Summer 2025
E. Stetzar, Editor

DELAWARE COUNCIL OF WILDLIFE REHABILITATORS & EDUCATORS

LICENSED IN THE STATE OF DELAWARE

IN THIS ISSUE:

DCWRE FOUNDERS

NATIVE HABITAT

HEALTH NEWS
Screwworm
National list of Diseases
Malocclusion in Squirrels
Combining Conspecifics

STRIPED SKUNK

UPCOMING TRAININGS

DCWRE NEWS

A Word from DCWRE Co-Founder Dawn Cox



Dawn Cox, Co-Founder of DCWRE

Who would have thought that a shoebox containing five young Cottontail rabbits would pave the way to what we are today: the Delaware Council of Wildlife Rehabilitators and Educators. The week-old bunnies came through the door of my family's feed store in 1988 and were successfully released back into the wild that summer. Word spread quickly and the family farm west of Wyoming Delaware became a sanctuary for injured and orphaned wildlife. By 1990 I was rehabilitating hundreds of birds and mammals. A few years later I was hired by the Division of Fish and Wildlife to coordinate the State Fair Wildlife Habitat Room. Seeing a rapid increase in wildlife needing help, I founded the Delaware Wildlife Rehabilitator's Association (DWRA) in 1995. As a result, I got help! Volunteers cleaned cages and fed animals, partnerships formed with environmental organizations and local veterinarians helped treat injured animals. The years rolled by, and the wildlife through my doors kept increasing. Time to create some awareness about the wildlife people share their space with! Hopefully we'll take in fewer animals needing rehabilitation. The "If You Care, Leave Them There" educational campaign was initiated. I am so thankful that Cathy Martin entered my life somewhere around 1992 because I was going nuts trying to stay ahead of everything. We had the same vision, worked well together, and became good friends. It was in 2005 that we both decided to reformat the organization and change the name to the Delaware Council of Wildlife Rehabilitators and Educators (DCWRE).



Cathy Martin, Co-Founder of DCWRE

We are so thankful for their vision! DCWRE, Leadership

DCWRE Members Engage Over 3,300 People in Spring Wildlife Education Efforts

From March through May 2025, many of our dedicated DCWRE members were busy sharing their passion for wildlife through educational programs that reached an estimated audience of 3,312 across Delaware.

Our outreach events took place at a variety of locations, including Bombay Hook Preserve, Trap Pond State Park's Nature Fest, the Angola by the Bay Earth Day Celebration, Tri-State Bird Rescue & Research's Open House, the Delaware Museum of Nature and Science's STEAM Career Fair, as well as several Zoom presentations focused on Box Turtles.

A heartfelt thank you goes out to Cathy Martin, Jean Hedrich, Jean Taylor, Tonyea Mead, and Natalie Allen for generously volunteering their time and expertise to deliver these engaging presentations.

Program topics ranged from backyard wildlife and their importance, to debunking myths about bats, understanding why box turtles' matter, and sharing other fascinating facts about Delaware's native species.

We believe the key to protecting and preserving our wildlife begins with education. If you're interested in getting involved with school or public outreach programs, please contact Tonyea Mead at **ercomead@aol.com**.

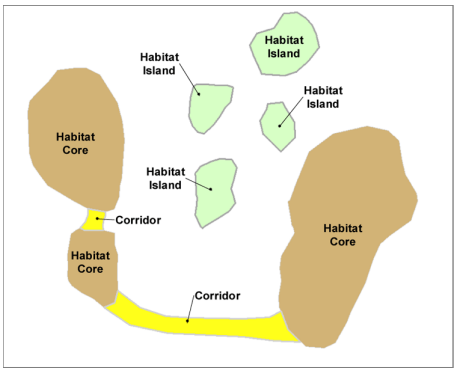
NATIVE HABITAT - VITAL FOR DELAWARE'S WILDLIFE



The primary goal of a wildlife rehabilitator is to return wildlife to their native habitat, essentially giving them another chance to thrive. Because of habitat loss and habitat fragmentation, it is often challenging to find suitable release sites that meet all the essential needs of the animal. Habitat loss/fragmentation often creates the conditions that make wild animals vulnerable to anthropomorphic threats, leading to injury, disease, or becoming orphaned.

What can be done about it? There are important ways you can help, such as: participating in habitat restoration projects, donating money to land conservation groups, or lobbying politicians to enact better land protection laws. But, we can also create suitable areas for Delaware's native animals in our own backyards. Of course those with larger tracts of land can support a more diverse and abundant suite of species, but small parcels can provide vital connections between core habitats, acting as a travel corridor to get there safely.

Think of these habitat patches as a system of 'stepping stones' across the landscape that animals use to get from point A to point B. These 'stones' provide a place to rest, find shelter from environmental conditions, and cover from predators. Wild animals need these patches to move daily across the landscape between foraging and resting areas, or seasonally as they migrate to breeding or overwintering habitat.



In a landscape fragmented by developments and roadways its important that these habitat patches provide the essential elements that wild animals need to survive. There are four main categories: Food, Water, Shelter, and Places/Space to Raise Young. More than anything else, the type of native plants[1] available will determine the wildlife species attracted to these small spaces.

