



No Summer Open House
Save the Date
September 16th Saturday
from 11:00am-2:00pm
Fall Open House

BABY SEASON HAS ARRIVED

Critter Creek is, in general, closed to the public from late spring to the end of summer because of the enormous influx of orphaned wildlife. Some are only hours old when they arrive. So much of the facility must be off limits for privacy and intensive care purposes. Through pictures we will try to give you a “behind the scenes” look at what takes place.



First we try desperately to get people to place the animal back in its nest, den or burrow. Taking care of newborns is not very successful especially for opossums and rabbits. We were fortunate to have a mother and her crew of six babies come in. She had been hit by a car but did not die from her injuries. We were able to patch her up and after her crew started to wean we were able to introduce six orphaned babies. She obligingly took them on. We were able to give her a few more over the next few weeks. In the end she had

raised her own brood and all the foster babies. This domestic mother rabbit had six of her own, so when we got a tiny baby jack rabbit, we tucked it in among her six and she has cared for it.



Seldom are we lucky enough to have a nursing mother healthy enough to be a surrogate for orphans.

In the absence of a nursing mom we have to use milk replacement. There are many milk replacement products sold for wildlife that have been designed to meet the individual needs of each animal. There are squirrel, opossum, rabbit, raccoon, fox, coyote, and

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deer milk replacers, so we are kept busy mixing each of these. As they grow their bodies change indicating that they need to get off the milk and start eating solid food. This can be a challenge. The wild mother encourages her young to eat by chewing the food up and then spitting it out to make it easier for them to digest. In our case a blender works well; in fact so well that this little fox dove right in with both feet.



Once they are on solid food, they grow amazingly fast. When they reach a certain size they are moved to an outdoor pen. Here their contact with humans is very minimal, making them wilder and less apt to approach humans once we release them. This little coyote tries to stuff as much food as he can into his mouth in competition with his cage-mate.

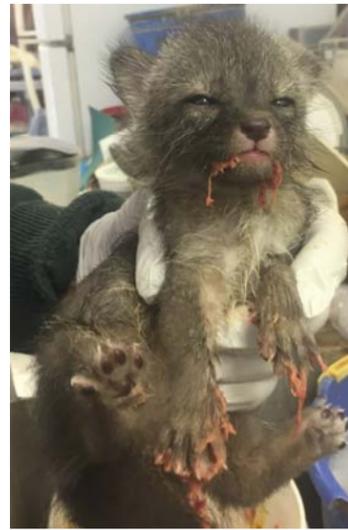


When the small babies come in we put them on heat around the clock with a foster "mom." These stuffed toys get quite a work out. They get suckled, peed on, and chewed on, giving the animal the sense that it isn't alone. This also minimizes habituation from contact with humans. We only need to handle them to feed them and back they go into foster care.



For ducks because they are used to being in a flock, it can be hard on a single baby that has been separated from its siblings. Again we provide a source of heat, food, access to a small amount of water and a "mom," in this case a feather duster. They snuggle right up to it and are perfectly content.

Birds of prey are a little easier. They are mostly interested in getting fed. Sometimes they arrive with problems. In the case of this young red-tailed hawk, he had



splayed legs, so we taped his legs to create a brace and in 10-12 days, we can remove the tape, and he is back on track. With young birds their rate of growth is so fast that whatever repair needs to be done occurs quickly minimizing how long they have to be in a cast, a brace, or wing wrap.

We get in quite a variety of owls as well...everything from this tiny baby Barn Owl to larger baby



Great Horned Owls. Once they are able to eat without assistance, they are moved to flight cages where adults "foster" them until they are strong enough to learn to hunt. Once they have successfully hunted we release them.



Crow babies are demanding. They are easy to feed. We call them "bucket mouths" because they gape so wide it is hard to miss with the food. The problem comes when they need to

become self-feeding. They can be quite lazy. We find what works best is being a little neglectful ...maybe not be so quick to feed them when they're begging. At some point we catch them getting the food from the dish on their own because we weren't quick enough to meet their demands. Once we see them feed themselves, they are on their own. Again at a certain size they are moved into the cage with the adults



Baby song birds take a great deal of time. We feed them as often as we can throughout the day. Fortunately in the wild, the parents quit feeding them at night. Once they are feathered and self-feeding they are moved to a small flight cage where they can become strong fliers. At that point, they are released. This cycle is amazingly fast...generally a few weeks to a month.

So around the beginning of June, we receive an occasional fawn. Again people are better off leaving it where they have found it, as the mother will come back in time to take care of it. Nonetheless some fawns are truly orphaned, and we do have to step in. Deer represent a commitment of many more months to raise up compared to some of the other animals. Once they are weaned, we try to introduce them to a variety of forages, so they will recognize them as food.

As you can see all of these processes take a lot of time and work, making necessary to put all our resources toward baby season rather than tours. We will have our next Open House on September 16th, so be sure to come visit.