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May, 2003

Edition

Featured: Fox Squirrel

A Message from our President

Newly elected to President in December, 2002, Maggie Lehning has been on NWRI's Board for over six years. Maggie's expertise is that of significant fundraising ventures. She can be seen each year leading the UNO's Women's Walk



Maggie Lehning President

I want to take this opportunity to provide an update for our members ... accomplish-

ments during 2002 and plans for 2003 and going forward.

First off, let me say that NWRI has just completed a very successful year. In 2002, our census was just over 2100 birds and mammals cared for by our dedicated volunteers. Our educational staff delivered over 60 programs to community, professional and school groups. Heller Art Images hosted another very successful fund raising event for NWRI. Two television news stories featured NWRI and our work (bobcat release and squirrels) which aired to a wide viewing audience. Two of our Board members represented NWRI and Nebraska wildlife populations on the Omaha Metropolitan Medical Response Team Veterinary Subcommittee which is charged with preparing an integrated and coordinated response for Omaha and surrounding communities in the event of a natural disaster or terrorist

These are but a representative sample of the many activities in which our members participate. All of our activities are related to the rescue, rehabilitation and release back into the wild of our birds and mammals. Education is a primary component of the NWRI mission and acts as a means to preserve habitat and species diversity within the state of Nebraska. Don't miss NWRI's meeting on "Bats" on May 22nd,

7pm in the Nebraska Humane Society Auditorium and hosted by Backyard Birds. This presentation is open to the general public.

The year 2003 is shaping up as another banner year. The number of trained animal care givers has almost doubled over last season (although we can always use more hands). NWRI plans to offer our popular five-day Environmental TREK program as a residential program at Dana College in July. The program, taught by faculty of Dana College, UNO and area high schools, is open to teenagers. The curriculum of Nebraska ecology, history, and wildlife uses computer technology and field work to create a unique experience for our students. If you would like to help give a young person the opportunity to attend the program by sponsoring a scholarship, please leave a message to that effect on our hotline, and we will follow up with you.

Our Educational Team has already given a number of presentations with many more requests pending. We will continue to offer our quarterly programs on bird and wildlife topics throughout the year. We will participate again this year in the University of Florida study on squirrel pox. We will also continue in the West Nile monitoring program that was initiated last year. Unfortunately we had to euthanize several squirrels in 2002 that were symptomatic and tested positive for West Nile.

NWRI has a lot happening. We continue to work on securing the future of NWRI through the construction of an Environmental Technology Education Center and Wildlife Hospital on 56 acres in Sarpy County. We are studying the plausibility of having an interim facility on the site in 2003.

(continued on page 5)

NWRI New Web Site ... Now Operational

We last reported in our February newsletter that our web site at DiscoverOmaha.com had been discontinued. Since that time, Board Member, Tim Heller, has been working to reestablish this important link to the community.

We are pleased to announce that effective immediately the new NWRI web site is up and running. You can view it at http://nwri0.tripod.com/

As a cost conscious organization, we have elected to go with a free web hosting service, rather than expending funds that would detract from our mission.

The web site is still in development and more pictures and information will continue to be added over time. So please check back with us from time to time to watch our progression.

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Meet Lana and Trina ... Wildlife Care Providers



Lana Halstead

Halstead and Trina Elia-Swanson are our squirrel team coleaders. Both ioined NWRI due to their love for animals and a desire to as-

Lana

sist animals unable to care for themselves. Lana joined in 1993 when prompted by the Beaver Lake Nature Club to provide care for animals in the Beaver Lake area. Trina joined in January 2002. Both have a special interest in squirrels and together, share the responsibilities for over 250 squirrels NWRI typically rehabs annually.

Lana first squirrel experience was following a terrible storm in 1990 which hit Beaver Lake with 14 inches of rain over a very short period of time. Under her kitchen window Lana found a 7 day old baby squirrel, which is not the most pretty site in the world at that point in their lives (furless and frail), and raised it to a young adult ready for release. It was a wonderful first experience, and Chuckles nearly broke her hе heart when left her.

