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# THE MOCKINGBIRD CHRONICLES

Newsletter of the South Plains Wildlife Rehabilitation Center, Inc.

1996

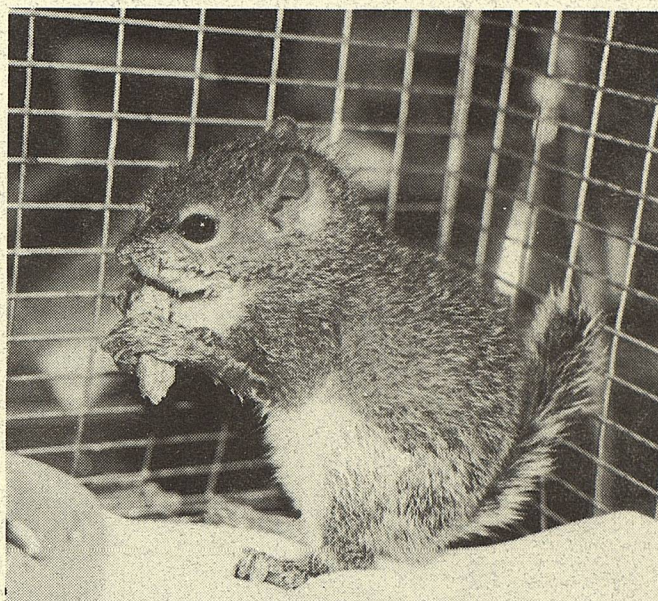
3308 95th Street, Lubbock, Texas 79423 • (806) 799-2142

Volume 2 Number 1

## OLD NEWS & NEW NEWS

A number of wonderful things have happened at the Wildlife Center over the past eight years. We will summarize some of those highlights and notable events in future issues. In the fall of 1992, *Texas Country Reporter* contacted us about doing a story on the Canada Geese in Lubbock. I spent the day with Brian Hawkins at Lake Ransom Canyon, area fields and playas where he took hours of video footage and turned it into an exceptional television Goose story. In April of 1994, we were one of three non-profit organizations given a \$1000 J. C. Penney "Golden Rule" award, for our wildlife work and our utilization of volunteers. It was a most welcomed surprise! In February of 1995, we saved and *released* our first oiled bird: A Northern Harrier had fallen into a crude oil pit in Big Spring. These cases are very labor intensive, and it may take many washes with *Dawn* and water at the correct temperature to remove every trace of oil. The birds' stress, body temperature and nutrition are critical concerns during the early phases of care, and must be constantly monitored. It was great to send this unfortunate hawk back on his way. We have had others (including a Barn Owl, House Finch and Kestrel which did not fare so well). As for *new* news, the year starts off as most do, with an admission every day or two; this will soon change! We recently helped with one interesting rescue: A Common Grackle was bound in a treetop in monofilament line, and a concerned family reported he was struggling in the same place for over 24 hours. The Asplundh Tree Expert Company brought their bucket truck to his aid, and freed him. We later cut the rest of the strands, looked after him for two days, and then sent him on his way. On February 3rd, the Center again participated in the "Love Drive." This is sponsored by KTXT-TV, The Volunteer Center of Lubbock, and South Plains Mall to match volunteers with non-profit agencies. 53 non-profits were represented, and more than 518,000

volunteer hours have been pledged thus far. "Bubo," our educational Great Horned Owl apparently got a hoot out of being a celebrity, as she *didn't stop* hooting through our presentation, or anyone else's! We also taught "Super Saturdays" at Texas Tech. We had 14 fourth-seventh graders in our "Birds of Prey" class, and it has been most enjoyable sharing information with these very bright and motivated students.



## Our little Gray Friends....

We have had a number of requests to include some "squirrel" information in this issue. People either love them or hate them; no middle of the road. In March, 1994, Debbie Tennyson was the epitome of "Grace Under Fire" when she attended the Mayor's meeting to address the "squirrel problem" in Lubbock. She provided factual information about gray squirrels to concerned citizens. "We don't take sides, we simply take care of them when they run into trouble," she explained. One woman demanded to know if *her* tax dollars funded us, because she "*hated squirrels!*" Debbie smiled, and politely told her no. We have included in this issue a few articles about the fuzzy little guys, and you can decide where you stand on your opinion of them! Gray squirrels are protected under Texas State Law, so remember, it is not legal to keep this animal as a pet.

