

November, 2002

Edition



Featured: Opossums

NEBRASKA WILDLIFE REHAB, INC.

# The Critter Chronicle



## Nebraska Wildlife Rehab, Inc.

Dear Friends:

With the fall season upon us, you may not be thinking too much about Spring ... but we are ... because with springtime comes babies ... lots and lots of babies. And we must be ready to care for them. Annually, we care for hundreds of raccoons, rabbits, opossums, songbirds, squirrels, and many other species. In fact, our annual census of animals and birds is well over 3,000 and, in many seasons, tops 4,000 including such large carnivores as coyotes, bobcats, and foxes.

Nebraska Wildlife Rehab, Inc. (NWRI) relies upon a network of unpaid volunteers to rescue, rehabilitate and release all of these birds and animals. The organization relies on the generous support of people like you to help us in our mission. Really, it's the responsibility of all of us in the Omaha and surrounding communities to protect our wildlife resources and ensure that future generations of Nebraskans will still experience the 'call of the wild'.

Your contributions to the NWRI mission are fully tax deductible. Please take this opportunity to "adopt" a species with a gift designed to ensure the ability of NWRI to continue rescuing injured and orphaned wildlife. If you are employed by an organization that provides matching funds, please consider this as an option along with your donation. We hope you enjoy reading the November, 2002, edition of 'The Critter Chronicle'. The form on the last page of our newsletter is made available for submission along with your kind donation. (If you prefer to become an NWRI member, please use the form on page 6.)

On behalf of our wild friends and our dedicated rehabilitation teams, thank you for your helpful support in the past and for the support you will provide for this coming year. Every dollar counts.

Sincerely,

**Maggie Lehning**

Margaret Lehning  
President

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## Meet Betty Tatum ... a Wildlife Care Provider

**Betty Tatum** has been a volunteer care provider for approximately thirteen years. She learned of the organization through her involvement with Fontenelle Forest. Betty currently leads the waterfowl team which was most recently the recipient of an endowment specifically for the care of Nebraska waterfowl. Betty's rehab expertise is focused on Nebraska's avian species.



Both the song bird and game bird rehab teams have benefited from her support and expertise during her tenure with NWRI. When asked what she

(continued on Page 3)



Betty patiently waiting for the release.

## Opossum ... Fact or Fiction

In each newsletter edition, we plan to feature a species, and this month we will share information about the opossum. There is much fiction that surrounds this nocturnal creature. This article should shed some light on what is fact versus fiction.



Opossums are North America's only marsupial (female has a pouch) mammal. The female carries and nurses her young in her marsupium until they are about 2-3 months old; then they are carried on her back another 1-2 months whenever they are away from the den.

Opossums are not known to carry rabies. Dogs, skunks, raccoons, bats and many other species are more easily able to carry the rabies virus than are opossums. Some specialists believe this may be due to their lower body temperature. As part of their defense system, opossums will drool when in a stressful situation. Some people may see this as a rabies symptom.

Opossums do not hang by their tails. Opossums use their tails for balance while climbing tree limbs, and are too heavy to hang by their tails. They may wrap their tails around a limb while reaching down to grab a lower limb thereby using their tail like another hand.

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# Heller Art Images Show Benefits of NWRI

Local News. Internationally renowned wildlife artist D. Arthur Wilson appeared at Heller Art Images in July as part of his national traveling exhibit. Guests had a rare opportunity to view his unique pastel application during a special demonstration of his "Wild Expressionism."

The festivities began with a Premier Party at the Lexus of Omaha showroom. The following evening an Invitation Only Collector's Reception was held at Heller Art Images.

The traveling exhibit, including over 30 original pieces, was on display. All proceeds will benefit NWRI's efforts to raise money to construct the rehabilitation clinic

near big Papio Creek at Rumsey Station south of Omaha.

