



A group of chukar after they were moved to safety.

# THE CRITTER CHRONICLE

## Collaboration is Key to Saving Wildlife

**Nebraska Wildlife Rehab is unique in Nebraska**, not only in the types of services we provide to wildlife and people, but also in the size and scope of our work; however, we could not do our work without the support of others, and we believe that partnerships are key to saving wildlife and serving our community. In 2018, we saw so many examples of how collaboration maximized our impact for the animals:

**In May, a large seizure of more than 170 chukar partridges** that were being kept in inhumane conditions left Midlands Humane Society with no place to house them. Luckily, we had the caging and expertise to step in and care for the chukar until they could be permanently placed. All of the chukar were extremely emaciated and needed extra attention and care to recover from the conditions in which they had previously been kept. Although they are not a native bird, we saw the opportunity to help the birds and our friends at Midlands Humane Society and were glad we were able to lend a hand!

**Also in late May, we became aware that Doane University had sold the Aldrich Prairie in Fillmore County** to a farmer. The prairie was home to a colony of more than 300 prairie dogs, as well as other animals that depend on this keystone species, including badgers, coyotes, shorebirds, ground squirrels, and a variety of reptiles and amphibians. Working with our partners at Audubon of Kansas and the Prairie Dog Coalition, NWRI staff and volunteers were able to capture and relocate 233 prairie dogs to the Hutton Niobrara Ranch Wildlife Sanctuary in north-central Nebraska. This project was a massive undertaking, and could not have been accomplished without dedicated partner collaboration and the support of our donors. To learn more about the Prairie Dog Relocation Project, read on in this newsletter!

**2018 marked the 18th year of our partnership with the Nebraska Humane Society (NHS).** As the largest animal welfare organization in our state, it is natural for members of the community to call NHS when they find a wild animal. Every day of the year, our volunteers pick-up all of the wildlife at NHS and bring it to our Wildlife Center to receive the expert help it needs. Our staff also works closely with NHS staff to ensure they have the proper training to handle wildlife, and to meet any wildlife "situation" that might come up compassionately and expertly! We estimate that because of our partnership with NHS, more than 40,000 wild animals have been rescued since 2001!

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A young orphaned prairie dog is fed formula from a syringe



A juvenile prairie dog contemplating his new home

## Partners

Audubon of Kansas  
Audubon of Omaha  
Collective for Youth  
Creighton University  
Doane University  
Film Streams  
International Wildlife Rehabilitation Council  
Joslyn Art Museum  
Midlands Humane Society  
Nebraska Game & Parks Commission  
Nebraska Humane Society  
Nebraska Master Naturalist Program  
Prairie Dog Coalition of the Humane Society  
of the United States  
University of Nebraska - Lincoln  
University of Nebraska - Omaha



# A Letter from Our Director

2019 marks NWRI's 20th Anniversary and we are excited to *Celebrate Wildlife* with you this coming year!

As I look back on this year, I am truly proud of what our team has accomplished. From getting our second site up and running to major collaborations with new partners that gave hundreds of animals a second chance at life in the wild - when unexpected opportunities to help wildlife came up, our volunteers, donors, interns and staff stepped up and made sure we had the capacity to do what was right for the animals. I'm delighted to share some of those stories with you in this newsletter.

So much has changed for NWRI and for wildlife in our community over the past 20 years. We are so grateful to you, and all of our other partners and supporters, who have helped us grow and become the professional wildlife rehabilitation organization we are today! Since we started our work, the number of animals we help each year has grown to over 6,000 - making us one of the higher volume wildlife facilities in the country. We couldn't care for these animals and bring a wealth of education to our community without YOU. For that reason, we are inviting you to Celebrate Wildlife with us in 2019 with a series of speakers and events throughout the year. Read on to learn about all of the events we have planned in 2019 and JOIN US - we can't wait to see you!

Best wishes in 2019!

Laura

Laura Stastny, Executive Director

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And the other numerous people who support us with donations throughout the year!