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## THE MOCKINGBIRD CHRONICLES

**Note from the Director...**...or maybe I should say "*Tar Baby*" because my last photo looked not unlike the character from *Brer' Rabbit*! Despite never having been to a tanning salon, I managed to look quite charred, so for those of you who never met me, it was hard to imagine just *what "the director" actually was...* maybe even an unnamed species?? Anyway, Ginny's was apologetic, as their camera malfunctioned, and we are always in need of some comic relief!

### Letter from the Director...

**T**hanks to each of you who became members recently. Thank you for believing in what we do, and why we do it. Since I became state and federally licensed in 1989, my involvement in wildlife care has insidiously taken over my life. It has been contagious. At the start, I was *the* volunteer, and now we have 35. Since the humble beginning in my home caring for a few songbirds, we presently accommodate an annual census of well over 1000. We have stayed "afloat" because of the generosity of the community, and scores of individuals. Each day has been a challenge. Whether it is a displaced owl, a Robin with an eye injury or a Heron with a broken leg, each case is a challenge. Some cases do not have happy endings. Is it all worth it? Absolutely. My personal experiences have been like a look into Nature's soul. Thank you again, one and all, for seeing us into 1996, and our eighth year of wildlife rehabilitation and education.



### VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

**BRITNEY HAGER...**by Mary Baze

**T**his issue's volunteer spotlight is on Britney Hager, a 21 year old Museum Science major at Texas Tech, who is originally from Silver Spring, Maryland. She is currently working as a student assistant at the Texas Tech Museum Natural Science Research Lab. She hopes someday to be a Museum Collection Manager specializing in mammals. Britney has volunteered at the center since January 1994. She has volunteered at several

animal shelters since high school and after seeing the Wildlife Center listed in a local volunteer directory, decided to take the next logical step in gaining experience: wildlife care. "My favorite part of working at the center is all the new encounters, having a variety of experiences, and working with a diversity of species." She related that on her *first* day at the center a rather difficult raven took hold of her finger and wouldn't let go while she tried to change his cage. Luckily, there was no serious damage done. Britney is certainly dedicated, and is still with us 2 years later. One of her highlights was releasing a bird and remembering what a "neat feeling" it was. Truly this is why we are all here!

Ed. Note: Some of our more unusual species that die are donated to the Natural Science Research Museum at Texas Tech University.



Britney Hager, holding our Educational Kestrel

*"In nature there are neither rewards nor punishments - only consequences."*

Robert G. Ingersoll

**J**osh Tennyson, son of our on-site managers Rick & Debbie, entered a "Reflections" Photography Program recently, sponsored by PTA groups. His entry "My Wild Life," a collage of wildlife photos of animals currently at the Center, won first place at Waters Elementary, then in all schools, and his work will now enter state competition!

### NEW SIGN COMPLETED

**A**fter over four months of planning, changing and editing the design long-distance, our new sign has been completed and sent. Thank you to Trent Brabant of Bratton's Signs Enterprises, in Intercourse, Pennsylvania. It will be in place soon.

## THE MOCKINGBIRD CHRONICLES

### EUTHANASIA - the difficult subject

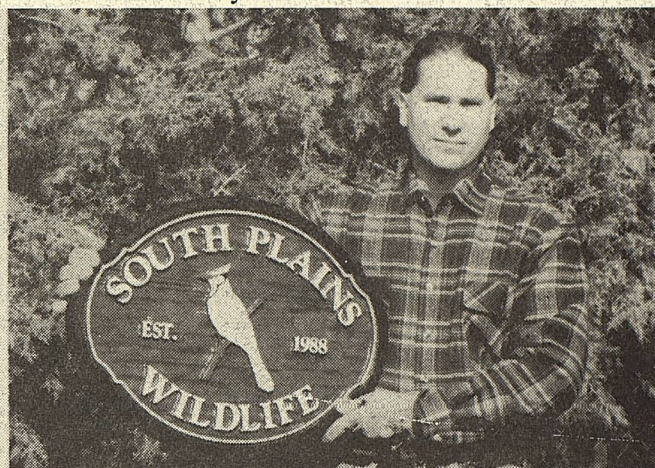
Euthanasia is a necessary part of wildlife rehabilitation. This is a decision that cannot be reversed, and demands a great deal of consideration. *Making* these decisions is never simple, and many factors enter into the decision making process. Euthanasia can and will be endlessly debated. However, the subject must be addressed, because it is an integral part of our work with wildlife. We need for people to understand, even if they do not agree, a few things about our position. First, our **goal is release**, and by the *terms of our permits*, we may not simply "retain" those animals which *cannot* be released back into the wild. If we "kept" every animal we could not help since 1989, we would have several hundred dependent animals with crippled legs or flightless wings. We would not have adequate space or resources to care for these animals. We would not have *time* to care for them, along with the hundreds of newcomers ...many of which are animals which DO have a chance at release once again. I have had to spend 7 years in rehabilitation to understand this fully. *When the animal is admitted* we must make an initial assessment: are we giving that animal a reasonable chance at release and *survival* on its own, or are we simply prolonging its pain and suffering? To quote a few lines from the Fall 1993 Journal of Wildlife Rehabilitation, "The animals with the most hopeless injuries often seem to be the ones with the strongest spirits to live, and the ones which fight the hardest. In any case, we must take responsibility for their lives, and their deaths; it is very hard to admit that the best you may be able to give this animal is a painless death." We *want* to save every animal we touch, even though our rational thoughts tell us this is not possible. The reality is that death is a part of life, and an eventuality. This is never an easy decision for any of us who work with wildlife. As we all know, some animals are admitted hopelessly ill or injured and cannot be "fixed" or put back together. We do hope that through our continuing efforts and our membership's help, we can provide better and better care, and improve the **likelihood of release** for each animal admitted to us.