Bold, stark, subtle exotic animals, unencumbered by backgrounds, epitomize Wilson's work. Those bold enough have embraced his work with the same fervor as which it was actualized. Wilson uses a daring "up close" approach resulting in startlingly beautiful portraits, which are at the same time realistic and sensuous. He feels these two "lend themselves especially well to wildlife expression. They help to express softness of fur, the silkiness of a mane or a feather, recreating the subtle blend of colors only nature could create".

A Wilson wildlife portrait is a unique experience. He sees wildlife not just as subjects for his work, but as objects of his profound love and respect.

\*Information courtesy of Metro Monthly.

If you find an injured or orphaned animal, please call NWRI's hotline at **341-8619**.

## NWRI President Recognized

**Maggie Lehning** was presented *the Women's Executive Board Distinguished Person of the Year Award* at the 27th Annual University of Nebraska at Omaha Athletic Hall of Fame Banquet.

Maggie was recognized for her far-reaching community involvement which included being the chair of the Diet Pepsi/UNO Women's Walk. In addition to being an integral part of UNO women's athletics (as well as NWRI President), she has also served on numerous other groups, such as the YMCA, Girls, Inc., Girls Scouts, and the Omaha Women's Fund.

The recognition event was held at the Holiday Inn Convention Centre on November 6.

## Meet Betty Tatum ... (continued from page 2)

enjoyed most about being involved in wildlife rehabilitation, Betty responded, "The release. It's such an adrenaline high!!"

Betty's love for waterfowl has been exhibited time and time again and is evidenced by the number tended and released back to their natural habitat. The waterfowl team cares for several hundred of our feathered friends annually. The waterfowl team clients include geese, heron, and egrets. However, wood ducks are Betty's current avian favorite. For her, the "woodies" offer an

Wood ducks are among the most high strung and easily stressed species in the avian population. It takes special habitats and special care providers to enable successful rehab and release of the woodies. Through many years of rehab experience and perfect-



*Betty stated "those little wood ducks are psychotic! They need to be on Prozac."*

extra challenge because of their high mortality rate. Betty stated "those little wood ducks are psychotic!

ing care protocols, Betty's team enjoys one of the highest success rates nationally for waterfowl rehab.

# The West Nile Virus Comes to Nebraska

This summer brought with it more than the traditional summer heat. In late June, Nebraska's first West Nile Virus (WNV) case was confirmed by Lancaster County officials in a dead blue jay collected in Lincoln. Since this first case, WNV has been confirmed in people, horses, and many avian species, most notably raptors which were hit hard at the end of summer.

There is no evidence to suggest that WNV can be spread from person to person or animal to person. WNV is spread to mammals through the bite of an infected mosquito. In rare instances, WNV can be fatal. However, in most infected people, WNV has no, or only mild, symptoms. Generally, its symptoms resemble the flu.

Neighboring states have additionally confirmed WNV in a young wolf (3 months), an 8 year old dog, and in several gray squirrels. During September, NWRI and the Nebraska Humane Society took in many fox squirrels suspected of having WNV. The majority of these squirrels were under six months of age. The clinical signs were very similar to those noted in the Illinois gray squirrels; lethargy, biting at their cages and paws; vocalizing, as if in pain, and

walking in circles. Additionally, the fox squirrels were exhibiting paralysis in all extremities.

Samples were sent to the State Public Health laboratory for testing. We received confirmation from the Douglas County Department of Health that three of the six samples tested positive. The remaining three samples are also suspect but have been given to the Center for Disease Control for testing and the results most likely will not be returned. We have a few squirrels who may make it through their suspected WNV infection. After many weeks in rehab, some can sit up and grab the cage doors with their paws. We have treated them with supportive care, heavy fluid therapy and high calorie, easy to eat foods.

For species with multiple occurrences in their populations, this disease appears to be a significant infection and a cause of death to that species, most notably its young or immune-compromised individuals. In the case of the wolf and dog, researchers believe it was a sporadic occurrence.

