
TALES FROM THE TREE

The Quarterly Newsletter of Ziggy's Tree Wildlife Rehabilitation Center



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E-mail: ziggystreewildlife@gmail.com

NATURE'S CLEANING CREW

Spring cleaning....that resolution we all make to clean out the clutter from last year. Mother Nature doesn't have to worry about doing the cleaning herself. She's got a really great janitorial staff – Turkey Vultures, Black Vultures and Virginia Opossums.

Many people consider vultures and opossums ugly or disgusting. But we love and respect them for that special niche that have in our ecosystem.

Vultures

Of the three species in the vulture family, two call Tennessee home – Turkey Vulture (*Cathartes aura*) and the Black Vulture (*Coragyps atratus*). Vultures have small, unfeathered heads, a good style for a bird that eats dead things. Their talons are fairly weak and not suited for killing live prey. Vultures do not build nests, but typically lay their eggs in a sheltered spot on the ground, or in an abandoned shed or barn.

Turkey Vultures are the larger of the two. The adults are easily recognizable by their red heads. In flight, their wings are held upward in a shallow "V" called a dihedral. They typically glide on thermals and rock side to side in flight, seldom flapping their wings once they are up. You might see a large flock or "kettle" of vultures circling in the sky looking for their next meal. It is widely believed that the Turkey Vulture is one of the only birds with a developed sense of smell.

Black Vultures are slightly smaller than the Turkey Vulture. As the name suggests, their heads are black. They also have a much shorter tail and broader wings and are more aggressive than the Turkey Vulture. They are less efficient in spotting carrion and may follow a Turkey Vulture flock and bully their way into the meal. They may also prey on young birds and small mammals.

Both species begin their breeding season as early as January. They usually lay 2 eggs which hatch in 4 to 5 weeks. The hatchlings have downy feathers – Black Vultures are more of a buffy color while Turkey Vultures have white to creamy-white down.

They are fed regurgitated food by both parents, leave the nest at about 2-1/2 to 3 months of age, and spend another 2 to 3 months with the parents.



Nestling Black Vulture

This past year, we were involved in one of the best rescues – because they were birds we never had to take out of the wild. We received a call from a rescuer in Lincoln County, TN – she had returned home after a business trip to find two vulture carcasses in her pasture. She was concerned as she felt these were the birds that had nested in her barn, and there were now two orphaned youngsters.

We immediately contacted our friend Anne Miller with Reunite Wildlife (www.reunitewildlife.com). Anne is continuing her research on reuniting young birds of prey with their parents and would be able to give us sound advice on the best approach to keep this birds out of a rehabilitation situation. Since vultures raised in captivity habituate to humans very easily, we wanted to avoid removing them from the wild if possible. Luckily, we had a very cooperative rescuer. She was willing to cover herself in black clothing and a black ski mask to place food in the barn near the nest site for as long as it took for the two youngsters to fledge.

But the next concern was their acceptance into the local flock. It is believed that Black Vulture chicks must be introduced to the flock by their parents. Would these two be accepted?

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Then something wonderful happened. Another vulture from the flock began hanging out with the youngsters. As they fledged, they were seen sitting on top of the barn with the adult. They soon began to take test flights but returned to their nest area for another two weeks. They began to spend less and less time at the nest area, and were seen with the rest of the flock. Success!!

Virginia Opossum

The Virginia Opossum (*Didelphis virginiana*) is our only North American marsupial. Females have a pouch, or marsupium, similar to kangaroos. The young are born after a gestation period of just 12-13 days, and are still embryonic when they leave the birth canal. They are roughly the size of a navy bean. The babies attach to one of the mother's nipples and remain attached for about 2 months. While a female may give birth to twenty or more pups, those that do not reach a nipple do not survive. The average surviving litter is eight to ten pups, but we have received as many as twelve from one litter.

Opossums are nocturnal and solitary. They are about the size of a large house cat. They have 50 very sharp teeth. When threatened, they can react in a couple of ways. They may "play possum", rolling over, shutting their eyes and allow their tongue to hang out as if they were dead. Or they may try to bluff their attacker by displaying their teeth, hissing and drooling. And they emit a foul smelling musk that is a mighty deterrent to any would-be predator. Trust us on that one!

Opossums do not hibernate, but may den for several days during extreme cold. They do risk frostbite if they are out in cold weather as their tails and ears do not have any fur.

The main part of their diet is carrion, but they also eat cockroaches, snails, slugs mice and rats, as well as windfall fruit.

Opossums are the exception to the rule that wildlife does not abandon their babies. Once the babies leave the pouch, they may get left behind if they fall off of mama's back.

Young opossums (less than 9 inches long from nose to butt) cannot survive on their own and if found, need to be brought to a wildlife rehabilitator. In a typical year, we will admit 60-75 baby opossums. Most of these babies are found on or near a dead (hit by car) mother. Older babies that have been separated from their mother are often the victim of attacks by domestic pets, especially free-roaming cats.



