

Welcome to

INSTINCTS



Aug 2026

Vol 15:3

"The newsletter helping you follow your Wild Instincts."

COME AND GET IT!

Me answering the phone: "Good morning, Wild Instincts."

Caller: "I have a black bird in my yard. I seen the last few days walking around. Been eatin' bugs and things. Driving my dogs nuts. Now it's laying down. I don't know if it's dead or not."

Me: "If you can get it to us, we can do all we can for it."

Caller <starting to get irritated>: "I don't know if it's dead. You don't come and get it? You guys ain't going to do nuthin? I don't got a car."

Me: "Do you have a neighbor or a friend that may be able to help? How close can you get to it."

Caller: "I thought you people helped. What do you do anyway? You don't care. A couple feet."

Me: "We have over 125 patients and 6 people trying to care for them. Where are you located? Can you check to see if it is still alive?"

Caller: "Narnia" (fictitious name for confidentiality).

Me: "I can TRY to see if I can reach a volunteer driver but I need to know it's alive. I will try, but I can't guarantee anything. They're all volunteer and it's the weekend so many have plans."

Caller<now livid and snotty>: "Guess the bird doesn't know it's the weekend. What the hell do you guys do anyway, then, you don't give a..."

At this point, I hang up the phone. We do not tolerate abusive callers. Our job is hard enough.

About 5 minutes later, caller is calling again.

Me: "Good morning, Wild Instincts."

Caller: "I called before about the bird."

Me, recognizing the caller ID: "The one in Narnia?"

Caller: "It's still alive. I called another place but got a machine."

Me: "I can make some phone calls and try to find a driver, but no guarantees. What's your name and where are you located?"

Caller gave me the info.

Me: "IF I can find someone, they will call you directly for directions, etc. If I can't find someone, I will call you back myself."

I did find someone who put their weekend project on hold because in their words "Duty Calls". The bird came into care but was too starved at that point. It didn't make the night.

Different call (yes, this call really happened):

Staff: "If you can get it to us, we'll do everything we can for it."

Caller: "What? I can't drive it to you! We're going rummage sale-ing in the morning."

Staff: "It's 2:00 p.m. now. We'll be here until 9:00 pm tonight."

Caller: "We have to plan out our rummage sale route. I can't drive it."

The next type of too common of a call starts "I was told you will come and get _____ (fill in the blank)." That always brings a big sigh from whoever answers the phone because the caller already has an expectation of a false reality.

The truth is we do have a Corp of volunteer drivers, about 140. But the key word there is VOLUNTEER. Every generous person who agrees to drive for us has their own life that doesn't revolve around Wild Instincts. Most

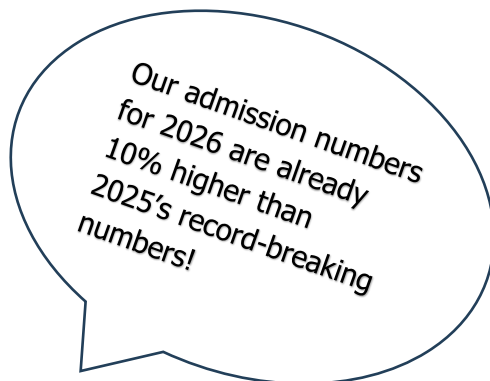
of them work so will only be available after work or on weekends. In the summer, many have vacation plans. This is why we have so many volunteer drivers; in hopes a couple may be available in the area we need at the time we need.

But to find a driver for an animal, we have to stop what we are doing ...which during Baby Season is CARING FOR ANIMALS to get on the phone and start calling down the phone tree. Many times we get no answer so we must move on to the next person. Or if we get an answer, they are unavailable. This can go on for an hour or longer, keeping someone away from animal care during that time.

We have tried one of the texting call out programs like first responders use. We've had mixed results with that and there is a charge per person per text.

What's further complicating our driver program is the decrease/lack of other rehab centers. This reduction is increasing our admissions as people turn to us to cover rehab needs. This means we have many more calls from Eau Claire, Stevens Point, Marshfield or farther.

We simply cannot cover the entire state. We cannot neglect the animals in our care to drive hours to get the animal you are calling about. This year we had so many animals in care we didn't even have time to try to find drivers.



We are a wildlife hospital. Human hospital staff don't leave the hospital to chase patients. There are separate entities that bring patients to the hospital. Doctors and nurses aren't expected to leave patients in their rooms and waiting rooms to drive for hours to get more patients.

