island lodge consists of a central chamber, with its floor slightly above the water level, and with two entrances. One entrance opens up into the center of the hut floor, while the other is a more abrupt descent into the water. The lodge itself is an oven-shaped house of sticks, grass, and moss, woven together and plastered with mud. Over the years, repair and elaboration lead to an increase in hut size. The room inside may measure 8 feet wide and up to 3 feet high. The floor is blanketed with bark, grass, and wood chips.

The pond lodge is built either a short way back from the edge of the bank, or partly hanging over it, with the front wall built up from the bottom of the pond. The lake lodge is built on the shelving shores of lakes. To ensure adequate water depth surrounding the lodge, beavers dam streams with logs, branches, mud, and stones.

Beavers build dams to slow down the flow of water in streams and rivers and then build stable lodges for shelter. The dams are engineered according to the speed of the water; in slow water the dam is built straight, but in fast water the dam is built with a curve in it. This provides stability so that the dam will not be washed away.

Beavers are monogamous, but if one mate dies, the other will seek out a new mate. Beavers are driven away from their colonies usually around their second year of life, right before a new litter is born. They then make a colony of their own, usually several miles away, and they first breed around their third year of life, depending on the quality of the environment.

Male and female beavers are sexually mature at about 3 years of age. They mate between January and March in cold climates, and in late November or December in the south. Beavers give birth to one litter of kits per year, usually between April and June. The gestation period is about 3 months. When the beaver kits are born they are fully furred, have open eyes, and can swim within 24 hours. After several days they are also able to dive out of the lodge with their parents to explore the surrounding area. Most beavers are weaned within two weeks, but may nurse for up to 90 days. The young usually stay with their parents for 2 years before leaving to make their own homes. Both mother and father beaver play a role in providing food for the young and protecting them from predators.

Beavers usually live in family groups of up to 8 related individuals called colonies. The younger siblings stay with their parents for up to 2 years, helping with infant care, food collection, and dam building. Beaver families are territorial and defend against other families. One method is territory marking. This is done by making mud piles around the edges of a territory, and then by depositing anal and castoral secretions on these piles. Beavers will also warn others of danger by slapping their tails against the water, creating a powerful noise.

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The Incredible Beaver (continued from page 3)

This is not always effective however, as older beavers will often ignore the warning slaps of younger members of the colony.

The average lifespan of a beaver in the wild is 10 to 20 years. While its size saves it from most predators, a beaver's lifespan can be cut short by predators, most commonly humans, wolves, and coyotes. Parasites and disease also play a factor in mortality.

Beavers are primarily nocturnal. They are only occasionally seen during the day, usually around dusk. Beavers travel good distances from their homes to find food. If they find a good source, they build canals to the food source as a way to float the food back to their lodges. Logs and twigs are often stored underwater for winter feeding.

Beavers eat bark and cambium (the softer growing tissue under the bark of trees). Their favorites include willow, maple, poplar, beech, birch, alder, and aspen trees. They also eat water vegetation, as well as buds and roots. Cellulose, which usually can not be digested by mammals, is a major component of their diet. Beavers have microorganisms in their cecum (a sac between the large and small intestine) that digest this material. In zoos, beavers are fed yams, lettuce, carrots and "rodent chow."

Beavers are incredibly beneficial to the environment. They are instrumental in creating habitats for many aquatic organisms, maintaining the water table at an appropriate level and controlling flooding and erosion, all by building dams.

Beavers maintain wetlands that can slow the flow of floodwaters. They prevent erosion, and they raise the water table, which acts as a purifying system for the water. This happens because silt occurs upstream from dams, and toxins are then broken down. As ponds grow from water backed up by the damn, pond weeds and lilies take over. After beavers leave their homes, the dams decay, and meadows appear.

The conservation status of beavers differs with respect to source, but there have been significant threats to the survival of the beaver. Beavers have been hunted and trapped extensively in the past and by about 1900, the animals were almost gone in many of their original habitats. Pollution and habitat loss have also affected the survival of the beaver. In the last century, however, beavers have been successfully reintroduced to many of their former habitats.

Thanks to the University of Michigan's Animal Diversity Web for much of the information contained in this article.

Team Wildlife—An Update

In the last newsletter, we told you about a fledgling club at King Science Center in Omaha, Team Wildlife. Under the guidance of teacher and Nebraska Wildlife Rehab member, Reenie McMains, approximately 35 children in grades five through eight are taking an active role in learning about, and are working to help Nebraska's native wildlife.

