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Summer
2001

The Mockingbird Chronicles



Letter of the South Plains Wildlife Rehabilitation Center

Summer 2001

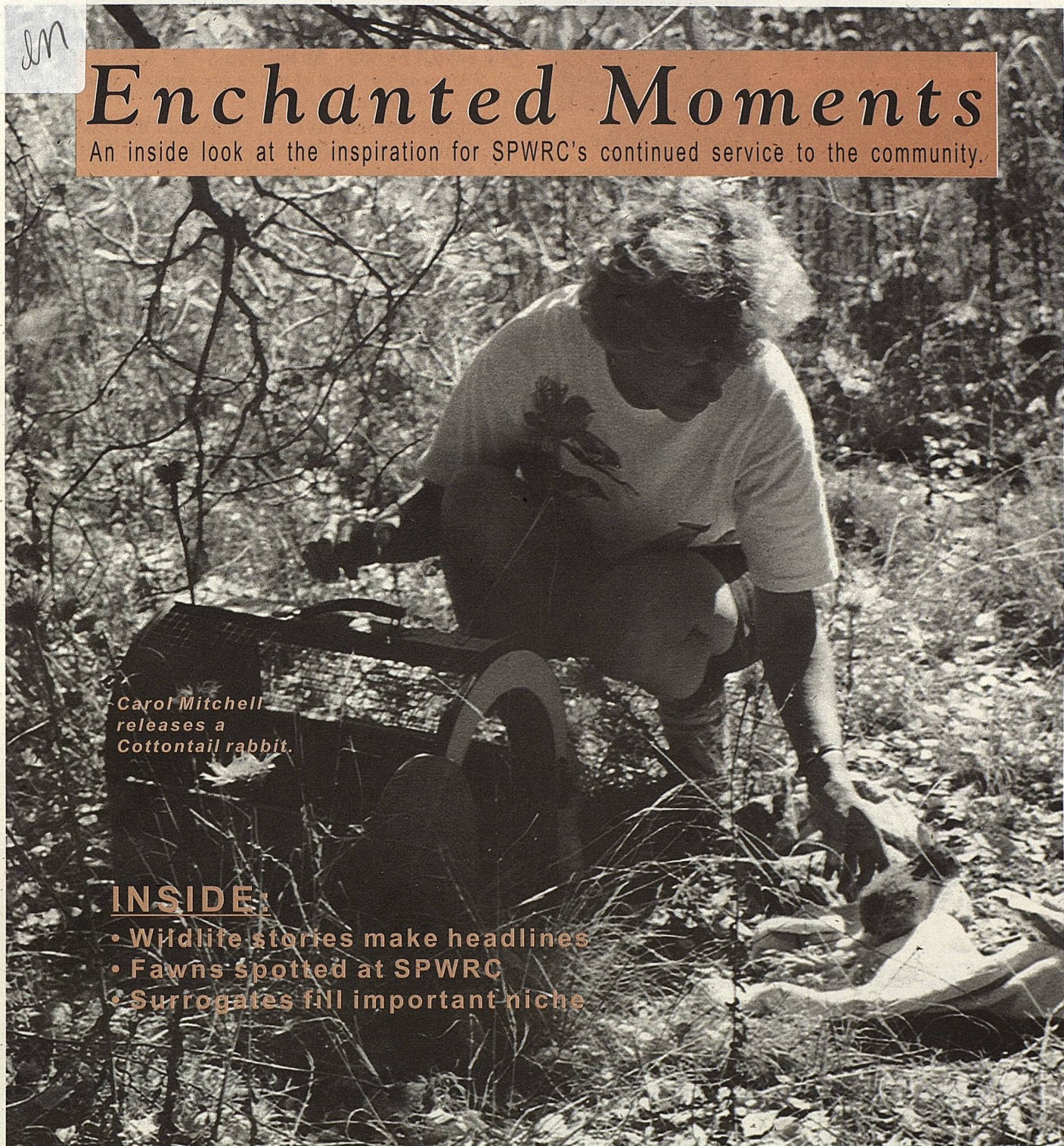
Enchanted Moments

An inside look at the inspiration for SPWRC's continued service to the community.

Carol Mitchell
releases a
Cottontail rabbit.