The little opossum pictured above was still in her mother's pouch when the mother was struck and killed by a car. Her front leg had a degloving injury - the skin had been peeled back, exposing all the tissue underneath. Thanks to Dr. Amy Nickels of Pet Medical Center, we were able to get the leg wound sutured. For the next 10 days, she was given a course of antibiotics. After the wound site had completely healed, the sutures were removed. We continued to provide supportive care and a healthy opossum diet. She was successfully released along with her three uninjured siblings about 6 weeks after surgery.



One of our more resourceful rescuers brought us a special surprise. She had created a substitute pouch for some orphaned opossums out of a stuffed bear. This group was kept warm and comfortable during their transport to us in something that probably felt very much like their mother's pouch!

Opossums are kept in our care until they are about 4 months old. They are fed a nutritious diet and given room to hone their climbing and foraging skills. Before they are released, we will hide food in their cages to make sure they know how to forage for food once they leave our care.

MEET OUR PARTNER – THE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION OF MIDDLE TENNESSEE



NEWS

We stayed busy this winter with baby squirrels. We had several unseasonably late babies followed by some harsh winter weather, so we over-wintered 30 Eastern Gray Squirrels and 4 Southern Flying Squirrels.

We expected a heavy spring crop of babies, but due to the harsh weather in January and February, intakes were somewhat delayed. However, March intakes have increased with 12 babies so far this month.

Have you heard that Ziggy's Tree has received a \$4,000 grant from The Animal Welfare Fund of The Community Foundation of Middle Tennessee? These funds will be used to support our songbird rehabilitation program, and will help us to purchase food, supplies and upgrade our caging for these wonderful, delicate creatures. Our goal is to continue to improve our release rate, which reached 75% this past year.

The Community Foundation awarded more than \$1.65 million in grants to 265 nonprofit organizations as part of The Foundation's 2014 annual discretionary grant-making. The Community Foundation awards discretionary grants annually from its unrestricted and field-of-interest funds, through an open application process, to Middle Tennessee nonprofit organizations addressing community needs and benefiting the well-being of citizens through valuable programs and innovative services. The Foundation connects generosity with need in order to build a stronger community for the future. To learn more, please visit www.CFMT.org.

Our friends John Stokes and Dale Kernahan with **Wings to Soar**, a non-profit environmental education group in north Georgia asked us to accompany them on a series of trainings. They are working with state park rangers who have or will be acquiring non-releasable birds of prey for use in education programs. The one day training sessions included information on training, housing, nutrition and medical management of hawks and owls. We already work closely with the ranger staff at Tims Ford State Park, assisting in the care of their birds, but it was great to meet other local rangers and establish a working relationship with them as well.

We have also conducted a training class for the new rehabilitation staff at the Chattanooga Zoo in preparation for the baby season.



Jerry Williams, Community Foundation president, LouAnn Partington, Ziggy's Tree board member and avian specialist and Angela Hensley, Ziggy's Tree board member and mammal specialist.

We are extremely grateful to The Animal Welfare Fund of The Community Foundation of Middle Tennessee for their continued support!



Eastern Screech Owl

One of the Eastern Screech owls we received in November (pictured above) suffered a severe head injury and some vision loss, which appears to be permanent. Once all the proper paperwork has been submitted and approved by the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency and US Fish & Wildlife Service, this little guy will be transferred to **Wings to Soar** to become part of their ongoing environmental education and outreach efforts. To learn more about Wings to Soar, visit their website at www.soarsouth.org.

SAVE THE DATE – MAY 5, 2015 THE BIG PAYBACK

Thanks to the folks that supported us during The Big Payback 2014, we were able to build a new flight conditioning cage for our songbirds!



Our old cages had served us well, but were in dire need of repair after 10 years of use.

We will again be participating in The Community Foundation of Middle Tennessee's **The Big Payback**, a one day on-line giving event. For a minimum donation of \$10, you can help support our Cage Fund. As the need for our services continues to grow, we will be adding additional pre-release cages as well as incubators and caging for orphaned and injured birds and small mammals.

There are also opportunities for us to win additional cash prizes through our participation in this event, such as the organization with the most donors or dollars during certain hours. Do you have friends at work that would be willing to donate during a specific time on May 5? If you would like to help us organize an activity to help us win those additional prizes, please contact us via e-mail at ziggystreewildlife@gmail.com or by phone at 931-393-4835.



WISH LIST

- Bird Seed
- Gift cards (grocery store, Lowe's, Home Depot, Tractor Supply)
- LCD Projector
- Heating Pads (without automatic shut-off)
- Laundry Detergent
- Nuts (pecans, walnuts, acorns)
- Vegetables (broccoli, carrots, kale, sweet potatoes, zucchini)
- Paper Towels
- Facial Tissues
- Reptariums (any size)

SUPPORT ZIGGY'S TREE

- Become a member – just complete the application on the back of this newsletter, or visit our website to download and print an application.
- Give a gift membership to a friend!
- Purchase items from our wish list.
- Donate newspapers (we use those to line cages and cover the tables under the cages)
- Select us as your charity for the Kroger Community Cares program – register your Kroger Rewards card at kroger.com/communityrewards and select Ziggy's Tree as your charity. You still get your gas points and discounts, and Kroger donates money to us!
- Contact us about volunteer opportunities, such as transport, animal releases, administrative/office work, fundraising or contributing to our newsletter
- Like us on Facebook and stay updated on releases, admissions and other news.
- Invite us to speak to your church or civic group – we love to tell people about the work we do!