A juvenile prairie dog, awaiting relocation



An adult prairie dog, marked for identification, after release



Young prairie dogs in an acclimation cage prior to release

## NWRI Partners to Save an Entire Town... A Prairie Dog Town!

In May, NWRI and several other conservation groups were alerted that the Aldrich Prairie owned by Doane University had been sold for agriculture, putting what is thought to have been the eastern-most remaining prairie dog town in the U.S. in imminent danger. By the time we became aware of the problem, the prairie dog town had already been completely plowed under and planted with soybeans. Many prairie dogs had been shot, babies were orphaned, and other prairie dogs succumbed to stress and lack of food.

Because there was no way to reverse the agriculture on the land, the only solution to save these prairie dogs was to trap all of the remaining prairie dogs and relocate them to the Hutton Niobrara Ranch and Wildlife Sanctuary in north-central Nebraska, owned by Audubon of Kansas. Working with our partners, donors, and the landowners, NWRI stepped in to manage the trapping operation (which took over a month!) and to care for all of the prairie dogs in need, including those that were orphaned, injured, or separated from their family groups.

By the end of the project, **we saved 233 prairie dogs** from the former Aldrich Prairie site! The prairie dogs were released in three groups, with the last group of juveniles relocated to the site at the end of August. The 47 juvenile prairie dogs that were released in August were released into artificial burrows that the partners installed several days prior to release and given a week to acclimate to the site prior to release. Upon release, our trail cams captured several touching moments of the young prairie dogs reuniting with prairie dogs from their home site that were released earlier in

the summer. It was just another confirmation for us that we were able to do the right thing for these prairie dogs!

Prairie dog towns are iconic. When one thinks of the windswept prairie, images of bison, pronghorn antelope, big bluestem, and prairie dogs abound. But they are more than just iconic – prairie dogs are a vital keystone species native to Nebraska – as integral to our landscape as the tallgrass prairies or towering oaks of the river valleys.

By definition, a keystone species is one on which other species in an ecosystem largely depend, such that if it were removed, the ecosystem would change drastically. This definition suits no animal better than the prairie dog. Prairie dog towns create ecosystems on which other animals depend, from the endangered black-footed ferret to the burrowing owl, from the fierce badger to the smallest thirteen-lined ground squirrel. These animals and many others have evolved together to co-exist in an ecologically unique and breathtakingly interesting web of nature.

Other animals that depend on, or benefit from, thriving black-tailed prairie dog towns in Nebraska include rattlesnakes and other reptiles; jackrabbits and cottontail rabbits; Franklin's ground squirrels; numerous prairie birds, including horned larks, ferruginous hawks and other raptors; multiple small rodent species, including kangaroo rats, grasshopper mice, and deer mice; and large grazing animals, like antelope, mule deer, and bison, which all depend on the high nutrient content of forage on and around prairie dog towns.

*continued on page 4*





Chet, along with Ron Klataske, installing prairie dog burrows in August



A group of volunteers works to install burrows on the release site



NWRI volunteer Heather Ingraham transporting prairie dogs

## Prairie Dog Town Saved

*(continued from page 3)*

This project allowed us to collaborate with several partners, and to realize that the plight of prairie dogs in our state is something we can work to improve. We are working now to find a way forward that allows us to work with landowners, the state of Nebraska, and partner organizations to facilitate future relocations of prairie dogs that would otherwise be exterminated. Stay tuned for details, and to learn more about how you can help us save this critical keystone species in Nebraska.

Special thanks to Maureen Franklin, who worked tirelessly to ensure that these prairie dogs were not forgotten, and to rally the partners to rescue them! Thanks also to our partners, Audubon of Kansas and the Prairie Dog Coalition, and our donors, Doane University, the Humane Society of the United States, Audubon of Omaha, and all of the individuals who made this project possible! Lastly, but never least, we thank the incredible group of volunteers who worked in torrential downpours, scorching heat, and yes, even through tornadoes, to set and check traps, and care for all of the animals, day after day.

**Want to learn more about this project, and what you can do to save prairie dogs in Nebraska?**

-----  
Join us for our very first  
**Wildlife Wednesday of 2019**  
January 9th at 6 PM  
Nebraska Humane Society  
90th and Fort in Omaha.