INSIDE:

- Wildlife stories make headlines
- Fawns spotted at SPWRC
- Surrogates fill important niche



*Letter from the Director***Enchanted moments define summer months**

Every year at midsummer, we look back and wonder just when the trickle of animal admissions became a flood. May 31, 2001 sprang to mind with our second-highest admission day in history, with 55 admissions following the terrible rain, wind and hail storm of the previous evening. After that, the days became a blur, running one into the other with "this owl and that turtle," and the seemingly endless stream of doves, jays, robins, mockingbirds and others.

I ask myself how I accomplished anything of substance the last 12 summers, when I raised all the nestling and fledgling songbirds and seriously ill and injured adult birds in my home. Most years, this figure teetered around 600. This year, thanks to the completion of our new building, *all* of the birds are cared for at the Center, and I have time to reflect on the hectic years when hundreds of birds and small animals passed through my doors.

I recalled the many nights of insomnia when I was concerned that I was not doing the best I could for a particular animal, or worried about a heart-wrenching case, or about the inevitability of euthanasia for some I simply could do nothing more for. I remembered the tiny jay, robin, mockingbird and kingbird that didn't complain about being together in the same "nest." I couldn't help but ponder what a great world it would be if people were so congenial.

I also remember lingering over one particular little Blue jay last summer, and how I told him I was sorry his wing had been hopelessly damaged. I felt a little silly talking to him, but we all do it at the Center — the job almost begs for it. For this

*Carol Mitchell*

particular unfortunate fledgling, it was the luck of the draw: he would never fly, thanks to a cat; he never had the opportunity to fly even once, and he would certainly never be free. In the end, he did not survive, though during his short life I marveled at the way he used his broken, misshapen wing as a leaning cane, and even propped his head on it standing up to take a nap. I reassure myself that others will be more fortunate.

This was but one of those thousands of moments etched indelibly in my mind.

I no longer ask myself, "Why do I do this?" when there is heartache and stress. Now, I wonder why I didn't start this job sooner.

Recently I returned from a brief trip and quickly felt overwhelmed as I reviewed my "To Do" list. I dashed to the Center the following day to pick up some receipts, and there in a playpen propped with blankets was our ninth fawn — a male Mule deer, only two weeks old, struggling to live after being fed a diet of cow's milk and pineapple for 13 days by one of those 'well-meaning' people. Now suffering from infection, mouth sores and severe diarrhea, it was literally at death's door when admitted.

Volunteers and veterinarian Larry Farley administered IV fluids, cleaned the little deer at both ends continuously, and kept vigil as it struggled to even raise its head. On the third day, we saw a tiny glimmer of real hope as he tried to raise his head.

This, countless episodes like it, exhilarating releases, and all those other enchanted moments are what wildlife rehabilitation is about. These moments are the fuel that keeps us going, with our dedication and commitment stronger than ever. (See pages 6-7 for an inside look at this summer's treasured memories.) I could not be more proud of our achievements!

Carol

The Mockingbird Chronicles is a quarterly publication of the South Plains Wildlife Rehabilitation Center (SPWRC). SPWRC is an all-volunteer, 501(c)3 non-profit organization that cares for orphaned, injured, ill and displaced wild animals with the ultimate goal of returning wildlife to their natural habitats. SPWRC holds state and federal permits but does not receive funding from any regulatory agency. SPWRC operations are maintained entirely through the support of private donations and volunteer service, as SPWRC staff are not paid. Donations to SPWRC are tax deductible to the extent the law allows.

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One of two American avocets released on July 21 makes its way to a playa lake where other avocets are gathered.

South Plains wildlife make local headlines

The summer of 2001 has been memorable to say the least, with wildlife playing starring roles in a number of stories covered by South Plains media outlets:

Storm Wreaks Havoc

On May 30, severe rain, high winds and hail storms ruined crops, flowerbeds and gardens, and stripped many trees of leaves. Animals, especially young ones, were hit hardest. Relentless hail pelted adults as well. Wildlife Center Manager Debbie Tennyson recounted that this storm seemed like a scene out of "Titanic" as volunteers moved the Center's outdoor animals to safety.

A total of 55 animals arrived at the Center the next day, a number surpassed only by a day in late May of 2000 when 58 animals were admitted following a severe hail storm.

Burrowing Owls Saved From Development Activity

Immediately following the storm, SPWRC admitted eight juvenile Burrowing owls displaced by development activity south of Lubbock. The construction

company has been working around the active burrows, which number 18-24.