Wildlife belongs to all the people of WI. We are ALL responsible for it. We all need to do our small part. Rehabbers' part is to advise, to help keep animals where they belong and if that can't be, then to care for them to get them back into the wild. Remember that care just begins when the animal gets to us. Some patients will require intensive care every 15 minutes for 12 hours each day. Each patient added to our care means more time taken up with animal care and less time for phoning potential drivers. Care comes first.

This is why most centers don't offer drivers. We will continue to do so if doing so does not compromise quality care for our patients. And if the public appreciates that extra service.

Abusive language and bullying over the phone will not be tolerated, even though it breaks our heart knowing an animal needing help may not get what it needs.

One reason many centers have voicemail is so they don't interrupt their busy schedule to be berated for having human limits.

Let's get better about being a caring community, all of us doing their small part in making sure the wildlife we care about is given the best chance of getting help. Not a single animal in our care drove themselves to us. A caring human did that for them. So, when you call and we ask you if you can drive it to us or at least partway to us, please don't snottily say "I'll drive it to the end of my driveway" (Yes, that is another real call).

We understand that cars break down, things happen and there are cases when driving it yourself is simply impossible.

Please work WITH us in trying to work out a solution. Emotions can run high in situations

involving suffering animals. Be kind. Do not take it out on us. We are doing our very best, are extremely overworked & exhausted.

If you want wildlife rehab to continue to be available, do your small part by just being kind.



CNG DONATION

Charter Next Generation (CNG) is a specialty film manufacturer that makes high-performance specialty films primarily for flexible packaging, food preservation, consumer goods, healthcare, and industrial markets. The Rhinelander location also supports the area community and many organizations, including Wild Instincts. A special thank you to them for their recent extremely generous \$5000 donation.

It makes a difference in the lives of injured & orphaned Northwoods wildlife.



Mark and Nova mesmerizing some of the younger attendees.

ANNUAL BAKE SALE

We had lots of goodies but still sold out early.

Thanks to Nancy N for all her hard work in organizing this event every year and volunteers Bruce, Cheryl, Kathy, Lauren, Sue, and Yvonne manning the booths and the countless bakers & makers behind the scenes providing the wares.

Of course, many thanks to the generous and giving people buying the baked goods and raising \$2,676.50 to help us help them!



Mark with Erik, Nova & Ocelli in the foreground with a people packing around the baked goods to support us!

THE CURIOUS CASE OF THE IMPALED GARTER SNAKE

By McKenna Brocco, Advanced Rehabber

We have seen many different kinds of injuries from so many different animals, but there are still patients that come in with surprises we have never seen before. In mid-July we admitted one of those surprises in the form of a Common Garter Snake. We received a phone call about a snake that had something stuck through its body. When the snake arrived, we got our first look at the object, but we could not confidently tell what it was from just the portion we could see sticking out. We could see there were two wounds, one where the object was obviously exiting the body and the other, with only a small bit of the object protruding, potentially where the object had entered. We threw around a couple ideas of things that could have impaled the snake. Was it the sheath of talon from a raptor that had tried to grab the snake? It did not match the shape or size of any raptor talon we could think of, so we moved on from that idea. Did the snake have a run in with a porcupine or slither too close to a porcupine quill and end up with a quill embedded in its body? It did look very similar to a porcupine quill, but still we could not be sure.



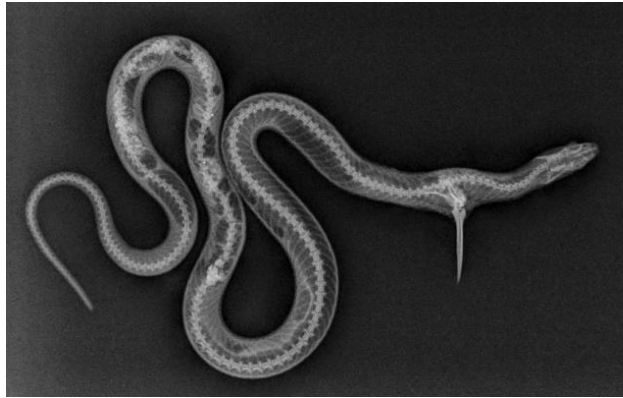
Garter snake with foreign object stuck through his body.



What is that and how did it get there?

Even without knowing what exactly the object was, we needed to come up with a course of action for treatment. Since the snake was in stable condition and was able to move and defecate normally, we believed that the object had not damaged any major organs. We took an x-ray to confirm this and to see if it could give us a better idea of what this object might be. That would determine what the best next steps would

be. The x-ray showed the section of the object inside of the snake was thicker than what we could see on the outside. The x-ray also showed that the object looked like it was jointed and was angled inside of the snake.