Infant and young squirrels require patient loving attention over several months before they are able to be released. They also require proper diet and exercise appropriate for the various stages of a squirrel's growth and development. Squirrels are prone to metabolic bone disease (MBD) and must have a calcium-rich diet when young. Squirrels of all ages are seen for care by NWRI's

rehabbers. A rehabber's commitment to a species requires an investment in continuing education in order to understand its unique needs for feeding, care, caging, illnesses, medication formulation and injury treatment which may be necessary during its life.

Lana and Trina both derive great personal satis-

faction in knowing that t h e y are making a difference to our squirrels and our habitats that need them. The day of release is bitter-sweet. but there is joy and accomplishment in ena-



Trina Elia-Swanson

bling a squirrel, that would most surely have perished if left on its own, to have another chance at life.

As with many rehabbers, Lana and Trina have several memorable rehab experiences. A few include: Bernice - an eight week old female, who had run twice through a bonfire and had severely burned her feet; Peg Leg - another eight week old female with a broken leg (and a most photogenic subject, as illustrated by her picture on the front page of this newsletter); Hope - an extremely malnourished female with a severe case of mange and brought home by a family's dog, who proved her fighting spirit by tolerating a severe treatment régime, including many long nights and was able to be returned

(continued on page 4)

Thanks to our Many Friends and Donors

NWRI is deeply grateful to the following individuals, foundations, and businesses for their contributions to our work in providing medical management and compassionate care for the injured, sick, and orphaned wildlife that come to our volunteers.

Mike Brookhouser Mary Lou Chapek Jerrold & Sally McKenzie Floris Sledge

Featured: Fox Squirrel

Location

Fox squirrels are found throughout the eastern United States; their natural range extends from Florida, north to Canada, and west to the Dakotas, Colorado, and Texas, but they are not found in New England.

General Characteristics

Fox squirrels (*Sciurus niger*) are the largest arboreal, or tree squirrels. There are three different color



phases; in the northeastern part of their range they have gray backs with vellowish bellies, in the western part of their range they are reddish in color, and in the south they are often black with a white blaze on their face and a white tipped tail. In addition several members of the species in South Carolina have white ears. Generally, there is no difference between males and females with respect to size or coloration. They are distinguishable from their close cousin, the gray squirrel (S. carolinensis), in that gray squirrels are at least 20% smaller and have silver tipped fur. In natural conditions, fox squirrels live to 7 or 8 years of age, although one individual lived to 18 years of age in captivity. They tend to be larger in the northern part of their range than in the southern part of their range. Their bodies measure 450 - 700 mm total length, 200 -330 mm tail length, 51 - 82 mm

right hind foot length, and they range in weight from 500 - 1000 grams. Fox squirrels have both a summer and winter coat, and therefore molt twice each year. The spring molt begins in March, whereas the autumn molt begins in September, but the tail only molts once each year during the summer. Fox squirrels have four sets of whiskers located above and below the eyes, on the underside of the

head in front of the throat, and on the nose. Whiskers, also known as vibrissae, are touch receptors that provide the animal with information about its immediate surroundings. Fox squirrels have very good eyesight even in dim light and a wide field of vision. They also have a well developed sense of smell and hearing.

Squirrels have upper and lower incisor teeth followed by a gap called a diastema. The diastema is where the canine teeth would normally be found in carnivorous animals such as cats or dogs, or omnivorous animals such as monkeys. Behind the diastema are the cheek or grinding teeth which consist of premolars and molars. As with

other rodent species, the incisors continuously grow to compensate for the enormous amount of wear that comes from a herbivorous diet. Young squirrels have milk teeth which are replaced by permanent teeth when they are between six and twelve months old.

Fox squirrels are highly adapted for climbing trees and fa-

tal falls are rare. Adaptations for climbing trees include tough curved

claws for climbing, and they can leap considerable distances using powerful hind limbs. Tails are used for balance when running and leaping between trees and held over the back of a resting animal.

Reproduction

Fox squirrels have two breeding seasons per year, and most breeding occurs in December - February and May - June of each year. Females can have two litters per year, one from each breeding season. Average litter sizes range from 2 - 4 individuals: the winter litter is generally smaller than the summer litter. Female fox squirrels are sexually mature as early as 6 months of age, but generally don't reproduce until 1 year of age. Male fox squirrels are sexually mature at 10 - 11 months of age. Functional testes descend in the scrotum from December to February and May to July, although testes may stay descended without spermatogenesis until October. Both sexes remain reproductively active throughout their lives.

