ATW Newsletter, July 2020

Paws 'N Claws

News from All Things Wild Rehabilitation, Inc.

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You Don’t Like Opossums????

By: Kim Fross

It is the dog days of summer with the Coronavirus pandemic once again on the rise, and you can’t go anywhere but stay at home. To relieve the monotony of in-home board games and teleworking, you take the kids on a campout. Where, you ask? Your own backyard!

“But wait a minute! There are rodents and creepy crawlies out there, like snakes, ticks, mice, rats, and cockroaches, that could come into our tent! Why would we do that?” you ask.

Well, actually, if you have opossums in your neighborhood, you don’t have to worry about all those creepy things! You see, opossums like to eat snakes, rats, mice, ticks, and cockroaches among other icky bugs out there! Opossums eat so many ticks that they help keep Lyme disease down!

“But I don’t like opossums either! They have beady eyes, they have a rat-like tail, their teeth, they drool, they might bite me and give me rabies!”

A young opossum peeks through tall grass. Photo Sue Puetz

On the contrary! Did you know that the opossum’s body temperature is too low, making it very unlikely to harbor the rabies virus! Also, opossums are docile, non-aggressive animals. They prefer to avoid confrontation and escape if possible. They will not bite unless they are provoked. When they become scared of conflict, such as when your dog charges, opossums will *play dead*. This is a defense mechanism they use; they enter a catatonic state and emit a foul odor, making the opossum appear and smell dead, which is less appealing for predators. Because they have no control when it happens, they may *play dead* for hours.

Another defense mechanism opossums have is they can foam at the mouth. When you see that drool, they are telling you to stay away. This is all for show, and they most likely are not sick!

“But what about the snakes? Snakes are venomous and can kill anything!”

No, that’s not true! The opossum’s blood contains peptides that can neutralize snake venom. Not only will they kill the snake, but they will also eat the snake! With further research, their blood could help scientists develop a universal anti-venom for saving human lives.

If you have a garden, opossums will be your custodian. In addition to the scary creepies, they will also eat grub worms, snails, and overripe fruit and veggies.

A momma opossum, whose foot was caught in a snare, recuperates with her 11 babies at ATW. Photo H. Laughlin

Being the only marsupial found in North America, opossums have a pouch, much like a kangaroo, where the babies, or joeys, are raised for about 2 months. When they are big enough, they will come out and ride on momma's back. Their rat-like tail acts as a fifth appendage. Nesting material is carried in their curled-up tail, or the tail can be used for balance.

If that doesn't change your opinion of opossums from despised rodents to a beloved potential super-hero, yard exterminator, marsupial, I don't know what will! Would you rather have snakes, spiders, mice, and cockroaches in your tent? Or an opossum outside your tent preventing them from coming inside? You decide!

Kim Fross is a permitted wildlife rehabilitator who specializes in opossums. She has volunteered with ATW for 6 years and serves on the Board of Directors where she is in charge of social media for the organization. Her day job is Project Manager for the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ).

amazon wishlist

Life Behind Bars

By: Sara Garcia

The sheer look of sadness and panic cannot be explained by photos. Watching the innocent creature searching for answers and attempting to claw his way out of this new situation brought tears to our eyes. Bandit, as the people called him, was found over 6 weeks ago as a tiny baby. They believed keeping him warm, fed, and protected was the right thing to do.

"Watching the innocent creature searching for answers and attempting to claw his way out brought tears to our eyes." Photo S. Garcia

After 6 weeks of being raised by humans and only humans, this raccoon kit lost his wild nature. He never saw another raccoon let alone being taught to be one. He had no idea what a raccoon should do or not do. He had no idea that his life was not supposed to be in a cage or roaming around a house or hanging out on the couch with his human family. He did not understand that humans are a threat, and he should fear them because he is a wild animal. As a young social raccoon, he did not understand that he should rely on his instinct to thrive and feed himself and that other raccoons are friends and family.

Then, one day, Bandit got too big to handle, so the family brought him to All Things Wild. Once we completed the intake, we immediately vaccinated him for distemper so he could join in with some of our younger orphaned raccoons in rehabilitation. Because he had not seen other raccoons for most of his life, he became so aggressive that we had to separate him. There, in a cage by himself, he paced, refused to eat, bit and growled at everything in sight, panted, cried constantly, and shoved his arms and face as far out of the cage as possible in an attempt to flee this stressing situation and get back to the only family he knew.

What was thought to be a life-saving act on the part of the well-meaning people who kept him as a pet for 6 weeks became a negative, life-changing act for this little raccoon. He is now imprinted on humans and has a strong distaste for other raccoons. Sadly, this innocent creature can never be released to the wild and will go to a sanctuary where he will spend his life alone behind bars.

