Wildlife in Crisis under threat from development

Wildlife in Crisis is currently facing a crisis of its own, one that threatens our very existence. Our quiet woodland setting, which is vital for our recuperating wildlife, is under serious threat from an impending residential development.

A subdivision is planned for a woodland area behind our facility, and we have realized we must try to create a buffer of undeveloped land between the planned housing development and our pre-release pens.

The absolute minimum buffer needed to retain our facility’s integrity requires the purchase of two building lots which directly border our wildlife rehabilitation facility. Each of the two-acre lots is priced at $175,000.

We plan to purchase the lots outright, and keep the land undeveloped in perpetuity.

One of the planned lots cuts directly along the edge of our rehabilitation compound, and the construction of a house there would make our continued rehabilitation of wildlife highly problematic, if not impossible.

Discussions on donation of the lots by the developer have stalled, and it’s up to us to raise the money we need ourselves. We are quite literally in a race against the clock to protect our facility. We have a good start on reaching our fund-raising goal, but we’re only part way there.

This four acre plot is well worth saving in its own right. The main feature (Continued on Page 2)

The past year was our busiest ever!

Paws! 1999 was our busiest “baby season” ever! In this issue we will introduce you to some of our success stories. The continued loss of valuable natural habitats combined with the worst drought of the century made the summer of 1999 a difficult one for wildlife. Although the drought has passed, its long-term effects linger on.

The acorns, beechnuts, berries and seeds which normally sustain wildlife throughout the winter months are scarce. This is having a significant impact on the animals who depend on these foods to survive.

Deer, turkeys, raccoons, rodents and songbirds are having a tough winter, as are the coyotes, fox and raptors who prey upon these animals. Many bird species that normally spend the winter here in the Northeast have migrated south. At WIC we are seeing more birds than ever at our bird-feeders due to the short supply of natural food sources.

Natural disasters such as droughts should make us all realize how vulnerable we all are to the forces of mother nature. So this winter, when deer nibble on your prized rhododendron or raccoons wander in through your cat/doggy door let’s remember that they are simply looking for food.

With so little habitat to go around these days we need to be more tolerant than ever of those who live around us.

This past year, we had a heartening number of successful rescues and rehabilitations. Here are just a few stories from the 1999 season:

● Skunk with its head caught in dumpster:
  During the summer, we received a frantic call from a woman in Redding regarding a skunk who had apparently gotten his head caught in a hole in the bottom of a large dumpster.

  Wild animals like skunks are attracted (Continued on Page 3)

We had an unusual number of owls requiring rescue and rehabilitation this year in Weston, which concerns us. Increased residential development is encroaching on the deep woods habitat enjoyed by great horned owls like this one. Also, several of the owls were suffering from a bacterial infection that made it difficult for them to digest food. This handsome fellow suffered from a head injury and severe emaciation, but was eventually released.

Habitat loss accelerated by suburban sprawl

In Connecticut over the past five years, more than 70,000 acres of cropland and forest has been lost to residential or commercial development. In neighboring New York state, the figure is over 500,000 acres. During the 1990s, development occurred at roughly double the rate of the 1980s.

Nationwide, 160 acres an hour are being developed.

This new hyperdevelopment is linked to several factors. The U.S. economy is booming, and more people than ever are leaving the cities for greener fields (greener, at least, until the condos and strip malls go up). More significantly, the U.S. population has almost doubled from 1950 to 2000 (from 150 million to over 270 million).

Rapid, unbridled growth is becoming a source for concern to community planners everywhere. Most worrisome, this hyperdevelopment often takes the form of “sprawl.”

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to the aroma of left-over food in garbage receptacles, and rescue of trapped skunks and raccoons from dumpsters has by dint of necessity, become one of our specialties. When we arrived we saw the poor little guy struggling with all his might to remove his head from this metal contraption. All he managed to do through his struggling was to literally dig himself into a hole. We applied olive oil to his neck on the inside of the dumpster and out. Then we gently slipped his little head through the hole, freeing him from his predicament. He scampered away without looking back. We can only hope that this won’t happen to him again. Prevention tip: Keep tops of dumpsters closed at all times and eliminate access to the top of dumpsters closed at all times and rubber plugs that are removed at the bottom of the dumpster plugged with rubber plugs that are removed at the time of pick up and dumping.