However, affected birds will need to be relocated or admitted to SPWRC. The owls will eventually lose their homes when nesting season ends and further construction begins, but Rob Lee, special agent with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, hopes other suitable habitat in the county can be preserved. The owls at the Center will be released when they are capable of their independence. A local Eagle Scout, Nick Hall, is working on a project to create artificial burrows for the Center's admissions.

SPWRC Takes in Bobcats on Display at Local Pet Store

A trio of bobcat kittens became the talk of the town in late June when they were transferred to SPWRC from a local pet store where they were on display. The store owner and Wildlife Center Manager Debbie Tennyson agreed that bobcats do not make good pets, and the two came to an agreement in the best interests of the cats. The trio, named "Heckyll, Jeckyll, and Hyde," will stay at the Center until they are about five months old



Development activity displaced these Burrowing owls.

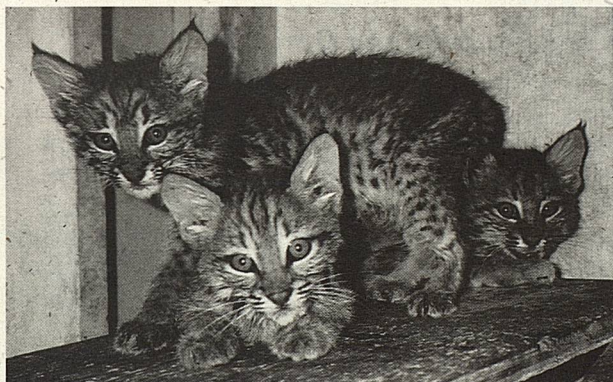
and ready for release. The cats will be released at a private ranch near Post, Texas, where they will once again enjoy their freedom and life in the wild. Many visitors at SPWRC's June 23 open house admitted attending the event out of curiosity to see the cats.

American Avocet Release Makes Front Page News

On July 22, the front page of the Lubbock *Avalanche-Journal* featured a photo of two juvenile American avocets released at a South Lubbock playa lake where other avocets were gathered.

A couple from Brownfield brought the birds to SPWRC when the playa lake the birds had inhabited dried up. Still unable to fly, the birds were literally stranded.

This release was another enchanted moment in SPWRC history, and a fitting end to the summer's media coverage. The successful rehabilitation and release of wildlife is our ultimate goal, and we are grateful to be part of a community that values wildlife and our services!



These bobcat kittens were transferred to SPWRC after being displayed at a local pet store.

News and notes



Carol Mitchell and Debbie Tennyson accept a \$1,500 grant from Xcel Energy Foundation.

Summer BBQ raises \$2,730 for SPWRC

Old friends and new attended a BBQ fundraiser at the County Line restaurant on August 3. More than 100 people attended the event, which was sponsored by the Lubbock Apartment Association. Folks enjoyed delicious food, and music by Bo Garza. Thanks to hosts Tracy Barden, Dalla Guerrerri and Kym Ruiz of the County Line for making this event a success!

SPWRC receives education program grant

Xcel Energy Foundation awarded SPWRC a \$1,500 grant to present environmental education programs to 10 Lubbock schools in 2001-2002. These programs will emphasize the importance of wildlife as a natural resource, and will give students the opportunity to view SPWRC's educational animals.

Chamber helps celebrate completion of SPWRC's new building

Lubbock Chamber of Commerce ambassadors joined SPWRC Board members and volunteers for an official "ribbon cutting" ceremony on July 20 to celebrate the completion of the Center's new building. Xcel Energy Foundation also presented the Center's educational program grant at the event.

Open House attracts record crowd

More than 1,500 people visited the Wildlife Center's Open House on June 23, a record number of visitors at this annual event. In addition to vacationers from Florida, New Jersey and Oklahoma, 21 South Plains communities were represented, and donations for the day totaled over \$1,500! A variety of species could be observed, including many songbirds, deer fawns, three bobcat kittens, eight juvenile Burrowing owls, American kestrel chicks and a hawk chick that was recently identified as a Swainson's hawk.

State wardens attend regional meeting

Wildlife Center Manager Debbie Tennyson presented a session on capture, care and restraint of wildlife for state game wardens on July 25. The wardens were visiting the Lubbock office of Texas Parks and Wildlife for a regional conference.

