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## BARN OWLETS RESCUED BY PA GAME COMMISSION

On July 29, we received two very special wildlings - barn owlets!

The PA Game Commission rescued them after they were found on farm machinery with no nest box or parents in sight. What a surprise for us, as we have only received less than a handful of adults since WWI began in 1993 and never any babies.

Since day one, these babies were both feisty and intimidating. Not only did they look like downy-covered aliens with piercing black eyes, they also emitted the most horrifying noises from hisses to ear-piercing screams. It seemed like they, instead, should be the owls called "screech" owls!

Instead of cowering in the corner when we cleaned them, they would lunge at us. If we

pleasure watching them grow into beautiful, ethereal adults. It is understandable why some cultures consider them supernatural beings.

The owls were transitioned into our raptor flight pen to build up their strength. It was truly amazing to watch them whip around the enclosure silently. We tested their hunting ability with live mice, courtesy of Vince Clemens. On Nov 2 the PA Game Commission came to pick them up for release. We are so thankful to have been entrusted with their care.

**DECLINING POPULATIONS** - Barn owl populations are declining at a rapid rate as farmland and grassland habitats are lost. Barn owls also face further difficulties as aging owl-friendly barns are being replaced with modern barns plus farming practices now include the use of rodenticide. Before barns these owls would nest in cavities excavated by woodpeckers in large, old-growth trees. But much of PA has been clear cut for farming and mining and there are now few trees large enough for nesting. During 2004-2009, barn owls were observed in only 30 of 67 PA counties.

So, where does this leave our barn owls? Thankfully both biologists and conservationists are working closely with farmers to build barn owl-specific nesting boxes to encourage local breeding. This is a mutually beneficial situation - farmers provide housing for barn owl families and the barn owls act as natural and highly efficient pest control.

The PA Game Commission has been working with private landowners to protect barn owl nesting sites and study these charismatic birds.

*Submitted by Elizabeth Ringstand*



Owlets shortly after admission.

### ABOUT BARN OWLS

- live along forest edges and clearings in open country and cities,
- are crow-sized owls known for their heart-shaped face,
- are 18" birds, with a 44-inch wingspan,
- have short square tails (other owls usually have rounded tails),
- have long hissing shriek-like vocalizations which are very different from the typical "hoots" of most owls,
- lay 5-7 white eggs on bare wood, hollow trees, caves or even ground burrows,
- are not usually migratory but some do migrate,
- are beneficial to farmers because they feed primarily on rodents,
- a family of barn owls can consume up to 3,000 rodents (mostly meadow voles) during the breeding season,
- also eats cottontails and the occasional bat or skunk,
- a small part of their diet is birds which they hunt in cemeteries, rundown farms, and similar waste lots of large cities.



were predators, we'd certainly not want to mess with them. It has been such a



## Pigeon or Dove???

WWI sees pigeons on a regular basis. Last year we admitted 16. The year before 23. They're listed as "Rock Doves" in the Annual Report section of our newsletter, but they are really common pigeons.

Doves and pigeons are very similar. Both belong to the family of *Columbidae*. All pigeons are doves but all doves are not pigeons. Our local Mourning doves are smaller than pigeons and their tails are more fanned out than the straighter pigeon tail. The bus-stop bird is likely a rock dove or common pigeon and the beautiful white "doves" released at weddings are just white homing pigeons.



We've never had a pigeon admission that we considered interesting enough to include a description in the newsletter. With other admissions we are told or have a pretty good guess of what was the cause of their injury - they were hit by a car, caught by a cat, or the nest was blown down. Not so with pigeons. Most are brought in simply because they weren't flying away.

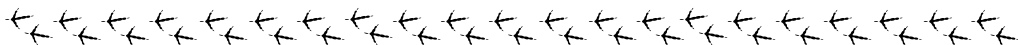
So now is the time to share – to introduce you to such a smart and interesting bird that has an amazing history and yet has such a bad reputation.

There is probably no other bird more maligned than this sweet, gentle member of the rock dove family? Rats with wings, statue and car defacer, gutter birds....the list of unflattering nicknames goes on. How ironic that the dove is an international symbol of peace and love, adored for its pretty feathers and pleasant cooing, while the pigeon gets such a bad rap, and yet they are both basically the same bird!



Introduced from France in the 1620s, they now thrive throughout North America. Records of them exist as far back as ancient Persia. They were used for food, and long-distance communication before phones. Julius Caesar used them to conquer Gaul, and they were used extensively in World War I. One pigeon, Cher Ami, flew twelve missions for the Army Signal Corps during the Battle of Verdun in WW II. She delivered her last message despite being blinded in one eye and having a leg nearly severed during the battle, saving nearly 200 men.