### -- SPECIES PROFILE --

#### THE BLUE JAY (*Cyanocitta cristata*)

The genus and species name define him well: Blue chattering crested bird. They are members of the Corvid family, which includes jays, crows and magpies. They have adapted to living in close proximity with man, and often exhibit aggressive behavior, which

does not always make them a *popular* backyard bird. Blue Jays are omnivorous, eating seeds, nuts, fruits, insects, carrion, small invertebrates, bird eggs and nestling birds. The female usually lays 4-5 eggs, which will be incubated for 16-18 days, while the male brings her food. We see infant jays here by the end of April, with droves of injured, displaced and kidnaped fledges arriving the beginning of May through early September. Fledglings leave the nest when they are about 17-21 days old, but remain with parents until about the 4th month, and often longer. *Hatchlings are fed every 20 minutes about 14 hours per day.* (Yes, at our center, too.) Blue Jays are highly intelligent, and are excellent parents. (We will be devoting much of our next newsletter to **Baby Birds**; Blue Jays were our most numerous songbird species last year, with a total of 110 cared for, mostly fledglings. We will include *when* to rescue, along with guidelines and information which can be used during baby season to help you make decisions that will be best and for you and for the bird.



Drew Adams, with our new sign.  
Drew was one of our first TTU interns.

### MORE THAN A FEED & RELEASE PROGRAM

By Hope Hall

South Plains Wildlife contributes much to the wildlife and the people of the South Plains. Veterinary care is provided to sick and injured wildlife. Humane care is given to convalescing and displaced animals. *Release* is the primary goal. Educational presentations help inform children and adults about indigenous wildlife. Students can learn about various species through hands-on experience, and those students participating in internship programs undertake projects and research papers. Volunteers learn many things: the natural history of species admitted, behaviors, preferred habitat, and common diseases, to name only a few. We hope that through these continuing programs within the community, people will develop a better understanding and appreciation of our native species.

## THE MOCKINGBIRD CHRONICLES

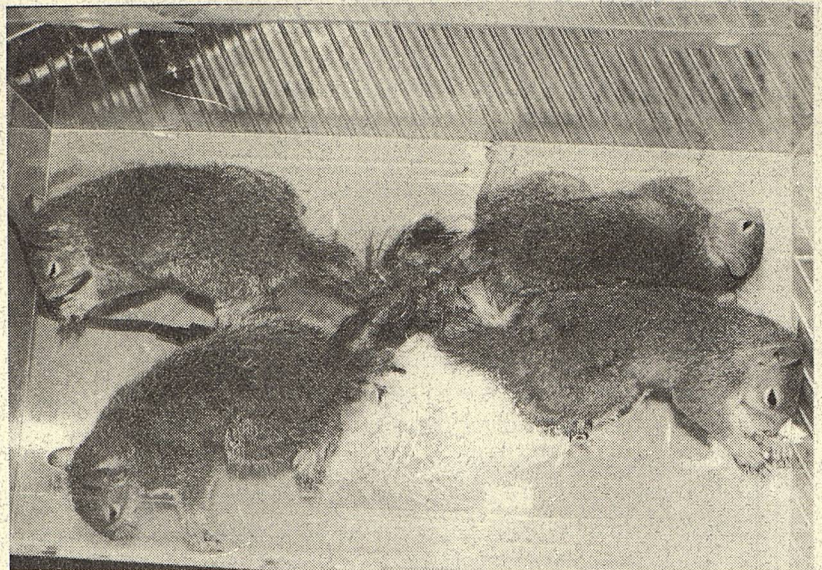
### ITEMS NEEDED:

- ✓ A freezer, in working order
- ✓ A portable phone/answering machine combination
- ✓ Gerber baby food: Beef, chicken, apples and pears, applesauce and sweet potatoes
- ✓ Towels without fringes and pillow cases
- ✓ Dry *Purina-brand* cat chow (Soaked, this is a nutritionally complete weaning food for songbirds; in summer we use more than one half pound each day).
- ✓ We also need small electric space heaters, trees, bedding plants, shrubs and landscape timbers.

