

■ SAVANNAH ■

# Wildlife Rescue™



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October 2019

## Oh what a busy season

**Helping squirrels, raccoons, beavers, foxes, bobcats, opossums, bats, fawns, and more!**

**Spring and summer** are always the busiest time for wildlife rescue and rehabilitation, and 2019 was no exception. Hurricane season can add even more drama, as it did this fall.

Here at the Savannah Wildlife Rescue Center, where we focus on caring for orphaned and injured mammals that are native to this area, we're proud to say we've helped more than 950 animals so far this year!

The 2019 list included many of our more common species, such as raccoons, opossums, squirrels, bats and fawns.

But we also had a few firsts as well — an otter, a mink, and beavers and bobcats! The otter and

*See Infants, page 3*



**We've helped more than 950 animals so far this year.** Most were orphaned youngsters whose parents had been killed, injured or re-located.



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# We loved Lucy and Ricky!

They were firsts for us in every way, and they enriched our season with lots to learn about and lots of tender care opportunities

**We try not** to play favorites, but when this year brought us our first orphaned river otter and mink, both tiny and abandoned, it was hard not to fall in love.

Caring for them and watching them grow into strong, independent adolescents was definitely the highlight of our season, as well as an incredible learning experience.

The infant river otter was originally spotted on the north end of Tybee beach in April by a tourist who was walking by. After noticing that it had not moved for some time, the tourist contacted us, and director Jeanne Paddison rushed to the beach to find the tiny creature, curled up and not moving near some large rocks.

After checking it for body condition and major injuries, she brought it back to the center, and started a long process of research, learning, daily care and lots of love from everyone who helped.

Paddison determined that the young otter, who was given the name “Lucy,” was about 10 weeks old and a long way from being weaned or otherwise able to fend for itself.

## Surprise, surprise

Only about a month later, a family in Richmond Hill found what they thought was also a tiny otter in the backyard of their home. This one still had the umbilical cord attached!

But once it arrived at the center, this tiny orphan clearly was different from Lucy the otter — it didn’t grow as much as expected;



**Lucy the otter, left,** was found on Tybee beach and nurtured back to life. Ricky the mink, *top and middle,* initially looked similar to Lucy but it soon became clear he was quite different!

the toes and nose were slightly different, and the feeding behavior was more aggressive.

“Ricky,” as he was soon named, turned out to be a mink, not an

otter! Both river otters and minks are members of the weasel family, and as newborns it can be hard to immediately tell the difference.

But as our caretakers found out, there definitely are differences. The most interesting perhaps was that while Lucy was calm when feeding from a bottle, Ricky would shred every rubber nipple that came his way!

Well, it turns out that’s as it should be — for a mink! Minks normally shred their prey, so Ricky was really just practicing for the time when he’d be old enough to find his own fish to eat.

## Ready for the wild

By September, both Lucy and Ricky had grown well and were honing their skills for living on their own in a natural habitat, like identifying and catching the fish they need to eat.

Since they did not have any others of their species to grow up with and were hand-raised by humans, they may not be suitable for a fully independent life in the wild.

Luckily, a safe new home for Lucy has already been identified — a five-acre stocked pond on an 80-acre farm, where she will be free to do what she wants but have availability for food if needed. And a home for Ricky’s release is in the works too. ■

**Wild note** Otters feed only under water and eat only fish. Minks can eat either on land or under water.

## Infants

*Continued from page 1*

mink — who were named Lucy and Ricky — quickly became favorites of the season among all the volunteers who help us every day (*see story, page 2*).

Most of the infant animals we receive at the center stay with us for about three to five months, as they grow and become strong enough to be released back into their natural habitat and fend for themselves. Some also have various injuries to contend with, such as wounds, head trauma and infections.

### How they arrive here

Many of the infants that come to us were orphaned when their parents were killed, often when the mother was hit by a car or succumbed to other trauma or disease. Some were themselves injured by cars, dog and cat attacks, poisons, traps, unnecessary relocations, or other human causes. In fact, 95 percent of the youngsters we receive were orphaned as a result of human activities.

We're proud to say that we're able to successfully rehabilitate and release more than 75 percent of the orphaned animals that we receive each year.

"Our goal is to help make up for what human activities have done to these young animals and give them a second chance to live free in their natural habitats," says director Jeanne Paddison. ■

The percentage of the youngsters we receive that are orphaned as a result of human activities **95%**

## One woman's vision

**The Savannah Wildlife Rescue Center successfully rehabs hundreds of animals a year, but started out in the home of founder Jeanne Paddison**

**Given that we help** more than 950 animals a year, have seven licensed rehabbers and a strong group of regular volunteers and interns (54 and counting), and that we are one of just a few rescue facilities for mammals in Georgia, you might think that the Savannah Wildlife Rescue Center has a huge building, lots of resources, and staff.

