

Wildlife Care Clinic Serves to Educate, Rehabilitate

Travis Saveraid†

"Will someone from the Wildlife Care Clinic please come to the front desk?" The message, barely audible through the pager static, sends Tim Hanks running to the Small Animal Clinic receiving desk. A worker from the Story County Conservation Board stands patiently with a large perforated cardboard box at his feet. "A woman found this red-tailed hawk under a powerline. It must have flown into the wires and broken its wing." Hanks takes the hawk and enters it as a new patient under the care of the Wildlife Care Clinic (WCC) at the Iowa State University School of Veterinary Medicine.

Established in 1982, the WCC receives, cares for, and rehabilitates over 300 wild animals a year. The patients range from baby squirrels and opossums to owls, tundra swans, and pelicans. The goals of the WCC are two-fold: 1) to rehabilitate admitted wild animals, and 2) to raise public awareness of wild raptors through educational programs. Rehabilitation efforts are led primarily by the current WCC rehabilitators, Tim Hanks and Malia Schepers, while Dr. Theresa Hanley directs medical care of the patients. Successful rehabilitation of a raptor with a broken wing usually takes from six months to one year. Upon arrival, a bird with a broken wing is evaluated, rehydrated, and radiographed. The wing is stabilized and, if feasible, a bone pin is surgically placed to ensure correct alignment. As the healing proceeds, the WCC staff stretches the wing to maintain the full range of motion. Once the bones have healed, the bird is flown outside on a kite string-like device called a creance. After complete rehabilitation, the patient is taken to a rural location and released back into the wild.



Wildlife Care Clinic rehabilitator, Tim Hanks, is holding a permanently injured Red-tailed Hawk which is used as an educational bird.

Historically only a few interested veterinary students and student volunteers have worked with the clinic, but recently efforts have been made to introduce senior veterinary students to the wildlife rehabilitation process. During Medicine III clinical rotations, seniors have the opportunity to work with the wild animals. This arrangement will hopefully encourage more seniors to work with the WCC, a valuable experience for graduates entering into the increasingly popular field of exotic medicine.

In addition to rehabilitation, the WCC is involved in presenting educational programs to local school and civic groups. "We present about three to four programs a month all over the area," said Hanks. Added Schepers, "The presentations keep us busy, but to see the kids' faces light up when I bring the red-tail out of the carrier makes it all worthwhile." The programs serve as valuable educational outreaches and generate

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publicity for the WCC efforts. While the College of Veterinary Medicine does provide rooms for the WCC, all monetary funding comes from extramural sources. According to Schepers, the majority of the funding comes from donations, Adopt-an-Animal programs, and T-shirt sales. While funding problems constantly threaten to close the WCC, dedicated efforts by staff members, interns, and volunteers will hopefully keep the WCC operating into the 21st century. "We are the only rehabilitation center in the state with direct access to these kinds of medical resources, radiography, blood work, etc.," commented Schepers. "The WCC provides excellent hands-on experience for students and is great PR for the vet school." ♦



WCC Archives

Top: WCC success story! This Great Horned Owl was rehabilitated by the WCC and released into the wild.



WCC Archives

Left: This permanently injured American Kestrel was a mainstay of the education program for several years. The bird is still used to educate the public, but is now cared for by another rehabilitation center.

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