X-ray revealed more details about the object.

The removal of this object had the potential to be somewhat complicated. If the object actually was a porcupine quill or something else barbed, it would be very difficult and painful to back the object out of the body through the entrance wound. Pulling the object the rest of the way through the body would create a larger exit wound since the mass inside was thicker than the slim pointed end we could see, and there was a greater risk of damaging something internally. Since the snake was able to function normally, we decided not to immediately remove the object and to treat the wounds with topical antibiotic ointment while we discussed with other specialists about the best course of action. During those few days the snake was able to eat normally, and we continued to apply a topical antibiotic multiple times a day to the wounds.



The snake seemed unbothered by his situation.

After a few days we were able to gently extract the object, following the intended trajectory, the rest of the way through the snake. The removal went smoothly and the snake showed no deficits after the procedure.

Now we were finally able to examine the object in its entirety. Initially we thought it may have been part of a crayfish claw that had been impaling the snake. Upon further inspection and cross-referencing, we were able to determine, without a doubt, that the object we had removed was a pectoral spine from a bullhead catfish.



It's the pectoral spine of a bullhead!

Common Garter Snakes prefer to live near water and often eat snails, leeches, and small fish. Many fish have spines that can injure a predator if not swallowed correctly. The fish need to be swallowed headfirst, so the spines lay down against the fish's body as it's being swallowed. A live fish does not always lay still and cooperate when being eaten, so injuries like the one this snake suffered are not all that uncommon. Researchers have even found snakes with these injuries while studying certain species' diets and are able to identify what species of fish the snakes are eating from the spine protruding from their body. Snakes can stretch their jaws to swallow prey larger than their heads, but the spine impaled in our patient seemed a bit large for a snake that size to eat the fish it would have been attached to.

There is no way for us to know if the snake sustained this injury from eating the fish or got impaled by the spine in a different way, but the most important thing is the snake is spine free.

We continued to treat the wounds for several days after the removal of the spine, and the snake shed its skin less than a week after the procedure.



Snake recovering spine free!

He was released August 10th with hopes that he will eat his fish, or watch where he slithers, more carefully from now on.



Free in all ways!



IN HONOR OR MEMORY OF

~In Memory of Juanita Sholar
~In Memory of Nunapik's Alaskan Kyoak
and the paths he brought to cross
~In loving memory of my beautiful
friend Jan Ghalardi LaDue
~In Memory of Mary Spitz
~In Honor of Nancy Negben's birthday
~In Memory of horse "Storm the
Castle", a strong & trusted friend who
will be missed dearly
~In Memory of Jackie, the Bald Eagle
from Big Bear



The distinctive fur of a Silver-haired Bat, admitted after being grounded on a construction site.

A Tiny Owl in Need: The Northern Saw-whet Owl

By Hannah Felsner, Basic Rehabber

As many of you may already know, the first feathered face to greet you when you enter Wild Instincts is Nova, our resident Northern Saw-whet Owl. Nova is a popular member of the Wild Instincts Team, as visitors often stop and stare at her in disbelief, waiting for her to blink and prove that she's actually real! Others may walk right past her, completely unaware that they are being closely watched. And there's a good reason she can be so easy to miss. Nova stands at less than 6 inches tall and weighs only 84 grams which is about the weight of a small kiwi or a deck of cards with a few cards removed.

Northern Saw-whet Owls are incredibly small and elusive, making them difficult to spot even though they have a healthy population. In fact, they are one of the least-sighted owl species in Wisconsin because of just how inconspicuous they are. Saw-whets are very distinctive, with their bright yellow eyes and large, round heads. Adults are speckled brown with a mostly white facial disk. Juveniles like this one however, have a mostly chocolate-brown head, back, and wings, with a cinnamon-colored chest and belly.



Juvenile Northern Saw-whet Owl.

Northern Saw-whet Owls can be found throughout southern Canada, the northern and western United States, and central Mexico. Their habitat includes wooded areas such as coniferous swamps, disturbed deciduous woods, savannas, riverside forests, and shrub-steppe habitats. They prefer to roost in dense conifer trees while nesting in deciduous trees. Saw-whet Owls don't build their own nests. Instead, they nest in tree cavities or abandoned woodpecker holes. They primarily eat small mammals such as deer mice though they will also hunt small birds and insects at times. They are nocturnal, which means they roost during the day and are most active at night.