Librarians raise funds for Center

The staff at Godeke Library presented the Wildlife Center with a check for \$217 on July 11. Librarians have raised several thousand dollars over the years by selling bags of grain for 25 cents so the public can feed the ducks on the adjacent playa lake.

Jim Eppler to paint wildlife murals

Lubbock artist Jim Eppler will create a panel of wildlife murals for SPWRC's front fence. This project will be sponsored by longtime Wildlife Center supporters Marcy and Terry Taylor.

Exxon Mobil Corp. supports TTU intern

For every 20 hours that Wildlife Center intern Melissa Baird works, the Wildlife Center will receive \$500.00 through a program with Exxon Mobil Corporation. Melissa is a Texas Tech student studying under Dr. Lew Densmore.

SPWRC Board positions announced

The Wildlife Center welcomes Mrs. Willie Haragan as the newest member of our Board of Directors. Officers for the next year include Gyna Cole, president; Jill Haukos, vice president; Pat Harris, treasurer; and Dr. Mark Wallace, secretary. Other Board members include Christie Billing; Dr. Lou Densmore, Dr. Larry Farley, Dr. Mike Hooper, Karen McDonald and Robin Parks. Advisors include Rob Lee, Norman Orr, Ed Price and Leanna Smith. We would also like to welcome Dr. Tim Polk to the veterinary staff at Animal Medical Center. AMC vets Dr. Roger Freund, Dr. Larry Farley and Dr. Lane Preston have volunteered their services for many years, and we look forward to working with Dr. Polk.

Haunted Farm opens Oct. 26

Mark your calendar and plan on bringing a date to SPWRC's second annual "Haunted Farm!" The event will take place Friday and Saturday, Oct. 26 - 27 as well as Halloween night, Wednesday, Oct. 31. The cost will be \$5. Admission is free for children age 8 and younger; SPWRC will offer a separate area where young children can meet the educational animals and enjoy age-appropriate entertainment. Volunteers and sponsors are still needed for this fundraiser in addition to supplies, including heavy duty dining canopies. If you'd like to help, please contact Debbie Tennyson at 806-799-2142.

Fawns spotted on Wildlife Center grounds

Volunteers and supporters cannot help but fancy the fawns admitted to the Wildlife Center each summer.

We cared for our first fawn on June 8 after its tail was caught in a combine, and as of August 3, a total of 10 fawns had been admitted to the Center for various reasons.

These beautiful and captivating creatures require a special diet and careful rehabilitation for successful release back to the wild. Well-meaning folks, who find orphaned or injured fawns sometimes attempt to "help" the animals by feeding them cow's milk or other inappropriate foods. *Never* feed a wild creature without consulting

a wildlife rehabilitator first; the effects of an improper diet can be irreversible.

We'd like to extend a special thank you to Sue Hill and her family for traveling to the Wildlife Center from

Morton, Texas, several times a month to deliver fresh frozen goat's milk for our fawns. The generosity expressed by the

Hill family and the Center's many supporters makes it possible for us to give these creatures a second chance at life. The fawns will return the wild this fall when they are ready for release.

White-tailed deer fawn.

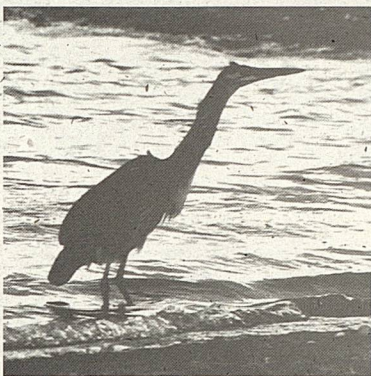


White-tailed deer fawns



Mule deer fawn.

Catch of the day



A Great blue heron catches an evening snack at one of Lubbock's play lakes.

Aviary building replacement project scheduled for fall 2001

The Wildlife Center is excited to replace our dilapidated aviary building with a larger, more versatile facility this fall. Lubbock architect Don Davis has drawn up the plans, and we expect construction to begin around October, when the old building is no longer in use by summer rehabilitation animals.