Food

- Plant trees, shrubs, flowers, and other plants that provide berries, seeds, or attract insects
- Native plant species should comprise at least 50% of available food sources
- Have plants with a variety of blooming and fruiting times so food is available most of the year

Water

- Need a clean, fresh reliable source year round, or a combination of sources
- Sources - bird bath, saucer, pond, logs, rocks, any water holding structure

Shelter

- Evergreen trees, dead fallen trees, brush or rock pile, thicket
- Have a variety, so there is shelter at varying heights, its layered, and available year round



Space/ Places to Raise Young

- Den sites, natural cavities in trees, woody debris, nesting boxes, bird houses, squirrel boxes, hollow logs

[1]Delaware organizations that promote Native Plants:

Delaware Native Plant Society

Delaware Naturally is a citizen focused effort of the Delaware Native Species Commission

Delaware Invasive Species Council – Protecting Delaware's ecosystems by preventing the introduction and reducing the impact of non-native invasive species.

HEALTH NEWS

Screwworm *Cochliomyia hominivorax*

The New World Screwworm (NWS), a.k.a larvae of the *Cochliomyia hominivorax* fly, is an emerging parasite that should be on everyone's watchlist. The larvae burrow into the flesh of warm-blooded mammals and feed on the tissue causing infection, and death if not treated properly. NWS has spread from islands in the Caribbean and South America where it is endemic, to countries in Central America and Mexico. Interestingly it was eradicated from the U.S. in 1966, thus re-introduction is a real risk.

IDENTIFICATION:
Size: Common housefly

Body: Metallic Blue or Green, 3 dark stripes along the back

Eyes: Orange


Photo: Entomological Society of America

SIGNS OF INFESTATION IN BIRDS OR MAMMALS:

- Irritated behavior
- Head Shaking
- The smell of decay

Infestations may not lead to death as the disease can be treated and prevented to a degree with doramectin. If you suspect a NWS case it should be reported immediately to the appropriate authority:

Wildlife – Division of Fish and Wildlife at:
Reporting Sick or Dead Wildlife - DNREC

Domestic Animals –DE Department of Agriculture at:
Poultry & Animal Health - Delaware Department of Agriculture - State of Delaware

Humans – Delaware Division of Public Health
Division of Public Health

For more information go to the USDA's NWS page

National List of Reportable Animal Diseases

Did you know that there is a national animal health reporting system? State officials send in monthly list of animal dieases and published case definitions to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). The USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service maintains the list. Although the primary focus is on livestock, avian, lagomorph, and aquaculture animals, many of these diseases can also occur in wild animals. Thus its good to keep current of dieases identified in your area.

For more information go to:

National List of Reportable Animal Diseases

Malocclusion in Squirrels

Squirrels, like all rodents, have teeth that grow throughout their lifetime. The two top and two bottom incisors grow on a curved trajectory, but are honed down if they are perfectly aligned in the jaw when the squirrel chews on hard objects. If the teeth become misaligned, the bottom incisors will continue to grow until they break through the roof of the mouth killing the squirrel or preventing it from eating. This 'malocclusion' can be caused by injuries to the teeth or jaw, malnutrition, and genetics. Its vitally important to examine dentition of rodents during intake and to carefully monitor regrowth of missing or broken teeth, or jaw injuries. A veterinary evaluation is recommended if there is misalignment because surgery may be needed if the condition is severe. In mild cases the teeth can be trimmed but chronic cases require trimming about every four weeks. This frequent trimming makes the animal non-releasable.

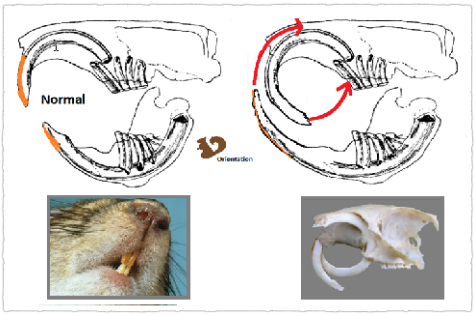


Figure: Teeth Issues in Squirrels | Mysite

COMBINING CONSPECIFICS

Social interactions are important for enriching the lives of wild animals in rehabilitation. It promotes healing as well. That is why single individuals received into the care of a rehabilitator will often be housed with others of the same species, although they are unrelated. At times, rehabilitators will network with each other and combine their single animals, so these individuals are not raised alone. It is critical to keep a record when unrelated animals are combined.

Case in point: A few days after a DCWRE rehabber received a gravely ill young cottontail rabbit, staff from the Department of Health (DPH), reached out with concerns about the unsanitary way this wild animal was handled by the person that originally found it. Turns out this person gave the rabbit fluids from a syringe that her daughter then put in her mouth. The DPH wanted the rabbit tested for rabies as a precaution because it was a sick, wild animal. Fortunately the DCWRE rehabber did not combine the rabbit with another litter in her care because it was in such poor condition. Because of a carefully documented intake form, the rehabber proved to DPH that the other rabbits in her care were not exposed to the sick one. Otherwise, DPH could have required all of the rabbits to be tested.

