

A House Is Not A Home For Wildlife

by Camie L. Brown

It's not a pretty story — working at Willamette Wildlife Rescue and Rehabilitation, a non-profit organization that gives assistance to injured or abandoned wildlife.

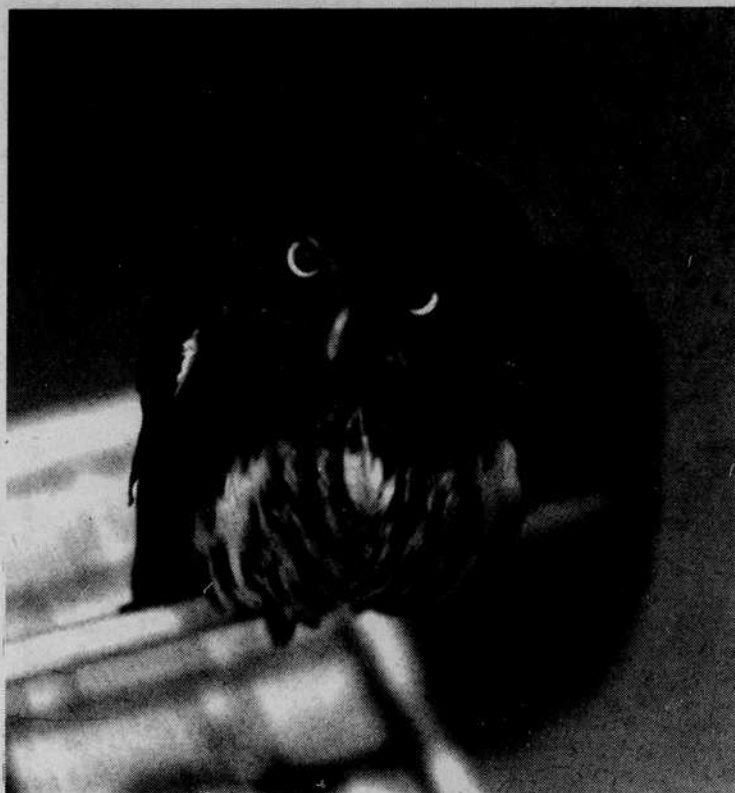
Bandit used to be someone's pet. Cro-Magnon was once free. Merlin is dead. Wildlife rehabilitation can be a heartbreaker.

In an introductory class taught by Scott Southerland, president of WWRR, several volunteers learned how just wanting to help is sometimes not enough.

"I'm pushing for public awareness of wildlife because of all the things man does to endanger it," says Scott. "You're going to save more animals through education than you are through direct bandaging and medical care."

For instance, good intentions may lead a person to adopt a wild animal as a pet, but lack of knowledge may lead a person to do unwitting harm to the animal. Not only is keeping a wild, native animal illegal in Oregon, but also, attempting to domesticate a wild animal imposes a handicap on the animal.

From the recovery room of a local veterinary clinic, Scott produced one such animal: a playful, nine-month old raccoon named Bandit. It had escaped from, or had been abandoned by, someone who had kept it as a pet. Scott's task is to undo the raccoon's learned reliance on people for survival.



In agreement that raccoons are not suitable as pets, one volunteer told how she had once raised a raccoon from a bottle only to have it become unmanageable and destructive when it reached sexual maturity.

Scott returned Bandit to its padlocked cage and reappeared with a squawking crow. Victim of a BB wound to its shoulder, Cro-Magnon will never fly again. The abili-

tude, the Gatorade provides warmth, combats dehydration, and replaces electrolytes. Cro-Magnon has luckily found a niche at WWRR. Like he did today, Cro-Magnon will help demonstrate the plight of injured animals to other interested groups and will be a visitor to local classrooms.

Merlin the merlin, a type of falcon, was not so lucky. Brought to the clinic with a broken wing, the high-strung bird was fitted with a wrap which immobilized the broken bones. For two weeks, he seemed to respond. Then, like many birds of prey in captivity, Merlin coped with the stress of confinement by chewing on his wing. The new injury could be repaired, but not well enough to enable Merlin to fly again. Rather than subject the bird to further stress, the doctor chose euthanasia.

Not a pretty story!

But there are also happy endings, like the pigmy owl that was released. Scott told how it took him 20 to 30 tries before the owl accidentally swallowed an offered piece of venison, thereby getting the idea that there was food to be had. Road kills are used for food for many of the recovering patients.

The happiest ending is, of course, the education of the public. Scott concludes, "I just hope that in a year from now this group will be a couple hundred strong and well in the public eye."

Persons needing assistance with an injured or abandoned wild animal can call the Wildlife Hotline at 726-3845. For information about the organization, call 485-2302. For wild creatures, a house is not a home, and just wanting to help is sometimes not enough.

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If the task cannot be accomplished the animal will be put to sleep.

"This is one of about 30 raccoons we've received this year," explained Scott as Bandit wrestled with his hand. "Most of those were orphans. The mother was either killed or somehow got separated from the young ones. There are certain animals that, if you're going to keep them in captivity and make them wild again, need to be in larger groups than one or two. Fawns should be kept in nothing less than groups of four, and it is probably the same for raccoons. Just by association with each other, they're going to rely more on natural instincts. Before they are released, raccoons are tested as to whether or not they can kill for their food. We release them as far away from people as we can."

ty to rotate its wing in flight is permanently lost.

Using the bird as a case in point, Scott emphasized the role of education in increasing public awareness. "With the amount of time spent in direct medical care, you probably could have talked with 60 people and, hopefully, one or two would have said, 'Wow, look at what I've been doing.' Maybe you reach the kid who's been out at the back fence shooting birds and never thought about it."

Holding the bird with two fingers on either side of its neck, and with the other hand grasping its feet and wings, Scott explained how not holding the bird around its chest allows the bird to breathe.

A surprisingly-willing subject, Cro-Magnon appeared not to mind as Scott demonstrated the crop-feeding method. Warm Gatorade can save a bird from the life-threatening shock of being in captivity. Delivered to the crop via a syringe and a soft, rubber

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