A halfway house of sorts, the aviary building is the next step of rehabilitation for birds and some mammals after they leave their artificial cup-nests, incubators and cages in our main work area. Here they spend several days or even weeks away from people and the watchful eye of volunteers. They can fly, climb, seek shelter, eat independently and experience night and day, inclement weather, and even lawnmowers. This temporary habitat is enhanced with natural branches and perches, pools and hiding places. Hatches can be opened or closed, allowing those that are ready for release access to the outdoors during daylight hours.

The new aviary will be larger to house more songbirds and mammals and better condition them for release. The 1,350 square foot facility will also be more versatile and easier to clean, with washable concrete floors and 11 interconnected rooms that will accommodate almost any species we might admit.

Proceeds from this year's fundraising events in addition to summer donations not needed for operational expenses will be used to begin construction. We will continue to accept funds and volunteer services to complete the project, however. If you'd like to help out, please contact Carol Mitchell at 806-745-8120.

Enchanted Moments:

Snapshots of the wild lives that continue to inspire SPWRC's service and success

The spring and summer months are the busiest time of year at the Wildlife Center, and it appears we will break our annual record for the total number of admissions once again. At press time, the Center admitted just over 1,300 animals in 2001 and released roughly two out of every three animals cared for.

During the summer, many species of animals are constantly being admitted and released, from songbirds to many species of mammals. Ten deer fawns have come from Lamesa, Andrews, Clarendon, Abilene and elsewhere. Scores of songbirds arrive weekly, and as others become self-feeding, they are released. Many Blue jays, doves, kingbirds, robins, mockingbirds and others are released weekly. A number of barn owls have been given a second chance at freedom as well. Back-up feeding for birds is provided well into September, until the various species are proficient at finding their natural food sources.

Despite the May 30 hailstorm wiping out many area Mississippi kites, 18 youngsters were at the Wildlife Center by mid-July. All are healthy and will be released in August.

Numerous mammals have also been released into appropriate habitats, including ground squirrels, jackrabbits and cottontails, skunks, raccoons and opossums.

With each passing year, it is clear the Wildlife Center is achieving our goals and staying true to our two-fold mission: to provide humane care and rehabilitation to orphaned, ill, injured and displaced wildlife with the ultimate goal of releasing these animals back into the wild; and to provide environmental education using a rational approach to appreciation and conservation of natural resources for future generations. Wild animals often come through our doors as a result of conflicts with humans, and it is our duty to give them a second chance at life. You never know when you'll experience an enchanted moment of your own as you observe the songbirds in your yard, a hawk circling overhead, or a lizard enjoying the sun. And it's possible that the wildlife you observe spent some time at SPWRC!

SPWRC depends on community for support

When we meet folks for the first time, they often say, "I never knew the Wildlife Center was here." But even people who know about SPWRC do not know the Center is an *all-volunteer*, 501(c)3 non-profit organization. That means all donations are tax-deductible to the extent the law allows, and because *no one receives a salary*, contributions directly support wildlife care.

The Center holds both state and federal wildlife rehabilitation permits, but receives no funds from either regulatory agency. In short, we depend on the generous support of the community to keep our doors open. Donations, grants, fundraising events, Center memberships and environmental education programs fund our services.

We are proud of the work that we do, and with every enchanted moment that passes, we feel lucky to have the privilege of working with South Plains wildlife, a treasured natural resource.

These moments are our dedication

SPWRC during

This adm

Young summ a mo



SPWRC has cared for and released 11 Black-crowned night herons during the summer months.



Summer just isn't summer without fawns!



This American alligator was among the list of exciting but "unusual" admissions in 2001.



Barn owl chicks are plentiful again this year.



Young opossums are commonly admitted in spring and summer, but it isn't every day that the Center cares for a mother opossum with babies!



This trio of bobcat kittens was the star attraction at the Wildlife Center's summer open house.

oments are the fuel that keeps us going, with
cation and commitment stronger than ever.

Volunteer Spotlight: Angie & Brent Wilkins**“Dynamic duo” share passion for wildlife**

Brent and Angie Wilkins, volunteers since 1999, are as terrific individually as they are as a team. They battle the heat, rain, wind and hail to care for South Plains wildlife, and they do this along with their full-time jobs.

Brent is the lawn and garden manager at Sears, and Angie is the manager of Buster Brown's shoe store. Even with busy careers and personal lives, this dynamic duo volunteer many hours each week.