Intake Sheets should Include the following at a minimum:

- Rescuer's name, address, cell phone,
- Species and number of individuals
- Approximate age of animal
- Animal's condition and final disposition
- If the individual (or multiples) was put together with another individual or individuals

Striped Skunk *Mephitis mephitis* - Native to Delaware

Its not common for wildlife rehabilitators to receive a complete litter of skunks* - usually its just one or two at a time. The seven little skunk kits below, from the same litter, were brought to Cathy Martin, one of DCWRE's experienced rehabilitators on June 6. Their mother was found dead on the road in front of a home outside of Smyrna. The next day the residents saw two small skunks wandering around their yard next to their shed, and then later, noticed another six or seven. After calling Cathy to discuss the situation, they collected two of the kits by putting canned pet food with a strong aroma in a tote. By the next afternoon, they had collected seven little stinkers, 5 females and 2 males. At intake Cathy found they weighed between 4 oz - 5 oz each and were about two months old. Because skunk kits are weaned between 4-6 weeks of age, they were readily able to lap up their special formula from a dish. Skunk kits are relatively agile at this age and playful, but will not have fully developed their scent glands for another month or so. This little group of seven are doing well and will hopefully be released when they are fully independent at about 4 months of age.

**to rehabilitate skunks, the full series of rabies vaccinations and UTD titers are required*

General Life History Notes:

- *Activity period* - Skunks are most active during night or twilight hours, but they can be seen during the daytime especially when they have young or are foraging if food is scarce
- *Diet*: Omnivorous - eat a wide variety of plants and animals; their diet varies with the seasons; will eat carrion or scavenge, including trash
- *Habitat*: A variety of habitats from woodlands to open fields, adapted to urban areas; use dens or burrows for shelter, during breeding, and in the winter; will dig their own den or use abandoned burrows of other animals.
- *Reproduction*: Typically breed and give birth once a year; gestation period is 59-77 days; Litter size is 2-10 kits, which are born blind and helpless. They develop rather quickly and are weaned at 6-7 weeks.
- *Life Span*: Dependent on habitat and food availability, an average of 7 yrs in the wild although many do not survive their first year; Roadways are a major threat



Interesting Facts About Striped Skunks

Skunks will stomp their feet and may slap their tail on the ground and then stand on their hind feet as a warning before they spray their foul-smelling liquid from their anal glands - spraying up to 10 feet away!
Striped skunks generally have a white stripe that runs from head to tail, but each skunk has a unique stripe pattern and variation on the amount of white that runs down its back.
Like humans, the black and white fur of skunks may begin to gray as they age
Skunks have poor eyesight, so they rely on their well developed sense of smell and hearing while hunting and foraging for food
Baby skunks will travel head to tail in a row following their mother. It helps them stay together with such poor eyesight.

Exciting Educational Opportunities for the 2025-2026 Year



Are you passionate about protecting Delaware's wildlife or know someone who might be interested in becoming a wildlife rehabilitator? We have an exciting lineup of trainings planned for the next 12 months, and we'd love for you to join us!

We're kicking off the fall season with a full-day **Wildlife Basics Training** on **Sunday, September 28**, from **9:00 AM to 3:30 PM** at **St. Jones Preserve**. The day will include a barbecue lunch, guidance on completing apprentice paperwork, and engaging hands-on activities. We're especially thrilled to welcome a **special guest speaker from a national wildlife organization**—you won't want to miss it! Registration details will be released soon.

Also coming soon in **August**—**Squirrel Training**! This in-person session will cover essential information just in time for the **second baby squirrel season**. Stay tuned for the date and location!

- **Monthly Trainings[1]:**
  *Our monthly sessions will be a mix of **in-person and virtual trainings**, depending on the topic.*
  Virtual sessions will run approximately **one hour**.
  In-person sessions will be about **two hours** and centrally located to accommodate attendees from both the northern and southern parts of the state.



- **Upcoming Topics for 2025-2026 Include:**
  Turtle Care: What You Need to Know
  Delaware DNREC Policies and Procedures
  Caring for Baby Opossums
  It's Bunny Season!
  Handling Public Interactions
  Cage Recommendations: Sizing, Materials, and Design
  Outreach Presentations: How to Engage the Public

[1]***Note:*** *We will **not meet in December**.*

We are always looking for **guest speakers** and new **training topic ideas**. If you're interested in presenting or have suggestions, please contact **Tonyea Mead** at ercomead@aol.com.

DELAWARE COUNCIL OF WILDLIFE REHABILITATORS & EDUCATORS

Dedicated to the Care of Native Wildlife through Rehabilitation, Education, and Community Engagement

www.dewildliferescue.com

https://www.facebook.com/dewildliferescue/

DCWRE Leadership

- President: Edna Stetzar
- President-Elect: Tonyea Mead
- Past President: Jean Taylor
- Secretary: Cathy Martin
- Treasurer: Jean Taylor