●Raccoon with peanut butter jar stuck on head: A homeowner in Ridgefield spotted a raccoon in her yard, stumbling around with its head stuck in a peanut butter jar. The woman made dozens of fruitless calls to police, veterinarians, humane societies and other agencies, until she reached us. We immediately responded with net in hand. The first thing we noticed was that this was a nursing female who had babies waiting for her somewhere. Since the jar was so tightly wedged on the raccoon’s head it took a few minutes of gently twisting back and forth, but once she was free the raccoon darted off back towards her den to care for her hungry babies. Stopping part way up a nearby tree she glanced back at us as if to say “Thank you ever so much.” This hungry mother raccoon was only trying to get the remnants of the peanut butter at the bottom of the jar. We responded just in time; within another half hour or so the raccoon would have succumbed to asphyxiation. Prevention tip: Wash recyclable containers well with soap and water before placing in recycling bin. Don’t litter and if you see litter pick it up and dispose of it properly. Keep garbage cans inside your garage or shed and have your garbage collectors take them out. Or purchase or build a hinged container to place garbage cans and recyclables in. Certain peanut butter jars (Peter Pan) and yogurt containers (Yoplait) pose the greatest danger to wild animals like raccoons and skunks due to their narrow tops and wide bottoms.

●Hedging great horned owl: A large young owl was spotted by a Weston homeowner one Sunday this past June. The owl did not fly away when approached and no parent birds were seen in the vicinity. When we arrived, the owl made an attempt to fly but was too weak to get aloft. The owl was taken to our facility and was found to be suffering from shock, a severe bacterial infection, emaciation and dehydration. After two months of intensive care and time spent in a large flight cage where he gained the necessary strength, muscle tone and ability to find food on his own, he was released in the deep woods. Since then, he has been spotted on several occasions, and appears to be doing very well!

●Baby bluebirds whose parents were killed by a neighborhood cat: A family in Darien had made it a family project to build and install a bluebird house on their property. They did everything right: they placed the house in a small field on their property, mounted it on a “predator proof” pole, and planted various berry bushes to provide a natural food source to attract birds. Spring came and so did a pair of bluebirds who busily built their nest and meticulously cared for their nestlings flying here and there finding insects to feed their young. One day the family noticed a neighbor’s black cat sitting beside the bluebird box tossing the brilliantly colored father bluebird in the air. They ran outside, but it was too late, the cat had severely injured the father bluebird who died moments later. Two days later the mother bluebird bluebird disappeared, there was no activity at the box all day and the family heard the hungry babies chirping for their parents. WIC removed the dehydrated babies from their warm, little nest and they were brought back to WIC’s facility. Once rehydrated the little nestlings were fed every half hour for several weeks until they learned to eat and find food on their own. They were released, and we

(Continued from page 1)
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Suburban sprawl is contributing to massive habitat loss

(Continued from page 1)

The inclination toward sprawl has never been more evident than in the last 20 years. Of all the land developed in the United States throughout its history, almost 1/6 was developed in the decade 1982-1992.

Fortunately, many communities are taking advantage of these prosperous times to develop creative responses to the problem of sprawl, and state and federal agencies are beginning to offer support. On the national level, Federal agencies are beginning to offer a variety of programs to stem the tide of sprawl, and state and local governments are beginning to address the problem of sprawl, and state and local governments are beginning to address the problem of sprawl. The Legacy Preservation program quantifies the economic benefits of open space increase, adding to overall property values. Suburban single-family homes are not only non-productive. Studies across New England have confirmed that open space has a positive economic contribution when contrasted with uncontrolled single-family home development. Suburban single-family homes very often do not pay enough tax revenue to cover the public services they receive. In contrast, open space requires little or no service, and costs towns very little in comparison. In addition, property values next to open space keep it undeveloped. Issues like non-point source pollution, storm runoff, and overall water quality can provide a point-of-departure for debate. Through the framework of NEMO, it is also possible to overcome the common perception that open space is non-productive.