Sadly, this raccoon will have to spend his life behind bars because of what people did to him. Photo S. Garcia

PLEASE NOTE: In the State of Texas, it is illegal to keep a wild animal in captivity without a permit from Texas Parks and Wildlife. Orphaned wild babies should be taken to a permitted wildlife rehabilitator, such as All Things Wild Rehabilitation, where they will be raised to live with their species in the wild.

Sara Garcia started volunteering for ATW in January 2020 and loved it so much she accepted a job offer to work for ATW in the evenings. Sadly, she has to leave ATW employment in July to resume her career as a Special Education teacher (behavior) at Elgin Intermediate School and finish her master's degree in Educational Administration. However, she will still be a volunteer. Her favorite wild animals are all the raptors, but especially the great horned owls.

Sue's Favorite Photographs

All Things Wild asked Sue Puetz to select some of her favorite photographs for our July newsletter. Here, according to Sue, is how she became interested in wildlife photography.

My immersion into photography began when husband Rob and I spent 3 years touring the USA in a motorhome sans home base. Summers were spent in Wyoming, South Dakota, Washington State, and Montana where the wildlife--and our grandkids--roam. My idea of living on the road was to explore all and experience all. Trekking the back roads with camera in hand, I captured images of deer, elk, bald eagles, bison, beavers, hawks, and more.

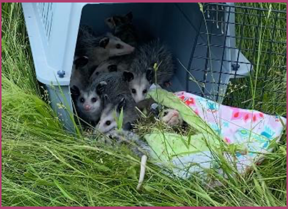
I first visited All Things Wild when I believed one of the owls in our backyard owl box was injured and the other was missing. I had sightings of foxes, cats, and raccoons sniffing at the box. When all activity stopped except that of a stressed adult owl lurking at the opening, I took the box with the owl in tow to ATW. When the ATW veterinary technician opened the box, inside we found a healthy female owl plus three owlets. While packing up the four owls for my trek home, the technician suggested I adopt an orphaned fledgling screech owl who needed help learning to fly in the wild. ATW’s story is that I came in with four owls and left with five. My story is I came in with what, I thought, was one owl and left with five, a much bigger success story. After all the owls learned to fly and vacated the nestbox, I adopted another owl from ATW and released it in our backyard.

Since my initial visit, I have become engrossed in capturing images of the wildlife being treated, nurtured, and ultimately released by ATW. I call myself the almost-resident student and volunteer photographer at All Things Wild.

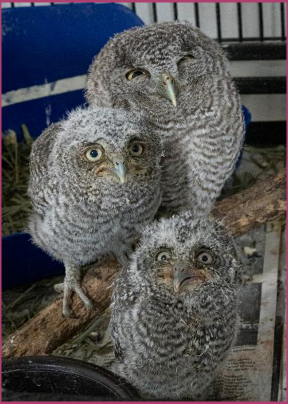
Eastern Screech Owl, Red Morph Photo Sue Puetz

Newborn Ringtail Photo Sue Puetz

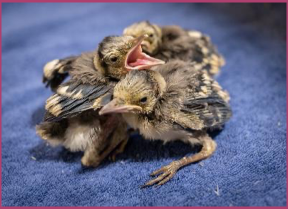
Fox Squirrel Release Photo Sue Puetz



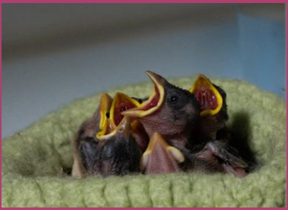
Opossum Release Photo Sue Puetz



Eastern Screech Owls, Grey Morph Photo Sue Puetz



Orphaned Fledgling Blue Jays Photo Sue Puetz



Orphaned Nestling English Sparrows Photo Sue Puetz

Young Grey Morph Eastern Screech Owls With One Red Morph Adult Photo Sue Puetz

12-Week-Old Orphaned Striped Skunk Photo Sue Puetz

Juvenile Crested Caracara Photo Sue Puetz

Orphaned Newborn Nine-banded Armadillo (That's formula in his mouth.) Photo Sue Puetz

Great-horned Owl Release Photo Sue Puetz

Great-horned Owl With Dinner Photo Sue Puetz

Eastern Screech Owl At Release Photo Sue Puetz

Young Orphaned Raccoons in Pre-release Enclosure Photo Sue Puetz

White-tailed Deer Fawn With Scars From Predator Attack Photo Sue Puetz

Sue Puetz, ATW's official volunteer photographer, is an active member of the Texas Photographic Society, the Photographic Society of America, and the Sun City Photography Club.

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All Things Wild Rehabilitation

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