-----  
Our director will share the details of the project, lessons learned, and how we hope to advocate for prairie dogs in the future.



## Education Updates

We are immensely proud of our Education Staff and the work they do every day in our community. This year, we've had the honor of expanding our programs into two elementary schools through Collective for Youth (in addition to our eight middle schools) and launching the fourth year of our High School Science Academy. Despite some uncooperative weather, our new High School students have already studied Bats and Prairies this year and have a full slate of topics for second semester. In 2018 we also added a new, Level II Internship, and welcomed our first two Level II Interns at our Washington County site this summer. **For more information on any of our educational programs, visit the Education tab on our Web site.**

# Animal Stories



◀ This beautiful pelican was injured during migration this spring and brought to the Wildlife Center in June. He was released back into the wild later in the summer, into a flock of migrating pelicans. Check out a video of him on our Web site on our Rescue Stories page (hint: he is not a cooperative photo subject)! Fun fact: The protuberance on the top of his bill is called a “nuptial tubercle.” Both male and female white pelicans get them in the spring, and they fall off after mating season.

↓ Hello! from this fledgling white-breasted nuthatch! We like to think he was mugging for the camera here while hanging upside down from the inside of his enclosure, but he was actually waiting for the delivery of his breakfast. We had the honor of raising three nestling nuthatches for release this year. Nuthatches are easily recognizable in the wild as the small birds who work their way in circles down trees (with heads pointed downward) as they forage for insects. In the winter, they will help themselves to seed left at feeders and even to dog or cat food left outside!



➔ This young pied-billed grebe was brought to us with minor injuries this summer. Each year, we are seeing more and more grebes, as was other less common water and wading birds like American coots, Virginia rails, woodcocks and sora. They all need specialized care, housing, and diets, much more than our common visitors – mallard ducks, Canada geese, and snow geese. This stunning photo of the grebe was captured by photographer Alex Wiles, prior to its release.



◀ This sandhill crane came from the Grand Island area in early June, and was likely injured during spring migration, like so many of the cranes we receive are. Cranes can be difficult to rehabilitate; however, this one is doing very well, and remains in rehabilitation this winter. We hope to release it during next spring's migration!





➡️ ⬇️ This beautiful young beaver was rescued this spring in a backyard in north Omaha after being attacked by a dog. She spent the summer with us and was released onto a nature preserve this fall. She looks happy to be on her way!



⬆️ Raccoons are some of the most charismatic animals we rehabilitate... and ALWAYS the messiest! These two were up to some mischief that resulted in this guy wearing his lunch instead of eating it. Needless to say, a bottle and a bath were in order after this attempt at self-feeding!



⬇️ This unique little bunny has more than just a little "milk spot" on his forehead. Although most cottontail bunnies are born with a small white spot on their forehead that fades over time, it is not true that the white spot on a rabbit's head can help determine its age. Some bunnies are born with no spot, and other are born with a blaze like this one. Although most spots fade over time, this bunny will always have a large white blaze on its head!

⬆️ In a story that made headlines around the globe, a homeowner in Elkhorn found these juvenile squirrels with their tails tied together on his tree this spring. This happened because sap from the tree stuck their tails together, and as they moved around the nest, their tails became tied in knots, making it impossible for them to separate themselves. After we received them, we gently untied them and cared for them until they were healed and ready for release. In the meantime, when told that they made the news in at least 5 countries, and in over 25 media outlets in the U.S., the squirrels had no comment.

(Want to see some of the press these squirrels garnered? Just google "tangled tail squirrels Nebraska" and you'll find it!)







← ↓ Each year NWRI receives more than 60 different species of birds. One of the most charismatic birds we receive is the American crow. This crow came to us as a nestling, and later got a crow family consisting of two other orphaned young crows. Here he is as a nestling and later as a juvenile, prior to release.



← ↓ 2018, we received a total of 16 red foxes. These are just some of the kits that came in throughout the spring and were released later this summer.