*Submitted by Melissa Morris*



## Snake Rescue

In PA there are only three species of venomous snakes - Eastern Copperhead, Timber Rattlesnake, and Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake.

- The two rattlesnakes are protected species and live in very specialized habitats and you will not find them in the city or suburbs.
- Copperheads are more common. They are nocturnal and rely on their camouflage to protect themselves. They are shy and would rather slither away or freeze than confront a human. In the cases that they do bite, most bites are dry (meaning no venom) and those that have venom, while painful, are generally not deadly especially with medical treatment.

If you have a confirmed venomous snake in your yard, call your local Fish and Boat Commission office and an officer will be sent to relocate the snake for you. This is the most humane and safest thing to do - you are more likely to get bitten by harassing and trying to harm the snake. If you are not able to identify a snake, it is best to keep your distance.



Thanks to the homeowner for reaching out so there was a happy ending for this snake.

*Submitted by Elizabeth Ringstad*



On August 12, we got a call from a local homeowner who had a snake tangled in netting. She wanted to help it but was afraid. Knowing my affinity for reptiles, I was selected to see if we could help. The homeowner with the snake was waiting and sure enough, the snake was in her garage, all tangled up in garden netting wrapped around a lawnmower handle. As I touched him, he

bared his fangs at me. To prevent any bites, I took a pillowcase and put it around his head and then got a grip on his neck. Rat snake bites are harmless but can be painful. I began cutting the netting to get him off the lawnmower. Then I cut the netting off of his body which was harder than I expected. Even though the snake had calmed down, he wrapped his body around my arm that was using the scissors. Thankfully, the homeowner held his body so I could work freely. Once he was free, I checked over his body and he was not injured. Some animals that are in similar situations get stricture and degloving wounds. Since this was not the case, I set him off in the woods on the edge of the property.

Snakes get a bad rap. They are so different from mammals that some find them unnerving. The truth is, snakes do not wish to harm us, even venomous snakes! But both venomous and nonvenomous snakes play an important role in the ecosystem. They help control prey populations, including those that are considered pests like mice and rats.

## Chipmunks – Love ‘Em or Leave ‘Em?



OK, I'll admit it...of all the critters we rehab here at Wild-life Works, chipmunks are one of my favorites. I think they are utterly adorable. So cute and tiny and furry. What's not to love? Unfortunately, we realize not everyone feels this way about our fast and furry chipmunk neighbors. Besides stealing seed from bird feeders, besides uprooting and munching on your expensive flower bulbs and besides planting millet and corn all over the garden, there's the matter of the damage their excavations can do to walls, foundations, and sidewalks, etc.

The Eastern Chipmunk is the most widespread and common here in Pennsylvania. They usually grow between 2.6" to 4.3" long, with flat, bushy tails, reddish-brown heads and a cream-colored stripe above and below each eye. They are members of the squirrel family (*Sciuridae*) and are closely related to red, gray, fox and flying squirrels and, surprisingly, the woodchuck. Their incisor teeth are broad and chisel-shaped, and like other North American chipmunks, they have internal cheek pouches.

They usually breed twice a year in the spring, giving birth to blind, hairless babies, and are prey for pretty much

anything bigger than they are, including hawks, foxes and snakes. Pets also kill or injure their share of chipmunks in and around residential areas. The majority of the ones we see here are usually caught and injured by someone's cat.

They tend to burrow under rocks, roots of trees or under stumps or logs to nest, and, although they do not hibernate in the winter, they do reduce their activity level and subsist on a stash of stored food they gathered in their puffy little cheek pouches. Their diet consists of fruits, nuts and buds (and, of course, seeds from your bird feeder) as well as mushrooms, insect larvae, snails and slugs, salamanders and even young mice.

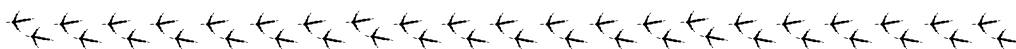
The species ranges from Quebec southward to northern Florida and Louisiana, and, although Alvin and his chipmunk family are more than 50 years old, the average wild chipmunk only lives about two or three years.

As darling as they are, it turns out they aren't particularly social. Each individual normally occupies a separate burrow and territory which they defend vigorously.