Check our website at www.ziggystree.org for other ways you can support us!

THANK YOU TO OUR GENEROUS SUPPORTERS!

WILDLIFE CHAMPION

The Animal Welfare Fund of The
Community Foundation of Middle
Tennessee

SUSTAINING

Overall Creek Elementary School 5th
Grade Classes

SUPPORTING

David & Linda Ranz
Drs. Jeffrey & Patty Marvel
Brady Palmer, O.D.
Louise McClure
Anne Kenney
Annette Master

FAMILY

Carter & Paula Arnold * Leslee Leach * Sandy Phillips
Chloe Cerutti * George Gifford * Mike Blackburn
Carole Shelton
Heather Crowe in honor of her niece Skylar

INDIVIDUAL

Joshua Rigsby * Lorie Burkhalter * Paula Burrows
Richard Knowles * Scott Hamby * Jennifer Walker
Alison Armstrong * Sara Padgett

VETERINARIANS

Pet Medical Center – Tullahoma
Town & Country Veterinary Hospital – Winchester

IN-KIND & CASH DONATIONS

Anna Seals * Denise Sims * Drai Cook-Corter
Marie Vanert * Kimberly Roper * Virginia Martin
Sharon Cicero * Annette Master

VOLUNTEERS

Animal Care: Brenan Bailey, Sami Green, Joanne Groat,
Valerie Bjorn, Dana Bjorn, Evan Bjorn, Angela Hensley,
LouAnn Partington
Transport: Carol Bailey, Vollie Stone, Hannah Coffey
Webmaster: Dana Bjorn

2014 RELEASES

| | |
|-----------|--|
| August | 4 Northern Mockingbird 8 American Robins 5 Mourning Doves 1 Red-headed Woodpecker 1 Blue Jay 1 Wood Duck 6 Mallards 2 Eastern Cottontails 3 Carolina Wrens 5 Barn Swallows 3 Brown-headed Cowbirds 2 Summer Tanagers 3 Red-bellied Woodpeckers 5 Chimney Swifts |
| September | 1 Purple Martin 1 White-throated Sparrow 1 House Finch 1 Eastern Wood-pewee 1 Cedar Waxwing 2 American Goldfinches 6 American Robins 1 Canada Goose 5 Northern Mockingbirds 25 Virginia Opossums 1 Groundhog 12 Eastern Cottontails |
| October | 2 Northern Cardinals 5 Carolina Wrens 1 Gray Catbird |
| November | 1 Carolina Wren 1 American Goldfinch 9 Eastern Gray Squirrels 1 Fox Squirrel 2 Eastern Chipmunks |
| December | 1 Eastern Screech Owl |



The Cattle Egret pictured above was not releasable due to a severely injured wing. We are grateful to the Memphis Zoo for providing him a permanent home in their Farm exhibit.

Ziggy's Tree Wildlife Rehabilitation Center
92 Maple Ave.
Tullahoma, TN 37388



NOTICE: YOUR MAILING LABEL CONTAINS YOUR MEMBERSHIP EXPIRATION DATE.

To avoid any interruption with delivering your newsletter, we ask that you renew at least one month before the date shown. Use the Membership Form provided below.

PLEASE RENEW, STAY INFORMED, WE NEED YOU!!!

YES, I WANT TO SUPPORT ZIGGY'S TREE, I AM ...

- A NEW MEMBER**
 RENEWING MY MEMBERSHIP

Memberships are for one year
Gift Memberships are also available.

Please Mail This Form To:

**Ziggy's Tree WRC
92 Maple Ave.
Tullahoma, TN 37388**

PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY.

| | |
|-----------------------|-----------|
| ___ Individual | \$25.00 |
| ___ Family | \$40.00 |
| ___ Supporting | \$100.00 |
| ___ Sustaining | \$250.00 |
| ___ Advocate | \$500.00 |
| ___ Wildlife Champion | \$1000.00 |

Name _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____
Home Phone (____) _____ Zip _____ -- _____
Work Phone (____) _____
e-mail _____

I would like to receive my newsletter by email.

I am interested in volunteering in the following areas:

- ___ Environmental Education
___ Wildlife Rehabilitation
___ Fundraising

Checks should be made payable to Ziggy's Tree WRC.

Not sure what to get that special someone for birthdays, anniversaries or just because? Consider giving them a one year membership to Ziggy's Tree!

Members receive our quarterly newsletter.

Ziggy's Tree strives to be environmentally conscious. If you would prefer to receive an electronic copy of our newsletter, please check the box above or e-mail ziggystreewildlife@gmail.com to be placed on our mailing list.