↓ This summer we received a call about a juvenile raccoon with his arm stuck in a tree more than 50' up! We knew we'd need specialized help to get him out, so we put out an urgent call on Facebook, and arborist Jose Castillo answered our call! He went up the tree to rescue the raccoon, which had a fractured arm from struggling to get out. This raccoon was rehabilitated and eventually released back into the wild!



↑ The Virginia Opossum, North America's only marsupial, is one of the more common animals we receive at NWRI, and their joeys are absolutely adorable! We commonly receive large litters of opossum joeys when their mothers are hit by cars and killed, but they survive the impact, safe in their mother's pouch. As marsupials, they require expert care and attention, but it's all worth it – opossums are incredibly beneficial! As one of "nature's garbage disposals" they eat ticks, carrion, small rodents, and insects – all things people often would like to see less of!

# NWRI Celebrating 20 Years in 2019



It is with gratitude and joy that we celebrate 20 years of saving wildlife in Nebraska in 2019. The best we can think of to mark this momentous anniversary is to spend more time with you, our supporters, this year and to expand our outreach to save wildlife in our state.

Throughout our history, we have worked hard to provide humane and compassionate care to every animal we receive (now more than 6,000 animals each year) and to provide practical wildlife education in our community. We work now, as we always have, to help people understand wildlife in the hope that they will join us in appreciating wild animals and wild spaces, and that will join us in working to protect them.

As we've grown, our responsibility to our community has grown, and we welcome every opportunity to be an asset in our state – to the animals, to our partners, and to you, our supporters who value the services we provide.

We look forward with enthusiasm to 2019 and continued growth and partnerships in the years to come. Thank you for your continued support, and we hope to see you at one or more events this year!

## Celebrating Wildlife with Events Throughout the Year

What better way to celebrate wildlife, partnerships, and our community than by getting together all year long? This year, we have dozens of programs and events planned, including:

### Wildlife Wednesdays

Join us at 6 PM on the second Wednesday of every month to learn more about NWRI and Wildlife. With a different topic every month, there's something for everyone!

#### January "Saving a Prairie Dog Town" with Laura Stastny

Come out to the Nebraska Humane Society to learn more about Prairie Dogs, our 2018 Prairie Dog Relocation Project, and what you can do to advocate for native wildlife in Nebraska.

#### February – "Legislating for Wildlife" with Jocelyn Nickerson

Also at the Nebraska Humane Society, this session will talk about state and federal legislation that affects wildlife, and give you practical ideas on what you can do to help protect our natural legacy.

March	"Baby Wildlife – Orphaned or Not?"
April	"Living in Harmony with Native Wildlife"
May	"Creating Space for Wildlife in Your Backyard"
June	"Ethical Wildlife Photography"
July & August	Topics TBD
September	"The Lead Affect"
October	"Bats, Bats, Bats!"
November & December	Topics TBD

*(The location for these sessions will vary from month-to-month. Have an idea for a Wildlife Wednesday topic? E-mail us at [info@nebraskawildliferehab.org](mailto:info@nebraskawildliferehab.org)!)*

### Wildlife Trivia Nights

Planned for February and August, join us for food, fun, and trivia! Stay tuned for more details!

### Bat House Building Workshops coming in March!

### Bats Over Omaha Bat Release

Although the date isn't certain, Bat Release almost always takes place in the second half of April. Make sure you're on our e-mail list and follow us on social media to make sure you don't miss it!

### Earth Days

As always, visit us at the Omaha and Sarpy County Earth Day festivities this April!

We are also looking forward to the **City Nature Challenge Bioblitz**, a film **collaboration with Film Streams**, **Wildlife Photography Workshops**, and a **Fall Fundraiser**.

### Get Up-To-Date Details On All of Our Events

on the News & Events page on our Web site and on our Facebook Page! We hope to see you soon!







Four bat fans share their best bat masks



Ellie shows a bat to the crowd prior to release



Volunteer Jenna shares a glimpse of a bat with attendees



Face (and hand) painting is a popular attraction at Bat Release

## Bat Release Marks Its 10th Event in 2019

Little did we know that when we asked the Joslyn Art Museum if we could “use their parking lot” back in 2010, that Bat Release would become such a long-lasting and popular event in Omaha. In 2019, we will hold our 10th annual Bats Over Omaha Bat Release at the Joslyn Art Museum.