**What can you do in your town?**

NEMO can send a land use expert to your community to present a seminar to townspersons and elected leaders. They can discuss issues of water quality and open space planning. For information, contact the NEMO Project, Tel: (860) 345-4511; or on the web at www.canr.uconn.edu/ces/nemo.

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Lending a helping hand to winter wildlife

- Provide fresh water daily for birds and other wildlife. Use an electric de-icer for bird baths and rubber bands on ground for deer, squirrels, rabbits, etc. If you have a pond on your property, invest in a bubbler to keep part of the pond unfrozen. Waterfowl will be especially appreciative.

- Be sure to place feeders for birds and other wildlife at least 50 feet away from your house. This will help to prevent birds from flying into your windows on the way to your feeders (hawx although templates made from black contact paper can be affixed to large plate-glass windows to prevent this from happening—call Wildlife in Crisis for details). If feeders are closer than 50 feet, rodents attracted by the free food are more likely to seek entry into your house.

- Plant trees and bushes that provide natural sources of food and shelter for native wildlife. High-bush and low-bush blueberries, holly bushes, viburnums, elderberry, black raspberry, crabapple trees, hemlock, white pine, cedar and dogwood are a few examples of the many natural enhancements to your garden that can benefit wildlife. Always use native plantings in your garden, they will last longer and need less care than exotic species. Use hardy grasses in your lawn and if space allows, let part of your lawn remain a natural field with native grasses. There are many books available on the subject of gardening for wildlife. The Connecticut DEP offers such a book specifically designed for Connecticut’s wildlife. Call (860)675-8130 to order “Backyard Wildlife.”

- Feeding. Black oil sunflower is a good universal seed for songbirds and cracked corn is an adequate supplemental food for turkeys, deer, squirrels and waterfowl. Small birds and mammals will benefit from seed during cold winter months (But use wire or wood suet feeders, not mesh bags which many birds, squirrels and chipmunks get entangled in). If you do opt to feed the birds, please realize that they will become dependent on this food source. They will use valuable energy coming to the feeders each day so it is important to feed without interruption.

- Use non-motorized garden maintenance equipment year-round.

- Use environmentally friendly alternatives to anti-freeze. Thousands of pets and wild animals die each year from ingesting the most popular green antifreeze that sometimes leaks from our automobiles. Conventional antifreeze contains ethylene glycol, a highly toxic compound that attacks the kidneys once ingested. A simple solution is to use the environmentally friendly propylene glycol (brand name “Sierra”). Considered to be less hazardous to animals and humans, Sierra anti-freeze coolant is available at auto supply and hardware stores. For further information about this product call (800)820-7234.

- Instead of using rock salt (sodium chloride) to melt ice use potassium chloride (one brand name is “safe step”). Safer anti-freeze and de-icing salts are not only better for the environment and wildlife, but using these products could save the lives of children and pets.

This is the best case scenario. An animal that was brought to us as a frightened, malnourished infant is released as a healthy sub-adult into suitable habitat. The band-aid approach? perhaps. But we can’t just forget the individual components of the environmental puzzle. And, when someone calls having found a litter of baby raccoons, who else is going to take them? We will continue to rescue and rehabilitate animals of any species (even the populous and sometimes unpopular ones like raccoons).
Wildlife Gallery

(Above, left) A handful of baby bunnies, found this past summer after a cat had killed their mother. A few short weeks later (above, center) this litter of bunnies practically breaks the sound barrier as they rocket out of their cardboard box, into a lovely meadow in Redding, CT. (Above, right) One of the newly-released rabbits, checking out his new surroundings.

(LEFT) A Wildlife in Crisis volunteer ascends a ladder in search of crying animal babies heard by passersby. As it turns out, it was a litter of baby raccoons, whose mother was trapped and removed by a neighbor. (ABOVE) You’ve heard of a pride of lions, this is a “jumble” of six baby raccoons pressing themselves into the smallest space possible as they fearfully regard their new environment. Fortunately, the robust adaptability of this species almost guarantees a successful eventual release. See page six, for a last look at one of these little guys.

Feeding songbirds can be labor-intensive, with syringes full of formula every half hour. Luckily this fledgling prairie warbler was a great eater.

This handsome (though extremely noisy) young flicker was released in Weston following rehabilitation.