If you're fortunate to have chipmunks living in your area, enjoy them! Their antics are comical to watch, and they disperse seeds, aerate soil, and distribute microorganisms that deliver nutrients to tree roots. Their eclectic diet and energetic digging make them valuable ecosystem players. And, the pleasure they give outweighs any small problems they may cause.



*Submitted by Melissa Morris*



## Loss of Habitat

From Barn Owls (page 1) to Bluebirds to Butterflies, many of our wild neighbors are experiencing drastic decreases in their populations.

These drastic declining population trends signal a fundamentally broken relationship between humans and the natural world. Though there are many contributing factors, the loss of habitat brought about by land use change is near the top for many species. Much of habitat loss and fragmentation (turning large areas of habitat into smaller disconnected patches) results from direct land clearing and other environmental affects due to human activities.

Monarch Butterflies are not the "wildlings" that are brought to WWI for treatment but they are a prime example of the negative impact of habitat loss: In July the International Union for Conservation of Nature added them to their endangered species list. The rapid rate of the decline is alarming to naturalists. One biologist estimated a 85-95% decline since 1990.

While we may not be able to add barn owl habitat to our back yards, we can do much to help the Monarch - plant-

ing milkweed - a plant that Monarch caterpillars depend on, and nectar plants the adults love.

Some people are now hand-raising Monarchs. Should you chose to do so, find the eggs and caterpillars yourself rather than buying them from commercial breeders. Also be sure you practice safe rearing practices so that you will not be releasing smaller, weaker and possibly diseased adults. Do your research.

Hand-raising Monarchs also has educational value and is enjoyable. It's an amazing experience to watch the tiny eggs hatch, grow at an amazing speed, form chrysalis, hatch, and fly away. All in 30 days.

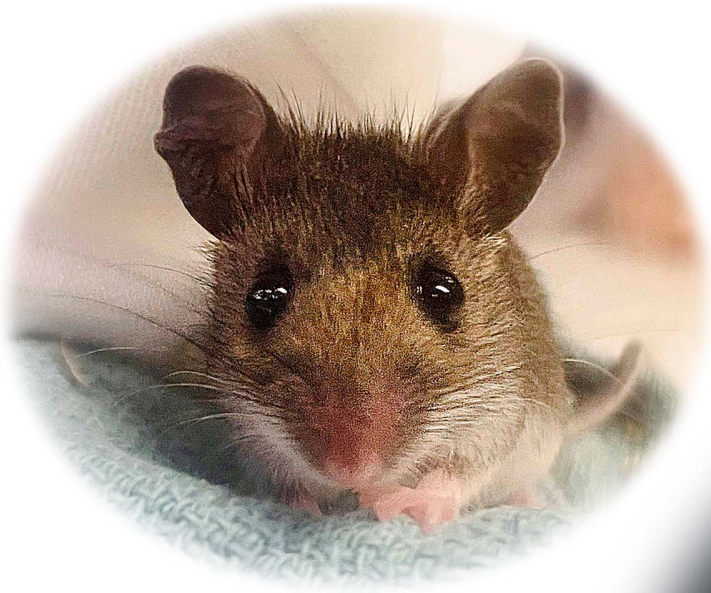
WWI has both Common and Swamp Milkweed seeds available if anyone would like some. They require cold treatment in order to sprout so they must be set outside or scattered on the ground this winter. Contact the office.

*Submitted by Sue Wiseman*





# Wildlife V Baby Ad



WWI's Mission is to  
injured, ill and orphaned  
educate the public and  
co-exist with



# Works Inc missions



s to rehabilitate  
aned wildlife and  
on how to better  
h wildlife.



## Anthrocon Friends

In our Spring 2020 newsletter we announced that we were chosen as Anthrocon's charity of the year for their annual convention in Pittsburgh. Then Covid happened and the convention was held virtually, and again in 2021. Both years the Furies raised money for us. We finally made it in person for 2022 and what a blast we had!

Anthropomorphic or "humanized" animals have been with us since the dawn of civilization. From the gods of ancient Egypt to the advertising icons of the modern day, people of every culture have created fanciful creatures simply by imbuing animals with human traits.

A large number of anthropomorphics fans are employed in scientific or technical fields. A significant percentage have college diplomas and many of those hold advanced degrees. This, perhaps, is what leads many casual observers to raise an eyebrow. "Why would someone like this be into cartoon animals? Isn't that

unusual?" If we look at the world around us, however, we will see that anthropomorphized animals are an integral part of our culture. We use them to represent our political parties. We talk to our dogs (and some even imagine they talk back, though in their own way).