Each spring, NWRI releases over 300 bats back into the wild, after taking care of them all winter. For this special anniversary, we are planning both traditional and new activities for children, additional education tables, a bat house silent auction, raffle, and roving bats to keep the crowd entertained.

As always, public is invited to come as early as 6 PM to stake out a spot on the lawn and enjoy a picnic dinner. Bat release

takes place at dusk and is generally wrapped up about 45 minutes after it begins. Although Bat Release can happen any time between the end of March and the beginning of May, it generally takes place in the second half of April. We release the bats on the earliest possible date, taking into consideration current conditions, weather forecast, and insect populations. Because this is all about the bats - the release happens when it works for them. We will notify the public 48-72 hours prior to the release, and hope that you can join us!

If you or your business would like to be a Bat Release sponsor in 2019, please contact our director, Laura, at [info@nebraskawildliferehab.org](mailto:info@nebraskawildliferehab.org).

## Remembering a True Hero for the Animals



Heather Johnson loved all animals and she made sure that she dedicated her time and energy to improving their lives, every chance she got. Heather volunteered for Nebraska Wildlife Rehab for 8 years. At least once a week, she would transport wildlife from the Nebraska Humane Society to our Wildlife Center in Louisville, and was always the one to jump in and help when we needed her. In addition to her work with us,

she also volunteered for many years in the Lost & Found at the Nebraska Humane Society and with the Humane Society of the United States - Nebraska office, doing everything she could to help animals, in every way that she could. Heather

also loved people, and people loved her. She was caring and kind, and had a zest for life that never wavered.

We lost Heather in a tragic car accident on September 25, 2018. We continue to mourn her loss at NWRI, but we know that we were lucky to have had the privilege of knowing her, and many animals got a second chance because of her.

In struggling how best to honor her memory, we decided to start a Wildlife Medical Fund in her name. She would love that more animals will receive the care they need and have a chance at returning to the wild - all due to a fund that bears her name. All donations to this fund will be used for veterinary care and medication for the wild animals in our care. If you would like to make a donation in honor of Heather, please do so online, or by mailing your check to: Nebraska Wildlife Rehab, PO Box 24122, Omaha, NE 68124 (Please write “Heather Johnson Memorial Fund” in the memo line of your check.)



Aksarben ARS General Manager, John Aliano, with NWRI staff, Ellie and Laura.

## Louisville Wildlife Center Closed for Maintenance

If you have an animal in need this winter, or were wanting to drop-off donations in Louisville, please note that the Wildlife Center had to be closed for the winter due to urgent building maintenance. However, we are still here to help you and the animals! If you have an animal in need, please call us at 402-234-2473 for fastest assistance. For all other inquiries, please call or e-mail us at [info@nebraskawildliferehab.org](mailto:info@nebraskawildliferehab.org). Thank you!



## Aksarben ARS Donates for Wildlife

During the month of October, Aksarben ARS donated \$1 to Nebraska Wildlife Rehab for every new Facebook like they received. By the end of the month, their donation totaled \$803! Special thanks to Dan Flanigan and John Aliano at Aksarben ARS for making NWRI their non-profit of the month!

## Enrichment Items

*If you want "enrich" the lives of our wildlife, please consider donating some of the items listed below:*

- Hollowed-out logs
- Landscaping rocks
- Hay or Straw
- Mulberries or other berries still on the branches
- Apples, pears, and other locally grown fruit
- Vegetables from your garden (particularly spinach, kale, spring mix, corn and zucchini)

- Hand mirrors
- Fisher Price Toys (think old-style xylophone, piano, and other large, bright, toddler toys)
- Small tire swings
- Toilet paper/paper towel rolls
- Sisal rope
- Rubber mats
- Ice cube trays
- Tennis balls
- Bike reflectors
- Barrels & buckets
- Antlers
- Corn stalks
- Pine cones, moss, shells

- Duck weed and willow
- Incubators
- Electronic gram scales
- Towels & Blankets
- Newspaper
- Reptile lights

### For caging:

- Cash donations to help build the new wilding cages
- Lowes, Home Depot, Menard's Gift Cards to purchase supplies & Enrichment items listed here.