### THE RESULTS ARE IN

The Wildlife Center admitted approximately 845 animals in 1995: 646 wild birds, 173 mammals, and 26 reptiles. They arrive at the center, and also show up in boxes on my front porch. There may be a dozen or so which inadvertently "fall through the cracks"- we keep handwritten admission entries at both sites, before being entered into the computer. These are the animals which are listed as "protected" under State and/or Federal laws. This does *not* include the English (House) Sparrow, the Starling, pigeon, or domestic white or hybrid "park" ducks. The Center *does admit and care* for those species, but they are not counted in our year-end recording. Approximately 454 animals were released back into the wild; 54 were euthanized. The remainder died, were wintered over into 1996, or were transferred to other permitted facilities. I believe the national statistics still agree that if you can release 50% of your wildlife casualties, you can feel good about it! Of the total admitted, we cared for 173 mammals, and, you guessed it, the most numerous was the gray squirrel. We have raised and cared for squirrels from a few grams and a few hours old to adults in dire straits (read on!). We will list more of the statistics we hope you will find interesting in the next issue.

**Thank you to . . .** Dr. Don Hegi, Eric Nelson, PetsMart, Judie Marquis, Richard Evans of Pets Plus, Dr. George Jury for food and supplies, and Lois Tanner of Tech Type for typesetting this newsletter. We also thank the South Plains Food Bank for seed. Dr. Louis Mitchell donated an air conditioner for the workshop, and Bill Gallagher donated his time and talent for the blackbird rescue. Joe Bill Rogers of *Flyers Specialty Pets* gave us crickets and other food. Norman Orr brought pecans & Charles Swift brought supplies. Jackson Elementary donated cash.



**The Tangled Ones**  
in the Animal Medical Center incubator

### TANGLED TALES

by Debbie Tennyson

A new year is upon us and I'm sure there will be plenty of tales to tell, but none quite so bizarre (*hopefully*) as this one from May of 1995. Early one afternoon, a woman called and said she had some squirrels that had gotten tangled in the vines on her house. She had cut them out of the vine as much as she possibly could on her own. I told her we would gladly care for them, just bring them out to the center. When she arrived, I carefully opened the box and to my total amazement, there were four half-grown squirrels with not vines tying them together any longer, but their own tails! I couldn't believe it! (Neither could anyone else who saw them that day!). Certainly *our* hands were tied - we could do nothing without anesthesia help from Dr. Farley. "It looked like someone had taken all four of their tails and tied them together like shoestrings," he said. (Or the tiger's tails in *Little Black Sambo*!) Unfortunately the only solution was to amputate above each "knot;" as the blood supply was already gone to the part of the tail below. Fortunately, all did well and were released two weeks later. On occasion I'll see one scamper across the yard and I have to smile. One of life's little tragedies *did* turn out to have a happy ending after all!

Our Fund-Raising **GARAGE SALE** will be April 13, 1996 at 3101 77th Street (corner 77th & Flint). This is a time you can unload your treasures and help us raise money. It is fairly painless, and we usually make about \$700.00. Drop off at 3308 95th Street - East side of Indiana and 95th at the house behind the privacy fence.

### THE EASTERN GRAY SQUIRREL

A few notes on this species: Several species of squirrels are native to Texas, including the Gray squirrel. These Tree Squirrels breed throughout the year, although in Lubbock, we have never had infants in December or January. (Yet?). The gestation period is 40-45 days, and an average litter is 2-4. Eyes open at about 30 days. They leave the nest at around 12-16 weeks of age, and this is when they often run into trouble - predators, cars, etc. We are asked what to offer them for food. The tree is actually like a squirrel supermarket, containing all the animal needs to survive: buds, bark, fruit, nuts, leaves, and yes, they do eat leaves! They also have a fondness for electrical wires, and will tear into paper bags to use to line their nests. Infants we receive must be on a Esbilac-based formula. (Puppy milk replacer, plus what the *squirrel* needs for a milk substitute). Criteria for release include: being fully developed; can recognize natural foods, accustomed to noises; hardened off gradually and can manage in inclement weather. Cute as they may be, we do not "pet" and play with them while they are with us for care. To do this would severely compromise the animal. We do NOT want them to associate people with food, and they must be able to adapt to the wild once they are no longer in our care. Back up feeding is provided.