Anthrocon began as Albany Anthrocon in 1997 and now calls the beautiful city of Pittsburgh home, and conventions are held annually at the David L. Lawrence Convention Center. This past July WWI staff spent four glorious days with the Furies. Not only are these folks generous, they are a sweet, fun-loving, creative bunch of people who know how to have a good time. We are so honored to have been a part of it.

## Winter Tips



Internet Photo

- ☑ Consider buying a heated bird bath. Water is just as crucial as food in the winter months. There are many solar heated bird baths to choose from.
- ☑ Take time now to clean and sterilize your bird feeders. House finch conjunctivitis (a contagious, bacterial infection that primarily affects finches) is on the rise this time of year. Bird feeders should be immersed and scrubbed with a solution of 9 parts water to 1 part chlorine bleach to eradicate any disease organisms.
- ☑ Clean feeders every couple of weeks.
- ☑ Spend a little extra on higher quality bird seed. The "bargain" brands usually contain large amounts of seed most native birds will not eat. Better quality seed means more nutrition and less waste. Black oil sunflower seed provides the most calories for winter-feeding birds.
- ☑ If birds of prey are decimating your bird feeder population, move your feeders and bird baths to denser cover. Consider feeding early morning or early evening when hawks are less active.
- ☑ Consider dedicating a feed station for squirrels, to help keep them off your bird feeders. Squirrels favor ear corn, peanuts, and sunflower seeds.
- ☑ Landscape with plants that provide winter forage for wildlife such as service berry and mountain ash.

- ☑ Drive cautiously watching for deer and other critters that may be darting across the roads. The riskiest times of day are two hours after sunrise and two hours after sunset. For deer, the riskiest time of year is Oct. through Dec.
- ☑ Consider building a brush pile in your backyard. Even in a small yard a brush pile can provide shelter and foraging sites for birds and other critters year round.
- ☑ During fall clean-up time, try to leave some leaves under shrubs or in other spots where they won't cover your lawn grass and where birds can find them. Leaf litter makes a great spot where birds such as towhees, sparrows, and others can forage for insects, seeds, and other foods.



Winter at WWI Facility Pond

## Many Ways to Support WWI

### ☐ GENERAL OPERATIONS

### ☐ MEMBERSHIP (Please Note: Due to new mailing requirements, we are no longer able to include expiration dates on our labels)

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Sustaining - \$500         | <input type="checkbox"/> Lifetime - \$1,000 |

*Memberships paid after Oct. 1 are good for the next year.  
All contributions are tax deductible  
**Thank you for your support!!!!***

To make a donation, complete this form and send it with your check or money order, payable to Wildlife Works, Inc., to PO Box 113, Youngwood, PA 15697.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

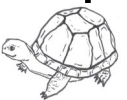
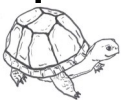
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WildlifeWorks, Inc.



2023

"Thank you for supporting local wildlife!!!"  
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365 Chances to Win various amounts of prize

**CALENDAR SALES** - Our biggest fundraiser is our daily numbers calendar. Daily winnings are \$30, Saturdays are \$50, and holidays and birthdays of famous individuals have greater winnings. This year we are selling two calendars. The calendars make great Christmas or birthday gifts. *Calendars will soon be available. If you'd like to secure your lucky number call asap.*

**AMAZONSMILE** AmazonSmile allows customers to enjoy the same products, low prices, and convenient shopping features as on Amazon.com. When customers shop at [smile.amazon.com](https://www.smile.amazon.com), the AmazonSmile Foundation donates 0.5% of the price of eligible purchases to WWI when it is selected by customers. Since 2015, WWI has received \$2817 from AmazonSmile!

**AMAZON WISH LIST** Many needed items are listed on Amazon's wish list. To view our list, log on to your Amazon account. Go to **Your Lists** under **Your Account**. Then go to **YOUR FRIENDS**. If we are not already listed as your friend, send the suggested email to [wildlifeworks@comcast.com](mailto:wildlifeworks@comcast.com). We will return the link giving you access to our wish list.

**SHARE WWI WITH A FRIEND** - Our primary source of support is from individual donors. Please pass this newsletter on to a friend or family member who loves nature.

**UNITED WAY** - Participate in the United Way payroll deduction campaign at your workplace. Enter Wildlife Works Inc and our agency code 16577371 on the pledge card. Since 2003 WWI received \$8,273. In 2021 WWI received \$1,085.

**DONATE SUPPLIES** - WWI needs many items, including: laundry detergent, bleach, paper towels, tissues, sunflower and other bird seed, yard work tools and postage stamps. We love postage stamps!!! But all donations are appreciated.