## Opossum ... Fact or Fiction

(Continued from Page 2)

Also contrary to what people believe, the opossum does not turn over trashcans, nor does he dig holes or destroy gardens or shrubbery. The culprit of such an action may actually be a raccoon or ill-mannered dog. Also crows have been known to pull trash out of garbage cans and strew it around the yard while

find an abandoned hole under a deck or shed that was previously owned by a woodchuck.

In addition, opossums are exceptionally non-aggressive and are most likely just wandering through the yard during their nightly travels.

The opossum's biggest predators in urban areas are dogs, cars, and people. They are not territorial, and are very much transient creatures holding up in various places during the day, while walking up to five miles each night in

their search of food. On the other hand, they have very good memories and will return

nightly to the same food dish that has been left out for cats or dogs.



looking for food. As opossums are opportunistic, they may come along after the fact and browse through the scattered trash, or



# 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.

Heller Art Gallery and  
D. Arthur Wilson  
Benson Transfer and Storage Company  
Batten Trailer Leasing  
Baldwin Hackett & Meeks, Inc.  
Bernard and Margaret Fink Foundation and  
Betsy Newman

Gerald and Clara Wakefield  
Franklin Elementary Ecology Club  
Fairview Elementary PTA  
Millard Public Schools  
Richard Rozgay  
Robert and Kim Baque

## Nuisance Neighbors?

It's a popular myth that the animal that is a nuisance on your property can simply be "relocated." It sounds easy enough and one would think that it might be the best for the property owner and nuisance animal. However, it's rare that relocated animals have a good chance of survival, and moving them may even affect the survival of animals in their new "home."

Relocation can be stressful to wild animals. They may experience elevated heart rates and breathing rates, high blood pressure, acute changes in blood chemistry and depressed appetites. These factors in turn may make them more vulnerable to disease or predation.

Relocated animals have no prior experience with their new homes which immediately puts them at a disadvantage in finding food and shelter. Most animals that cause problems are common and widespread, such as fox, opossum, and raccoon. That means that almost all areas that could be places to relocate nuisance animals already have established populations of those animals.

Animals released in a new territory lack the local knowledge to fit in with existing animal hierarchies. They risk fights with resident animals and exclusion from feeding areas and den sites.

Releasing animals may help spread disease. Just as we humans spread disease among our populations by traveling, animals can bring diseases into new areas when they are relocated, thus impacting the resident animal populations. A relocation site may not have all the basic needs for the animal site. Although the area may look suitable to us, it may lack proper food or shelter. Many animals such as foxes and raccoons are

territorial and will seek to return to their home territories at any cost.

The combination of the previous factors often cause animals to leave the release area. The animal may aimlessly wander for miles, and this is the main cause for high mortality rates in relocated animals.

Although relocation sounds appealing, it is tough on the transported animals and can have negative impacts on the animal populations where they are released. Our goal is to co-exist with our wild animals, and we owe it to them to seek low stress and, hopefully, non-lethal solutions to nuisance animal problems. Usually, that means modifying our own behavior.

\*Information courtesy of the Audubon magazine.



### Upcoming Events

Please mark your calendars. On December 9, NWRI will sponsor a Bat-o-rama at the Nebraska Humane Society auditorium at 8929 Fort Street in Omaha.

**December 9**



This informational seminar is being offered to the general public and will introduce the audience to the thirteen species of Nebraska bats and their role in controlling insects. The session will begin at 7PM. Voluntary contributions will be gratefully accepted at the door.

## Bats taking wing to U.S. postage

Washington. Holy stamp collecting, Batman! America's flying mammals are about to be featured on postage. Four stamps illustrated with bats found in the United States went on sale September 13 per the post office.

Ceremonies were held in Austin, Texas, at the famous Congress Avenue Bridge, which houses the largest urban bat colony in the world.

About 1.5 million bats emerge each evening at dusk to devour insects. The stamp ceremony was scheduled for 7 p.m. so the bats would be included.