### But you'd be wrong

The Savannah Rescue Center has no paid employees and is the evolution of just one woman's efforts to do what was necessary to help orphaned and injured mammals in this area get a second chance at life.

Founder and director Jeanne Paddison started informally caring for rescued animals as a teenager, eventually setting up a raccoon rescue facility in her own garage.

She is now an officially licensed Georgia rehabilitator, with permits for small mammal, rabies-vector, and deer rehabilitation. In 2014, Paddison also incorporated her efforts into a nonprofit 501(c)3 organization allowing supporters to give tax-deductible donations, and for the organization to be able to apply for grants. It also allows for the training and education of additional rehabbers, including students and community members.

### Outgrowing spaces

The center now resides in a 1,500-square-foot warehouse, with

a small amount of outdoor green-space, having outgrown its former facilities in the back of Whitemarsh Animal Care and on Paddison's private property before that.

However, it's still an all-volunteer effort, with lots of fixed costs that have to be met every month, including rent and utilities, animal food, and other supplies.



**Founder and director Jeanne Paddison** has been working with rescued wildlife since she was a teenager, gradually creating a much-needed rescue center.

### More need help

Even though the goal of the center is to help prevent the need for wildlife rescue through education and outreach, the number of animals in need continues to grow, especially when they are displaced and injured due to loss of their natural habitats.

Sooner rather than later, the center will need to find more space, as well as some hired staff, Paddison says.

*See story on page 4 for the many ways you can help!* ■

# Volunteer spotlight Caitlin Putnam

**She loves watching small animals heal so they can go back into the wild**

*Editor's note: Caitlin is a senior biology major at Georgia Southern in Savannah and hopes to pursue a master's degree in environmental science or wildlife conservation. She became a volunteer with the Savannah Wildlife Rescue Center this past spring and says it has been a wonderful, rewarding learning experience working with director Jeanne Paddison, the team leaders, and all the animals.*

## What are your typical duties as a volunteer at the center?

There is such a variety of duties, from infant feedings three times a day, to cleaning of cages, to making the special diets needed for each species at their different stages of life. I really enjoy making "weaning bowls" for the adolescent raccoons. This is a combination of fruit, yogurt, vegetables, cat food and other nutrition for them.

## Do you have a favorite species among all those you work with?

I love the raccoons because they have such quirky personalities and are fun to watch, especially as they grow up. But all the species are great in different ways. The

fawns are all sweet, for example, the opossums are all cautious, and the skunks often show a "team mentality" where they line up and show off their tails.

## Why is wildlife rehabilitation important?

I believe that wildlife, even in urban areas, plays a huge role in our own quality of life — they are part of the whole circle of life. I grew up in the north Georgia mountains surrounded by national forests and seeing the natural ways of life up there, how it all connects.

The education aspect of the work is important. The human-wildlife interaction factor is what we all need to work on. Many people don't understand that all these animals are vital to our environment, even in the city. For example, opossums eat ticks and bugs and other undesirable things and are shy and harmless, yet people don't like to see them.

## What are your favorite things about volunteering at Savannah Wildlife?

The best thing is watching the improvement of the animals as they grow up and heal, like watching a baby squirrel that was the size of your thumb when it came in and is now a crazy flying animal, or helping the raccoons as they move from bottle feeding through the trials of growing up, into outside hacking cages and meeting other raccoons, as we prepare them for release back into the wild.



## What would you like others to know about the Savannah Wildlife Center?

We are completely donation and volunteer driven! We all do it for the love of wildlife and to see them succeed.

And if you don't mind getting your hands dirty, we can always use more people to help! ■

## What we need, how you can help

Rescuing and rehabilitating our local orphaned and injured wildlife is truly a community effort. We are lucky to have a committed corps of amazing volunteers helping them to heal, grow, and get back to their wild habitats.

### But we also need your help.

Of all the ways you can support this effort **becoming a monthly donor is the most important** because that allows us to know what money we can count on . . .

- to pay the rent and utilities for our facility,
- to buy formula and fresh foods for the animals, and
- to provide for other ongoing basic needs.

### Please help us help wildlife!

- Become a monthly donor
- Make a one-time donation
- Sponsor a species
- Provide items from our donation list
- Designate us on Amazon Smile and/or purchase something from our Amazon Wish List
- Volunteer or become an intern
- Ask us about corporate sponsorships (recognition available).

Visit our website for any of the above at [savwildliferescue.com](http://savwildliferescue.com)

Or visit our Facebook page @savwildliferescue