*Did you know...* On average, one baby squirrel can consume more than an ounce of formula (Esbilac + additives) per day. This costs us approximately \$2.00 a day. We have had anywhere from 1-12 squirrel youngsters at one time.

### SQUIRREL HOUSING

We are often asked how to build squirrel houses. Generally they can be made easily out of almost anything. They need not be very big, about 2 ft. X 3 ft. The most important thing to remember is that their entrance need only be a few inches in diameter, just large enough for their access, and NOT predators. An easy and inexpensive way is to use a mail box; cut a hole in the side, for an entrance and leave the door closed, hang facing upward. This gives you access for cleaning. They can be painted and made very attractive for your little friends. If you take *our* young squirrels for release on *your* property (we have a **waiting list** for squirrels!) we will advise you on pre-release conditioning and housing. A 4x4x4 ft cage will house up to 4 squirrels. It should be at least 24" off the ground, and contain soft bedding. The squirrels need to be gradually "hardened off" and acclimated to their surroundings. Back up feeding must be provided. Nesting boxes for your yard's resident squirrels should be at least 10 ft. off the ground.

### Llano Estacado Audubon Society

Andy Sansom, Executive Director of Texas Parks & Wildlife Department in Austin has accepted an invitation to speak at the April 2, 1996 meeting of the Llano Estacado Audubon Society. Formerly he was the executive director of The Nature Conservancy of Texas. He recently wrote "Texas Lost: Vanishing Heritage." This will be at 7 PM at the Ranching Heritage Center. It is free and open to the public.

We admitted a Ring-tailed Cat for care in January; this was a new species for us, and it came from within Lubbock city limits. We kept him, and fed him well during the few days he remained with us. Renee Meunier took him to a wooded area east of here for release. Charter Members & Organizations which have donated \$100 or more in funds & service will be periodically listed again, also.

### NEW MEMBERS

#### *Benefactor*

Dr. & Mrs. Harold K. Smith

#### *Patrons:*

Marla Riddlespurger

Dr. Alan Row

Dr. James E. Shotwell

#### *Supporting*

Herb & Kathy Boatwright

Dr. Cheryl Weber & Mr. Fred Weber

Maner, Maner & Hogan Law Office

#### *Organization Members*

Dr. Don Hegi & The Animal Care Clinic

#### *Family Members*

Tom & Robin Boudreaux

Jamie Casper

Marla & Charle Huddleston

#### *Individuals*

Elayne Banks

Beth Claybough

June Ducker

George & Bonnie Hager

Thomas & Wanda Hager

Robin Hinn

Dodavah Lawrence

Claudette Miller

Bob Rasa

Jerrie Rodgers

Sellie Shine

Ted Simon

Jane Stuart

Reid Ware

## MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

If you will consider becoming a member, and help our organization continue to help wildlife, please send the attached form, along with your tax deductible check Please consider an affiliation with us and help us help wildlife.

- |                                                    |          |
|----------------------------------------------------|----------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Benefactor                | \$500.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Patron                    | 100.00   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Supporting Member         | 50.00    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Organization or Group     | 30.00    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family Membership         | 25.00    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Individual Membership     | 20.00    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Student or Senior Citizen | 15.00    |

Your Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Organization or Group: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Please mail this registration form along with your financial support to: Carol Mitchell, South Plains Wildlife Rehabilitation Center  
3101 77th Street, Lubbock, Texas 79423

Make your check payable to ***South Plains Wildlife Rehabilitation Center, Inc.***

## RECRUITING VOLUNTEERS

**S**eeing individuals, 17 or older, who love animals and don't mind a little hard work. Even if you have only one hour a month or several to spare, we *need* YOU! Baby season is fast approaching (and we will have baby birds which need to be fed about *every 30 minutes about 12-15 hours each day*, beginning in April, through August, plus infant mammals) and we need as many volunteers as possible. To set up an orientation date, please contact Debbie at (806) 799-2142.

**Volunteers gave 224 hours of time in January.**

## THE MOCKINGBIRD CHRONICLES

South Plains Wildlife Rehabilitation Center, Inc.

3308 95th Street

Lubbock, Texas 79423