Indoor cages Chet built in the winter of 2018 for a new animal nursery



Chet, along with volunteer Greg Elliott, installing shoreline cages at our new site

## VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT: Chet & Louise Bressman

In 2017, we here at NWRI had the extreme privilege of welcoming Chet and Louise Bressman as new volunteers. Right after orientation, they immediately jumped in to do anything and everything needed to help the animals, from cleaning and organizing to soliciting caging donations and fundraising. Chet is a skilled builder, which is priceless in our field. In his first summer, he built 13 large indoor cages for our Wildlife Center in Louisville along with countless raccoon and squirrel nesting boxes, release boxes for multiple species, additional small cages, and our beloved raccoon bottle racks! Chet and Louise also helped move and construct large caging donations from VCA and for our emergency raccoon caging.

This year, Chet topped himself, building more than 20 indoor and outdoor cages for our new site in Fort Calhoun. He is also always ready to build whatever we can dream of, from animal enrichment items to ramps and shelves for our outdoor caging. Chet built the underground burrows for our Prairie Dog Relocation Project this year, and he and Louise joined the team in Bassett, NE, braving the August heat, to ensure they were installed correctly.

Chet and Louise never fail to step up to do any task, large or small, and are often ready to serve at a moment's notice. They both have a long history of volunteerism, advocating for animal welfare, and giving to our community, and we at NWRI are so incredibly fortunate to count them as our family. They are a prime example of how big of a difference dedicated volunteers can make, and we don't know how we ever got along without them!



# Find the Perfect Gift for a Friend (or Yourself!)

## Shop NWRI's Online Store

NWRI's online store is filled with fabulous new gifts for the wildlife lover in your life (and for yourself!), including Swedish dishcloths, scarves, bags, pins, patches, books, greeting cards, baby gear, socks, and t-shirts! Go to our web site and click on the "Shop for Wildlife" link from our home page or under the "How You Can Help" tab to check it out!



## Adopt-An-Animal

Give the gift of a symbolic adoption of a bat, raccoon, fox, songbird, or prairie dog to a loved one, or show your support by adopting an animal for yourself! Depending on the adoption level you choose, you or your recipient will receive an adoption certificate and photo, as well as other gifts. To learn more, go to the "Adopt-An-Animal" page under the "How You Can Help" tab on our Web site!



## How You Can Help [nebraskawildliferehab.org/how-to-help/](http://nebraskawildliferehab.org/how-to-help/)

## And... Give a Gift to Wildlife

There are so many ways to help wildlife this giving season:

### Donate

Your cash donations help us purchase specialized food, formulas, and veterinary care for our wildlife, pay for day-to-day operations at our Wildlife Center, and purchase the items of most pressing need for whatever wild animal comes through our doors!

### Purchase Items on our Wish Lists

We have three special shopping lists on Amazon with the items most needed at our Wildlife Center. These lists are: 2019 Baby Shower List, Wildlife Field Rescue Gear List, and our General Wish List. You can find the links to the Amazon wish lists and a list of the other items we need on our Web site on the "Wish Lists and Special Projects" page, under the "How You Can Help" tab. (You can also find our Amazon wish lists by searching for Nebraska Wildlife Rehab on Amazon or going to: <http://amzn.com/w/1HU9HHCG8IDSR>)