Female deer that are killed on the road in the spring always leave orphaned fawns behind (see story, page 3).
of the land is a knob covered with hemlocks, much favored by the local wild turkey clan, and at least one family of owls. A family of fox has denned on the property in past years, and the numerous ledges and rock outcroppings provide nooks ideal for many species of small mammals.

The property is also part of the extended watershed of the Saugatuck River, with a seasonal stream andveral pools that provide ideal spawning grounds for amphibians.

In addition, the lots border the Nature Conservancy’s 1800-acre Devil’s Den Preserve, and this land will help provide an additional buffer zone, we are confident that we can do our work here indefinitely.

You can help! We’re now seeking donations to help purchase these two lots, because we believe that acquiring these four acres will be the keystone

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We realize that buying this land will be a big step, but we believe that the long-term benefit will make it worthwhile. Over the past ten years, we’ve grown by leaps and bounds, expanding our services from Weston to surrounding communities throughout Connecticut. We want to preserve our facility as a lifeline for orphaned and injured wild animals, and a resource for the people who find them and bring them to us.

Overall, we’re a very healthy organization. Our wildlife rescue and rehab operations are in fine shape, and we served more animal patients than ever before this past year. Our level of volunteer assistance is at an all-time high, and we have built strong links with the community.

Our member supporters have been generous over the years, sending the contributions that purchase the animal feed and veterinary supplies that keep us in operation. As a result, literally thousands of wild animals have received a new lease on life. From great-horned owls to flying squirrels, these creatures wouldn’t be alive without the generosity of our donors.

In addition to saving wildlife, we are committed to preserving habitat. Ironically, the first habitat we have to preserve is practically our own backyard. Injured wild animals require quiet and seclusion during recovery, and this is something we will no longer be able to guarantee if the development goes forward.

Once we can protect the two lots behind us from development, our future will be secure. Our other flank is securely anchored on the boundary of the Nature Conservancy Preserve. With the addition of a four-acre buffer zone, we are confident that we can do our work here indefinitely.

You can help! We’re now seeking donations to help purchase these two lots, because we believe that acquiring these four acres will be the keystone for building our future. We are seeking individual donations, as well as grants for the purpose of this acquisition.

On behalf of the animals, we thank you in advance.

For further information, call 203-544-9913 or e-mail to wildlifeincrisis@snet.net.

One of our favorite letters from 1999

Dear Mrs. McDonough,

Thank you very much for helping the bat we found outside. We all hope it lives. We are so happy when you said you would try to help him. We named him Lucifer (short for Myths Lucifer was his latter name) that you again, and again, and again.

From, all the children in the Upper Elementary of the Montessori School

Lucifer

Letter from the president

Dear supporters and volunteers,

Thank you for helping us to do what we do. Your support has been indispensable, given that 1999 was our busiest year ever. We saw dramatic increases in the numbers of injured and orphaned birds and mammals reported to us, and we believe this is directly related to the increased tempo of residential and commercial development in our area.

Case in point: Great horned Owls have been rare visitors to our facility over the past ten years. They need deep woods habitat to breed, and they are very retiring, so people don’t see them very often. This year, we rescued and rehabilitated not one but three young, great horned owls. All were found in areas where new subdivisions are cutting into areas of mature second growth forest. To me, this was a wake-up call.

I have come to believe that the most important thing that we can do for wildlife is to preserve their natural habitats, hence the creation of the Wildlife in Crisis Land Trust. And by preserving land in its undeveloped state, we increase quality of life not only for wildlife but for people as well.

We are going to continue to rescue and rehabilitate injured and orphaned wildlife of every species. That’s our expertise, and it’s a service that is important, given the fact that no other public or private groups fulfill this function. But we’re also going to address the root causes of the increased traffic we’re seeing through this facility, and those root causes include habitat loss. Thanks again for your support. I can’t tell you how much it means to me when I see a wild animal that would have died released healthy and whole back into the natural world. I’m heartened that so many people care enough to bring us animals that they find, and that you, our supporters, care enough to help us continue this work.

With hope,

Lucy McDonough-Reid

WIC receives grant to publish wildlife manual

Thanks to the generosity of the Fairfield County Foundation, WIC will be publishing a manual entitled “Simple and Effective Solutions to Common Wildlife Problems.”