Brent grew up in Lubbock and Plains, Texas and graduated from Frenship High School before attending South Plains College in Levelland. At the Center, he has enjoyed making new friends and learning to treat and care for injured animals. He has also developed a passion for raptors.

The first time he held our Golden eagle, Sierra, he felt a flood of emotion from being close to an animal so beautiful and



powerful. Brent enjoys working with Sierra and the Center's other educational animals, whether feeding, training or even cleaning up after them. C.C., a young Bald eagle and our newest wildlife ambassador, is under Brent's care and is his favorite.

Wife Angie, on the other hand, enjoys the deer fawns the most. One fawn in particular won her heart last year: “Mickey” the Mule deer. She says, “loading him

into the trailer for release was heart wrenching and joyful at the same time.”

Angie attended school in the Dallas area where she grew up. She moved to Lubbock to further her education at Texas Tech University. Her first love is education, and she is now actively involved in the Center's environmental education outreach programs. She believes native wildlife and its role in the environment is a critical issue and she enjoys educating others about it!

Brent and Angie share many memories of certain animals and rescues they have embarked on together. Someday, they hope to establish their own wildlife rehabilitation facility in New Mexico or Colorado. In the meantime, SPWRC and its furry and feathered are the richer for having them in our lives!

--Debbie Tennyson

Species profile: Burrowing owl (*Athene cunicularia*)**Habitat loss threatens a West Texas favorite**

Burrowing owls reside and breed across grassland regions of the U.S. and Canada. The Latin word *cunicularius* means “mine” or “miner,” an appropriate description for a bird who makes its home underground.

Adults have a round head and no ear tufts. Their expressive faces have yellow eyes and white eyebrows. Long legs characterize the owl's slender, robin-sized body, which reaches a height of 8.5 to 11 inches in adulthood. In flight, these owls appear larger



Juvenile Burrowing owl.

than they really are, with a wingspan of 20 to 24 inches.

In most raptor species, males are the smaller of the two sexes; however, male Burrowing owls are larger and heavier than females. Females are often darker in color.

These owls nest underground in abandoned burrows dug by mammals — or if soil conditions allow — they will dig their own burrows. Both sexes prepare the burrow for nesting using feet, beaks and wings to remove dirt. Dry materials as well as livestock dung line the nest; the dung may be used to attract dung beetles that the owls eat, as well as help to mask odors produced by the owls, making detection more difficult for predators.

Beetles and grasshoppers make up a significant portion of

their diet; small mammals, including mice, rats and ground squirrels, are also important foods. Other prey includes reptiles and amphibians, scorpions, young cottontails, bats and small birds.

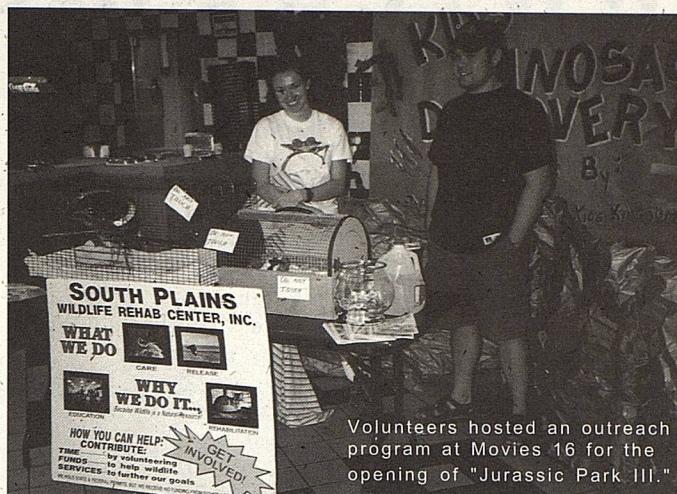
Burrowing owls are listed as endangered, threatened, or a “species of special concern” in many states and Canadian provinces, primarily due to habitat loss. Development is a growing problem for this species in West Texas. Earlier this summer, the Wildlife Center admitted eight juvenile Burrowing owls removed from a developing area south of Lubbock. The owls (including the one pictured here) are being raised at the Wildlife Center and will be released later this summer.

Education programs reach diverse audiences

Environmental education is part of the Wildlife Center's two-fold mission, and the Center has presented more than 25 programs to various organizations this year.