### Check out our Project Page

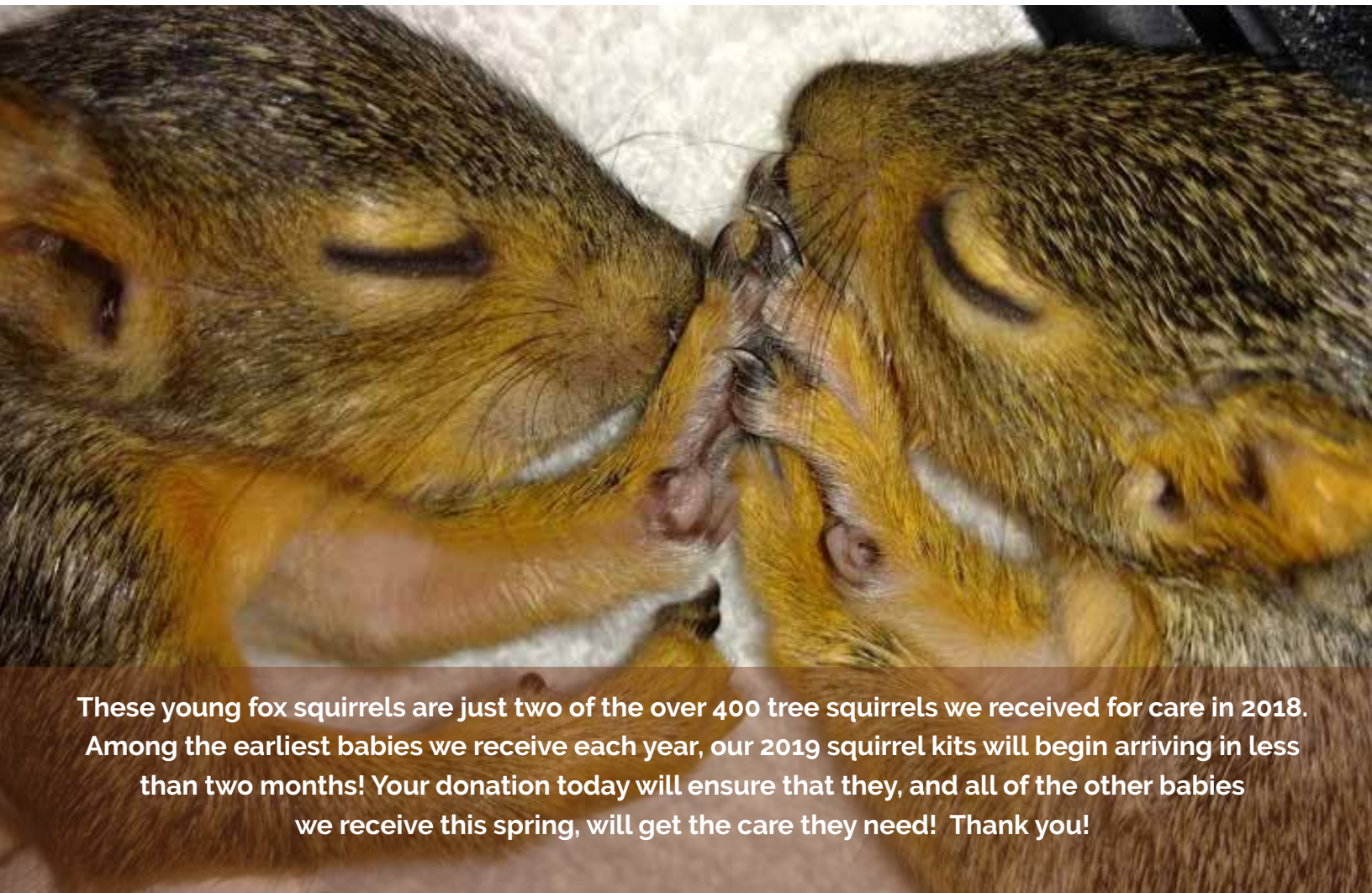
We keep a list of special projects in need of funding on our Web site on the "Wish Lists and Special Projects" page. Current special projects include our new Reptile Nursery, a Wildlife Caging fund (with matching donations), and other special needs!





PO Box 24122  
Omaha, NE 68124

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FIRESPRING



These young fox squirrels are just two of the over 400 tree squirrels we received for care in 2018. Among the earliest babies we receive each year, our 2019 squirrel kits will begin arriving in less than two months! Your donation today will ensure that they, and all of the other babies we receive this spring, will get the care they need! Thank you!