On June 6th, Wild Instincts had the opportunity to help another Northern Saw-whet Owl, a juvenile that had been found grounded and struggling in a local resident's yard. While finding a young bird on the ground does not always mean it needs help, this young Saw-whet was brought to us because it was struggling and had visible injuries. During the exam we discovered trauma to its right wing and leg. Luckily its injuries appeared to be fairly minor. We believed with the appropriate medication and time to heal the Saw-whet would make a full recovery.

During its time at Wild Instincts, we provided medication to help manage pain and inflammation. We also tweezer-fed it multiple times a day to make sure it was getting the nutrition it needed while it healed. After a few weeks as its condition improved, it was moved outside to one of our raptor flight enclosures where it could begin spending time in a more natural environment. This also allowed us to assess how well it was able to fly. At that point, we were able to minimize contact, only needing to provide a tray of fresh food and water each day while giving the owl the space and time it needed to finish recovering.

Once we determined that the Saw-whet had fully recovered, it was time for the next

step: release. Rather than simply opening the enclosure and sending it on its way, we gave the owl the opportunity to leave on its own through a soft release. During a soft release, the enclosure door is left open, allowing the owl to leave when it chooses. We provide food inside the enclosure each day until the owl leaves and then continue placing food on the roof of the enclosure for another one to two weeks after its departure. On July 15th, the door to the Saw-whet's enclosure was opened! When we checked the enclosure the next day, the Saw-whet was nowhere to be found—and that was exactly what we wanted to see! It had successfully flown back into the wild, ready to continue life on its own. What started with an injured juvenile grounded in someone's yard ended with an owl that was strong enough to return to the life it was meant to live—hidden among the trees.

Fun Fact:



Age of Saw-whet owls can be determined by use of UV light. The natural pigments, called porphyrins, will glow bright pink in new feathers. The entire wing glows the same because nestlings grow their flight feathers all at once. As they mature, the feathers age and are replaced at different times, causing a mixed glow.

IM-POSSUM-ABLE OPOSSUMS

By Kaitlin Wikoff, Asst Rehab Director

In the last four years or so, Wild Instincts has seen a significant increase in Virginia Opossum admissions. Opossums used to be a fairly rare animal to come in our door just because of how inhospitable northern Wisconsin winters can be for an animal that has relatively thin fur, a mostly bald tail, and doesn't hibernate. Many of the rehabilitators in the southern half of the state are used to taking opossums since their population is much higher. We are playing a little bit of catch-up, and when average litters are anywhere from 6-12 babies, the numbers add up fast.

Like so many other things we write to tell you about, the days of us rarely seeing opossums are in the past. More people are seeing dead opossums on the road and checking if the pouch has babies. There are not as many rehabilitators in the state, and some people are willing to drive 2 hours one way to bring us baby opossums. The species also seems to be slowly crawling its way north in a push for territory, even though opossums are not quite adapting new ways to withstand winter.



Looking closely at the tail on this adult opossum, you can see the tip has suffered frostbite in the past.

Virginia Opossums are the only marsupial native to North America. Marsupials are a

unique group because they are similar to placental mammals since they have live young that rely on mother's milk to grow, but marsupials are different in that their young are very small and underdeveloped at birth and they spend a lot of their first few weeks of development in their mother's pouch. Baby opossums are born about the size of a jellybean and then crawl their way through mom's fur until they make it into mom's pouch. From there they attach themselves to a nipple, where they will stay for 8 weeks or so. Once they grow too large to stay in the pouch, the young opossums, called joeys, travel by clinging onto mom's back. They will become independent from mom and venture out on their own at roughly 4-5 months of age. The biggest causes for opossums needing rehabilitation are being separated from mom at too young of an age, vehicle strikes, and extreme winter weather.



Opossums eat a large variety of things.

Overall, opossums are omnivorous, meaning that they eat meat and vegetation. They can do well on a varied diet of fruits, vegetables and different types of protein. The biggest hurdle for rehabbers is the young joeys, especially the tiny jellybeans. If the opossum is less than 6 weeks old, there are very few rehabilitators who have much success raising the young ones to release. We cannot be perfect foster moms for little opossums. There is something so unique about opossum moms that

rehabilitators have yet to replicate it on a consistent basis.

When young opossums come in, it can be really difficult to know that the odds are not in their favor. It's a hard conversation to have with rescuers, and then it's an uncomfortable period for the rehabbers who are trying every possible option to get the opossums to grow. We are always honest with anyone bringing in really tiny opossums that we really don't have a good success rate. We try our best, and we are learning every time, but our success rate is still not what we would like it to be. If the opossums are older, eyes open and starting to eat other things in addition to drinking formula, our success is much better. But we still haven't cracked the code for jellybeans yet.