Featured on the 37-cent stamps are:

- The red bat, found throughout much of North America. The red bat is solitary, roosting alone in dense foliage. When it hangs upside down by one foot, its predators may be fooled by its resemblance to a dead leaf.
- The pallid bat, which lives in the western United States, British Columbia and Mexico, where the staple of its diet is believed to be moths. Its ears, the largest of any bat on the continent, measure nearly two inches.
- The leaf-nosed bat, a resident primarily of caves or abandoned mines in Southern California, Nevada, Arizona and northern Mexico. Its large ears allow it to hear the extreme faint sounds of insects such as grasshoppers and caterpillars.

\*Information courtesy of USA Today.

If you find an injured or orphaned animal, please call NWRI's hotline at **341-8619**.

(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

I would be willing to help with:

- fund raising
- membership
- programs
- supplies
- newsletter
- other:
- publicity/PR
- special projects
- education
- cage building
- animal care

**Please make checks payable to:**

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

## A Squirrel by any other Name

Toadie came into our lives this spring ... a very special and unique nine-week-old male squirrel. A young Bellevue, Nebraska resident found him after a bad storm and called NWRI for assistance. His description of the squirrel's skin problems sounded like a bad case of mange; however, one look at the squirrel certainly changed that diagnosis.

His whole body was covered in tumors, ranging in size from peas to marbles. The tumors could even be seen on his tail and around his eyes. His feet were grossly swollen, and most of his toes were three to four times their normal size. He was able to walk, but he could not climb, nor could he hold food with his front feet. Many of the tumors were dry, cracked and raw. He was named "Toadie" due to his toad-like appearance.



Since no one at NWRI had ever seen a case like this before, wildlife rehabbers in Tucson, Arizona and Dayton, Ohio were contacted to determine what we were dealing with. The diagnosis was squirrel pox (*fibromatosis*) ... a viral disease believed to be transmitted by mosquitoes in a manner much like the West Nile Virus is transmitted. It is not contagious, and the treatment consists of good supportive care in an effort to enable the immune system to fight off the virus.

Toadie lived with a care provider for a month before complications from the virus ended his life. He was active and lively

right up to the end. Although we were not able to save Toadie, we were able to save another young squirrel from Bellevue with the same symptoms. The property owners were willing to feed the squirrel a good diet of dry dog food and lots of fresh fruits and vegetables. The last time they called to report on his progress, the tumors were going away, his hair was

growing back, and his skin was looking more normal.

Most recently, Dr. Frank Slansky, with the University of Florida Department of Entomology, contacted us for assistance with his study to determine the



distribution/spread of squirrel pox throughout North America. After hearing Toadie's story, Dr. Slansky shared that Nebraska was the farthest west squirrel pox had ever been reported. NWRI shared its summer experiences with the squirrel pox virus, along with some pictures of Toadie for inclusion in the study.

\*Information courtesy of Lana Halstead, NWRI Squirrel Co-Team Leader

## Acid rain linked to bird population decline

Acid rain may play more of a role in the decline of bird populations than just harming the trees they nest in, scientists say. The pollutant (caused by power-plant emissions) also may hinder breeding by depleting snails, slugs and other calcium-rich foods vital for birds to lay eggs and for their babies to thrive, Cornell University ornithologists reported in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.

They studied breeding data for the **Wood Thrush**, a migrant bird that breeds along the acid-rain-prone slopes of Eastern mountains and whose population is slowly declining. Using a statistical model to compare breeding with environmental measurements, scientist conclude that acid rain affects breeding by depleting soil calcium, which depletes the creatures birds eat. Females re-

quire lots of calcium-rich food, such as snail shells and millipedes to lay eggs with adequately hard shells; the resulting nestlings need lots of calcium, too, the researchers write. "Procuring these food items may represent a considerable burden on the parents in acidified regions."

\*Information courtesy of USA Today.