In just a short time, Team Wildlife has made some amazing accomplishments. Meeting weekly, the children have formed committees to undertake various projects to increase their knowledge of our native wildlife, and to help some of the animals NWRI receives every year.

One committee, the "Fantasizing Foxes", coordinated a "Warm your Paws for Our Cause" fundraiser. This fundraiser allowed students and teachers to wear slippers to school for a day if they each donated fifty cents to NWRI. They raised $250.00 for NWRI's resident bobcat in one day! Another committee, the "Habitat Hounds", submitted and was awarded a grant of $6,000.00 to plant a natural habitat garden in their school courtyard. Yet another committee, the "Cooking Cubs", made pinecone birdfeeders and hung them outside classroom windows around the school.

Yaneli Sandoval counting the donations from "Slipper Day"

Ben Kammerer making posters for Slipper Day at King Science Center

The club also took a field trip to Desoto Bend over Thanksgiving break and will be traveling to Kearney in March to observe the migration of the sandhill cranes.

Their next big event involves a project between Team Wildlife and research scientists from Creighton University in Omaha. The researchers are traveling to Antarctica, and will be interacting with the club through a two-way satellite camera feed while they are in Antarctica. The researchers will meet with the students in April before they leave for Antarctica, and each committee is designing a flag that the scientists will take and display from their fish huts in Antarctica during their project. Club members will be conducting fish tissue experiments along with the researchers in Antarctica and comparing results throughout the study during the next school year.

Toasty Feet on Slipper Day!

NWRI team leaders will also be visiting with the club in March to catch-up with the club's activities. NWRI is excited to hear that such an active group of children is working to increase their knowledge of our native wildlife and our natural environment. We applaud Reenie's enormous effort to educate these children and help them realize the value and excitement of knowledge. We look forward to working with Team Wildlife in the future!

NWRI's 2004 Animal Report

As NWRI volunteers gear up for spring, our period for state reporting of animal numbers is winding down. Your efforts and generous donations helping the following animals in 2004:

Bats:

Big Brown Bat:	163
Evening Bat:	2
Hoary Bat:	8
Red Bat:	8

Large Carnivores:

Bobcat:	1
Red Fox:	4

Game Birds:

Chukar:	1
Guinea Fowl:	2
Ring-Necked Pheasant:	2
Wild Turkey:	2
Mourning Dove:	25
Turtle Dove:	5
Rock Dove:	54

Opossum: 366

Eastern Cottontail Rabbit: > 700 (final numbers not yet reported)

Raccoon: 238

Reptiles:

McKay's Brown Snake:	1
Bullsnake:	2
Painted Turtle:	3
Ornate Box Turtle:	2
Snapping Turtle:	4
Spiny Soft-Shelled Turtle:	2
Red-Eared Slider:	3

Miscellaneous Mammals:

Plains Pocket Gopher:	2
Mink:	1
Muskrat:	1
No. Short-Tailed Shrew:	3
Woodchuck:	98
Beaver:	1

Squirrels:

13-Lined Ground Squirrel:	12
Franklin's Ground Squirrel:	6
Fox Squirrel:	182

Waterfowl:

American Coot:	2
American Bittern:	2
Canada Goose:	15
Great Blue Heron:	1
Hooded Merganser:	1
Mallard:	27
Domestic Duck:	14
White Pelican:	1
Wood Duck:	60

Songbirds:

American Robin:	29
American Crow:	3
Barn Swallow:	9
Blue Jay:	9
Brown-Headed Cowbird:	7
Cedar Waxwing:	3
Chimney Swift:	4
Common Nighthawk:	9
Downy Woodpecker:	2
Grackle:	35
House Sparrow:	11
Killdeer:	2
Ruby-Crowned Kinglet:	1
Northern Cardinal:	4
Northern Flicker:	3
Purple Martin:	1
Red-Headed House Finch:	1
Ruby-Throated Hummingbird:	1
Starling:	32
Yellow Warbler:	1
Other:	3

It was noted that this year we saw a sharp increase in the number of raccoons and woodchucks. This increase was due almost wholly to the handling of adult animals that were trapped and surrendered at the Nebraska Humane Society, and later turned over to NWRI. The increase in the numbers of these animals, and how to handle them was a huge dilemma faced by NWRI this year. It is well know to rehabilitators that relocated adult raccoons and woodchucks seldom survive in new surroundings, as they are unable to find appropriate food and shelter quickly when relocated. They also are often unaware of the habits of local predators, or are run out of their new territory by animals already living in the area. Additionally, the stress of unfamiliar surroundings is incredibly detrimental to their survival.