What we refer to as a "jellybean" opossum.

Wild Instincts has seen a consistent trend in the last few years of baby opossums being brought into care. Last year we took in over 70 opossums and this year we've already had over 40. I highly doubt that number will decrease much in the future. We now have to plan for another common species during baby season, including making sure we have correct formulas on hand and having to ensure we have enough cage space for all of our species during peak baby season. Without knowing what species will show up every year, sometimes not all of our outdoor cages get used. This year we ran into a bottleneck between the high volume of squirrels, woodchucks, weasels and a

porcupine needing similar sized cages at the same time as some opossums. We work with what we have and all of the animals got their time outside, but it changes our dynamic to know that we need to increase more cages of that size in addition to all of the other cage expansions we want to build in order to accommodate our growing patient numbers and number of species.



This opossum is roughly 10-weeks old.



Approximately 4-months old, almost ready for release.

SPECIES ADMITTED 2026

1/1/26-8/14/26

American Beaver	1
American Black Bear	12
American Crow	2
American Goldfinch	4
American Robin	39
American Toad	1
American Tree Sparrow	1
American Woodcock	1
Bald Eagle	13
Baltimore Oriole	1
Barn Swallow	4
Barred Owl	12
Belted Kingfisher	15
Big Brown Bat	7
Black-and-white Warbler	1
Black-capped Chickadee	4
Blue Jay	3
Blue-winged Teal	1
Bobcat	1
Broad-winged Hawk	6
Brown-headed Cowbird	2
Canada Goose	17
Cedar Waxwing	11
Chipping Sparrow	5
Cliff Swallow	24
Common Garter Snake	2
Common Grackle	13
Common Loon	1
Common Merganser	1
Common Raven	6
Common Redpoll	1
Common Snapping Turtle	11
Cooper's Hawk	1
Coyote	1
Dark-eyed Junco	1
Deer Mouse	36
Downy Woodpecker	3
Eastern Chipmunk	16
Eastern Cottontail	282
Eastern Fox Snake	1
Eastern Fox Squirrel	2

Eastern Gray Squirrel	74
Eastern Phoebe	20
European Starling	6
Evening Grosbeak	1
Gray Fox	1
Gray Treefrog	1
Gray Wolf	1
Great Blue Heron	1
Great Horned Owl	2
Hairy Woodpecker	3
Hermit Thrush	1
Hooded Merganser	22
House Sparrow	3
Indigo Bunting	2
Least Flycatcher	1
Little Brown Bat	2
Long-tailed Weasel	8
Mallard	55
Meadow Vole	6
Merlin	5
Mourning Dove	18
Mudpuppy	1
Muskrat	1
North American Porcupine	4
North American Ruddy Duck	1
Northern Cardinal	1
Northern Flicker	1
Northern Long-eared Bat	1
Northern Raccoon	12
Northern Saw-whet Owl	2
Northern Short-tailed Shrew	1
Norway Rat	1
Osprey	1
Pileated Woodpecker	2
Pine Grosbeak	1
Purple Finch	2
Red Fox	9
Red Poll	1
Red Squirrel	45
Red-bellied Woodpecker	3
Red-eyed Vireo	6
Red-headed Woodpecker	2
Red-tailed Hawk	2

Red-winged Blackbird	2
Ring-billed Gull	4
Rock Dove	8
Rose-breasted Grosbeak	6
Rough-legged Hawk	1
Ruby-throated Hummingbird	16
Ruffed Grouse	2
Sharp-shinned Hawk	1
Snowy Owl	1
Southern Flying Squirrel	11
Southern Red-backed Vole	5
Swainson's Thrush	1
Thirteen-lined Ground Squirrel	13
Trumpeter Swan	1
Virginia Opossum	42
Western Painted Turtle	22
White-tailed Deer	27
White-throated Sparrow	2
Wild Turkey	7
Wood Duck	17
Wood Thrush	2
Wood Turtle	1
Woodchuck	8
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	5
Total	1104

UPCOMING EVENTS

For the Wild 5K/10K+*

Saturday, Sept 20 8:00 a.m.

Parking & Start/End point at Newbold
Recreation Area: 6954 Ole Lake Road,
Rhineland, WI

*The 10K+ is 6.8 miles.

Pizza Ranch Community Impact Event

Pizza Ranch, 275 S Eisenhower Parkway
Rhineland

Monday, October 26th from 4:00 - 8:00 pm



Did someone say Pizza?



Young Gray Fox