Wildlife/human conflicts are increasing in Connecticut, as residential and commercial development proceed apace. The purpose of this manual is to provide information to the public on how to effectively deal with injured, orphaned and “nuisance” wildlife problems. To address that, we will be distributing this manual to veterinarians, police departments, humane societies and nature centers free-of-charge. These are the public service groups that must often receive the initial call about a wildlife problem. It is our hope that this quick-reference manual will help answer common questions and quickly resolve problems involving wildlife. By distributing this manual to each township in the state, we will help citizens address wildlife issues in a rational, cost-effective and humane fashion.

We intend to have this manual published by spring 2000. It will be available for individual purchase for $25. Make checks payable to Wildlife in Crisis, and request “wildlife manual.”
The past year was a busy one, with numerous successful rescues/rehabs

(Continued from page 3)

Field mice are attracted to the seed, providing the fox with the opportunity to hunt on its own. We can tell from remains left in the cage and from stool samples whether the fox is successful. Prevention Tip: Unlike baby raccoons, baby fox are cared for by both parents and young kits will often explore their territory immediately outside their den. If you see a baby fox (young red fox look like little, grey kittens), stand back and observe the situation before attempting to rescue the kit. Most likely you’ll see the kit quickly disappear into it’s den if given the chance.

● Baby flying squirrels orphaned when “their” tree was cut down:

WIC received the call about four baby flying squirrels with their eyes still closed who miraculously survived a 70 foot fall when the tree that they were “safely” nestled in was swiftly cut down with a chainsaw. Their mother was crushed by the weight of the tree, but the babies were protected by the small hollow that their mother had carefully chosen for them. They had a few nicks and scrapes, but were bruised, but no worse for the wear. Prevention Tip: Open holes in the ground on your property pose a significant danger to wildlife and humans alike. Keep old wells securely and permanently covered. Other obstacles include window wells, which skunks often fall into due to their poor eye-sight. Place plastic window well covers over opening.

● Ruby-Crowned Kinglet: This sweet little bird was found this September in Bethel with a broken leg and was brought to the Bethel Veterinary hospital. The compassionate staff at Bethel Veterinary hospital sent him to us for rehabilitation. His fragile leg was carefully and swivelly set and he was placed in a very quiet area at WIC. Little birds like this one often die from pure stress in these situations, so we kept contact to a minimum and hoped the leg was healing under the tiny bandage. We knew that keeping him for too long would increase his chance of dying from stress, we removed the bandage after only two weeks. Bird legs heal very quickly and thankfully this leg healed well. We released him and watched in awe as he flew off.

● Deer trapped in a dry well:

We received a strange call from a woman who was renting a house near the Norwalk river, reporting that a deer had fallen into a well on her property. WIC responded and found a large doe weighing several hundred pounds trapped about 20 feet down in an old underground pumphouse. The doe had walked across a rolled trapdoor, which collapsed, tumbling the animal into a square underground room about 10 feet by 10 feet occupied by a large, rusty pump. WIC volunteers and a DEP Conservation Officer sedated the doe, and then hoisted her out to safety. Since 99 percent of the “fawn calls” we receive do not involve orphans, we explained to the caller that does only return to their fawns a few times a day. And that if there is any activity in the area the doe will not return until after dark when things settle down and she can move her fawn to a safer area under cover of darkness. Fawns instinctually lie still and wait for their mothers to come to them for the first 7 days after birth. Knowing this, we asked the homeowner to see if any deer had recently been hit by cars nearby. Unfortunately we received a call back a few minutes later saying that she had found a dead lactating doe on the road near her house. WIC rescued the fawn and placed him in our intensive care ward for a few days, after which he was placed in WIC’s deer pen with 15 other orphaned fawns. Once outside, our fawns are fed via a bottle rack in order to eliminate human contact with the fawns. They are given natural foods and when they are fully weaned they are released in September. The anecdotes recounted above reflect just a few of our wildlife encounters of this past year. Hundreds of mammals, birds and reptiles passed through our facility this year. Not all of the stories had happy endings, but that is the nature of what we do.

● Fawn orphaned when his mother was hit by a car (see photo, pg. 5): In June, we received a call from a concerned Westport homeowner regard-