NWRI has decided to refuse to relocate adult animals except in extreme situations, and instead to launch a campaign to educate the public about the best ways to live with urban wildlife.

Top 10 Reasons Not to Trap and Relocate Wildlife

10. It is not an effective solution. If you remove one animal from your property, another will come to take its place.
9. You will never succeed in eliminating wildlife from your property. As long as you have a source of food or shelter (e.g. accessible trash, pet food left outside, grubs in your lawn, uncapped chimney, holes in your eaves) they will come. Eliminate, fix or secure the source of your problem, and you will solve it with much less wasted effort.
8. Trapping is indiscriminate—you may trap your neighbor's cat or another animal completely unrelated to your nuisance problem.
7. It's not fair. Where do we expect wildlife to exist? Never-ending expansion of urban areas to accommodate the ever-growing human population has left wildlife no choice but to adapt to us. Don't we owe them a little tolerance?
6. It's illegal in the off season. Although it is widely ignored, all forms of trapping are legally limited to designated hunting and trapping seasons. These seasons are defined to allow animals to breed and raise their young during non-hunting and trapping seasons, free from harassment.
5. It is highly stressful to an animal to be trapped and to be relocated. Most animals do not survive in unfamiliar territory. Resident animals will drive off the intruder, or the animal will not know where to find food or shelter, if it is even available. A recent study notes that over 90% of relocated raccoons die within a short period of time.
4. "Humane" traps are anything but humane. Frequently animals do serious injury to themselves trying to escape during the hours they are confined in a live trap.
3. Fear, as a reason for trapping, is irrational. Wild animals have no interest in attacking you, your pets, or your children. Their only reason for aggression is self-defense, and their first choice is always to escape the perceived danger.
2. With just a little effort, we can coexist peacefully with wildlife. If they cause you minor inconvenience, please remember their only motivation is survival. They have no concept of property or damage. There are many more effective and less disruptive alternatives to trapping.

And the #1 reason NOT to trap and relocate…

When you trap and relocate, someone's mother might not come home. From early spring until late fall, chances are 50/50 that the animal you trap is a mother, whose babies depend on her for their survival. Taking a mother away from her babies condemns them to a very cruel fate - starvation and death.

The Membership Drive Is On!

The annual membership drive is on! Thank you to everyone who has already renewed their membership. If you did not receive your membership renewal form in the mail, please take the time to renew your membership by completing the form below. For animal caretakers, your paid membership is required to remain in good standing with Nebraska Game and Parks. For others, your generous support helps us care for thousands of animals each year! Thank you!

Please cut out, complete this form and send it along with your check.

Make me a member of NWRI!

_____
Name

_____
Street Address

_____
City State Zip

_____
Telephone

Enclosed is a check to cover my annual membership fee.

- ☐ $25 general
- ☐ $50 patron
- ☐ $100 benefactor

Please make checks payable to:

Nebraska Wildlife Rehab, Inc.
P.O. Box 24122
Omaha, NE 68124

NEBRASKA WILDLIFE REHAB, INC.

P. O. Box 24122
Omaha, NE 68124-0122

Phone: (402) 341-8619

Tiny lives leaving paw prints on our hearts.

A new Web site coming soon! Check us out at http:// www.nebraskawildliferehab.org

NWRI … Nebraska Wildlife Rehab, Inc. … is a 25+ year old, not-for-profit (501c3) organization whose mission is to *rehabilitate and release orphaned and injured wildlife, and through education, preserve and protect the natural habitat and species indigenous to Nebraska and the Great Plains. The means to accomplish this mission is to educate the public to an understanding of our Great Plains ecosystem and its component parts.*

Become a NWRI donor!
Please help give our wild friends a second chance.
All contributions are tax deductible .

Yes, I want to help. Enclosed is my check for:

☐ $25 ☐ $50 ☐ $100 ☐ Other _____

Name

Street Address

City State Zip

Telephone Email