Most recently, SPWRC hosted programs for the City of Ralls Children's Camp, Critterfest at the Science Spectrum, Crosby County 4-H Council, Godeke Library, Stroke Patients Civic Club and the Scope of Science Careers for Girls program at Texas Tech University.

Executive Director Carol Mitchell also conducted a presentation at Iles Elementary School



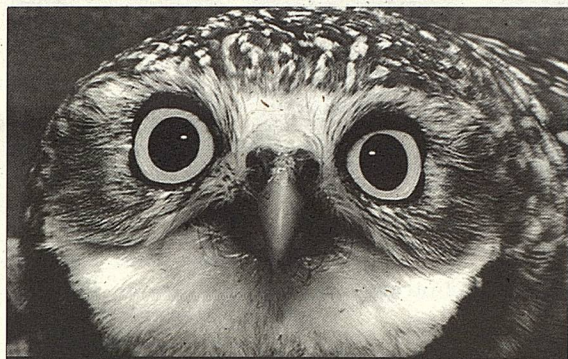
for about 90 children and adults as part of a "Kaleidoscope" program held at two Lubbock school locations. For several weeks prior to

the program, students filled a "nest" with supplies the Wildlife Center always needs. The nest was a baby wading pool covered

with brown paper and filled with tissues, baby food, bird seed, pecans, detergent, baby blankets and other useful items.

Movie goers have even had the chance to experience wildlife up close and personal this summer. Volunteers were on hand for the opening of "Jurassic Park III" at Movies 16 to promote the importance of South Plains wildlife.

As the year progresses, SPWRC will continue its outreach programs, using a rational approach to conservation of natural resources for future generations.



STOP!

If you've been meaning to renew your membership, adopt your favorite wildlife ambassador, or simply send a donation, *please don't delay*. Turn to page 11, complete the form and send your contribution today. Because SPWRC is an all-volunteer organization, your gift will directly support wildlife care. Thank you!

FOCUS ON NATURE™ by Rochelle Mason



The BLACK-CAPPED VIREO

(Vireo atricapillus) is an active 4 1/2 inch songbird with white "spectacles" and yellow wing bars. The male has a jet black head with green-gray coloring above and whitish underparts. The female's more camouflage coloring is gray with greenish-yellow underparts. This vireo feeds mostly on insects found in dwarf oak woodland and thicket habitats in rugged terrain. Nesting occurs in the summer from central Oklahoma to west and central Texas. Wintering grounds are in Mexico. Brown-headed cowbirds which trick other bird species into raising their young are the main threat to the vireo's populations. A donation of your time or money to a nature conservation organization will not only help save this endangered vireo's habitats but aid efforts to control the parasitic cowbirds.

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Rochelle Mason www.rmasonfinearts.com (808) 985-7311.

Acknowledgments

\$1,500

Xcel Energy Foundation

\$400 - \$600

Lisa & Travis Bruster
Ruth Cantrell
Dr. & Mrs. David Close
Bill & Margaret Couch
Greg Ellis
Kathy Phillips

\$100 - \$399

The Randy Andrews Family
Marilyn & Jim Blasingame
Jeremy Borger
JoAnn & Thame Chapman
Godeke Library
Margaret and Perry Lockett
Lubbock Apartment Assoc.
Catherine Ronaghan, M.D.,
and Bill Nolan
Dr. & Mrs. Billy Sealy

\$50 - \$99

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Tennyson
Bill Van Pelt
Myrtle & Bob Veach
Mark & Janet Wallace
Kimberly Weatherford
Melissa Wilborn
Angie and Brent Wilkins
Laura and Todd Winans

Adoptions

Mary Asbell & Allan MacKenzie
adopted **Fifi**.

Kathryn Northcutt adopted
Maddie for Adrienne Pyeatt.

Dr. & Mrs. Johansson
Cordero adopted **Fritz** for
Jeffrey Cordero.

Max and Alzada Malone
adopted **Bobby**.

Gifts to Honor

Marjorie & Lee Manning
sent a gift in honor of Liz
Rylander.

Marsha & Roger Polen gave
a gift for Jessica Birchum.

Memorials

Gerene Rowe gave a gift in
memory of "Mikie," beloved
Chihuahua of Jean & Ellis Ivey.

Carol Mitchell's first inspiration
into the world of birds, Clara
Lückenbach of Allentown, Penn.,
died in May 2001 at the age
of 91. An avid birder for over
75 years, Clara had been on
more than 45 consecutive annual
Christmas Bird Counts.