**BIRTHDAY AND CHRISTMAS GIFTS** - If friends and family insist on buying you gifts you really don't need, suggest they give a donation to WWI in your name instead. We'll send them a card announcing your gift.

**MEMORIALS AND HONORIUMS** - Remember and honor those you love through a gift to wildlife. Families and individuals will be sent an acknowledgement card and individuals and donors will be recognized in our Spring newsletter.

**TICKET SELLERS NEEDED** - WWI is in need of volunteers who will sell, up to five times a year, \$2 raffle tickets that pay out \$1,000 on the 7PM PA Lottery 3-digit number. Tickets can be picked up at the WWI office or they can be dropped in the mail to you. This is an easy fundraiser that can yield up to \$4,000 per year.

## Truck Needed

Several years ago, the Zuckerman family donated to WWI an old pickup they no longer needed on their farmette. This truck became an integral part of the WWI "arsenal." It hauled feed, lumber, mulch, sawdust, gravel and leaves. Our pickup broke down recently and isn't worth fixing but, it is a hardship doing without it.

We are reaching out to our friends who may be able to donate a used truck or know of someone who can. Maybe you have an old truck you rarely use. Or maybe you're looking to buy a new truck and your trade-in isn't worth much. Any truck donation will be tax-deductible! We may be able to pay for a used truck if the price is one we can afford, as we need to save our resources for food & vet bills. Please ask around for us.

## Why so late???

Some of our readers may have noticed that this edition of our newsletter is late. We like to have it in the mail in Sept and here it is already, Dec. Things have been very difficult here for a good, but unfortunate reason. Beth Shoaf, our Sr Rehabber, is on medical leave. Beth became very ill in late Sept and had surgery the first week of Oct. Her full recovery is expected to be at least 3 months.

During this hiatus, we've closed to all admissions with the exception of patients from the PA Game Commission, at least until year end. This is the first time in 31 years that we have had to unilaterally shut down.

Other issues from Beth's absence have included her inability to help with and attend our Bingo fundraiser; board meetings have been cancelled a number of times, and her usual contributions to the newsletter have been very late. We're hoping you understand we are operating under duress. We expect everything will be back to normal soon.

### SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR BINGO SPONSORS

Melissa Morris	DMJ Transportation
Andi Morris	Ruffo's Auto Repair
Stephanie King	Krystal Ritenour Photography
Judi Wilson	Marica's Bakery
Hospaws	Major Stokes
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Wildlife-Works-Inc

**WWI's MISSION** is to rehabilitate injured, ill and orphaned wildlife and educate the public on how to better co-exist with wildlife. WWI primarily serves Westmoreland County but also accepts select patients from surrounding counties.

**FACILITY** - WWI operates from the Youngwood home-based facility of Beth Shoaf and several satellites in Westmoreland County.

**VOLUNTEERS** - There are 40-50 WWI volunteers, the majority of whom are animal care volunteers. Animal care volunteers are active every day of the year. In peak baby season, volunteers contribute approximately 50 hours daily!!!!

Additionally, the volunteer base includes several veterinarians and other professionals greatly adding to the high level of professionalism of WWI. In addition to caring for animals and educating the public, volunteers also raise a significant portion of the budget through events, sales, solicitations and program income. Without the dedication of these individuals WWI would not exist.

**STAFF** - There are currently five part-time paid positions at WWI: an office manager, two animal care technicians, one senior rehabilitator, and a grounds-keeper. These positions provide essential support for year-round uninterrupted operations.

**LICENSED REHABILITATORS** - WWI currently has two rehabilitators licensed by the PA Game Commission and the US Fish and Wildlife Service: Senior Rehabilitator, Beth Shoaf and Morgan Barron.

**ADMISSION HOURS** - Are by appointment only and are dependent upon the availability of staff. The office is open 10AM - 3PM Monday through Friday. Please leave a message during off hours. Your call will be returned as soon as possible.

**NOTICE OF NON-PROFIT STATUS:** WWI is a registered 501(c)3 non-profit. The official registration and financial info of WWI may be obtained from the PA Department of State at 800-732-0999. Registration does not imply endorsement.



**MERGANSERS** - IN THIS PICTURE THESE MERGANSERS WERE 6 WEEKS OLD. WHEN ADMITTED IN JULY THEY WERE ABOUT 1½ WEEKS OLD

*All photos within are Wildlife Works photos taken by WWI volunteers of rehabbed wildlings unless otherwise noted.*