A Note from the Director

During the spring and
summer months, the
Wildlife Center is a
whirlwind of activity with
phone calls, admissions,
and emergencies, 15 hours a
day. If we have overlooked
your gift inadvertently,
*kindly accept our apologies
and please call or e-mail
the Center at 799-2142 or
spwrc@hub.ofthe.net, and
your name will be included
in our next newsletter.*

Need a meaningful gift for a friend or loved one?



Sierra
Golden Eagle
\$50

Consider "adopting" a SPWRC wildlife ambassador or giving a gift to honor or remember friends, colleagues, or family members. Gifts of \$20 or more include a one-year subscription to *The Mockingbird Chronicles*. All recipients will be notified with a personalized announcement from Carol Mitchell, SPWRC executive director. Your gift will help give wildlife a second chance at life! All donations are tax deductible to the extent the law allows.



Percy
American White Pelican
\$50



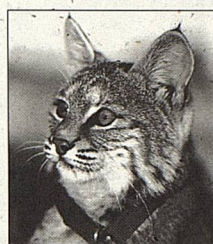
Empress
Peregrine Falcon
\$40



Fritz
Gray Fox
\$40



Bubo 2
Great Horned Owl
\$40



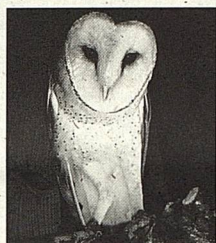
Bobby
Bobcat
\$40



Harris
Harris's Hawk
\$30



Mardigan
Red-tailed Hawk
\$30



Jasper
Common Barn Owl
\$30



Festus
Turkey Vulture
\$30



Fifi
Striped Skunk
\$30



Bandit
Raccoon
\$30



Maddie
American Kestrel
\$20



Louie
Eastern Screech Owl
\$20

Your name: _____

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☐ I'd like to support SPWRC by adopting a wildlife ambassador(s): _____ Total: _____

☐ \$_____ of this contribution is a gift for: _____ ☐ Membership

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Name: _____ Address: _____

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I'd like to support SPWRC with a membership donation at this level:

- | | |
|--|-------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Benefactor | \$500 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Patron | \$100 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Supporting Member | \$50 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Organization or Group | \$30 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family Membership | \$25 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Individual Membership | \$20 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Student or Senior Citizen | \$15 |

Mail form to: Carol Mitchell, c/o SPWRC • 3101 77th St. • Lubbock, TX 79423 (make checks payable to SPWRC)

Surrogate program fills important niche at SPWRC

It stands to reason that a Blue jay or a barn owl will grow up more naturally with a member of its own species than it would with a human or member of a species different from its own. Whenever possible, birds are placed with their own kind. These older or foster animals do not always feed or take an active part in the care of the young newcomer, but by default, they do take on an active or passive position as a role model.

Young Blue jays placed with older birds are able to observe normal Blue jay behaviors. While some behaviors are instinctive, others are picked up in other ways, just as human infants learn by example. Some animals, particularly birds, go above and beyond the call of duty and actually take a youngster under its wing to raise as its own.

For years, the Wildlife Center was home to two permanently grounded Common barn owls who aptly lived up to their names, "Mean" and "Nasty," but together they raised dozens of baby barn owls that were admitted each year. These two owls not only protected, but fed the

many owlets over their life times. Of course, we must always consider the well-being of these foster parents, and we are careful to avoid overwhelming them with too many charges.

Our educational Great horned owl, Bubo 2, does not actively feed or "rear" the chicks placed in her enclosure, but she does provide an "owl" figure for the young chicks to emulate. She has helped raise several youngsters this year that were later released when they could hunt and make it on their own in the wild.

"Maddie," our educational American kestrel, doubles as a foster parent when spring and baby kestrels arrive. Not only is she fiercely protective of "her" babies, but she

carefully feeds each of her charges in turn. She is actually a better surrogate parent than she is an educational bird; feisty and with an attitude of defiance, Maddie without a doubt lives for baby season!

Note: non-releasable birds like Bubo 2 and Maddie that are legally retained for "education" may double as surrogate parents, but they may not be used for both purposes at the same time.



Bubo 2 is a role model for Great horned owl chicks.



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The Mockingbird
Chronicles