Juvenile squirrels are born without hair and their eyes remain closed for about one month. Young begin to venture outside of their nest at 7 - 8 weeks of age, but generally don't travel on the ground until closer to 3 months of age.

Juvenile males are more likely to



leave the natal area and disperse than are juvenile females. Dispersal

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Featured: Fox Squirrel (continued from page 3)

usually occurs during the fall, and young males move between 1 and 16 kilometers away from their natal nest. The longest recorded dispersal is 100 km. Dispersal is a high cause of mortality among males, which results in a slightly female biased sex ratio.

Habits and Ecology

Fox squirrels are active year round during the daytime. Even during the most severe winter weather, they will leave their nests for short periods of time to forage for food. Activity is bimodal from late spring to autumn with peaks 2 hours after sunrise and again 2 - 5 hours before sunset.

Fox squirrels have large overlapping home ranges and are non-territorial. Fox squirrels are most commonly found in oak-hickory forests. In the south they will also be found in live oak and mixed forests, cypress and mangrove swamps, and in piney areas.

Fox squirrels are generalist feeders, and their diet is dependent upon the area in which they are found. Squirrels feed heavily on nuts, flowers, and buds of 24 oak species, and 10 species of walnut, hickory and pecan. Other food items include the fruits, seeds, buds or flowers of maples, mulberry, hackberry, elms, buckeyes, horse chestnuts, wild cherries, dogwoods, hawthorne, hazelnut and ginkgo. Pine tree seeds and pollen cones are readily eaten including cedar, hemlock, pines, and spruce. Fungi are also consumed when readily available in summer as are cultivated crops in winter. Animal food items include bones, bird eggs, nestlings, and frogs.

Food consumption peaks in summer or autumn and decreases in winter. Autumn rates of food consumption exceed energetic needs by 32% so that the animals can increase their weight before the onset of winter. Fox squirrels are classic scatter hoarders. They carry nuts in their jaws and bury them in various locations within their home ranges. Olfaction and memory are used in locating their caches.

Nests

Fox squirrels typically use 3 different types of nests: winter drays, summer drays, and dens. Drays are round conspicuous twig and leaf nests built in trees between 25 and 45 cm in diameter. They are waterproof, and made of an outer layer of interwoven twigs with a softer inner lining consisting of moss, bark, leaves, fur, feathers, lichen or other similar material. Summer drays are less elaborate than winter drays and may be no more than twig and leaf saucer shaped platforms on exposed branches. Drays are generally built in the upper 1/3 of the canopy and seldom in isolated trees which may serve to protect nests from predators.

Tree dens are another type of nest used by fox squirrels. These are holes or cavities in the main trunks of trees which are also lined with soft material. Formation of den cavities requires 8 - 30 years and are more common in deciduous trees than in coniferous trees. Squirrels often use dens in winter months and drays in summer months.

NWRI meets Zippy

... short for Zip Code since he traveled to us from a great distance. In late January, Phyllis Futch, Animal Operations, received a call from the Humane Society. It seemed a truck driver had found a stow away on his rig and brought the wayward squirrel to their facility for veterinary care. Zippy was very close to being completely frozen, having hitch-hiked his ride on the "outside" of the truck.

The veterinarian who examined Zippy found some frostbite on his ears and on his feet pads, but after a couple hours of thawing out, his activity level increased dramatically, and we had hopes of a full recovery. He went home with Trina Elia-Swanson, Co-Team Leader for Squirrels. Unfortunately, he passed away very peacefully in his sleep from obvious internal injury from the frost bite.

Meet Lana and Trina ... Wildlife Care Providers (continued from page 2)

healthy to her neighborhood. Throughout it all she was able to retain a sweet and trusting disposition; people can use her as an example.

Lana even has a few memorable experiences with other species she has rehabbed. These include: a fawn who's mother was hit by a car; a white pelican she spent 6 weeks trying to capture before the lake froze; and a mangy fox at her local golf course, successfully cured by feeding him baited hot dogs. Many rehabbers, while specializing in a particular species, have experience rehabbing many others. Lana and Trina are no exceptions. In addition to those mentioned above, Lana also has experience with song birds, bunnies and raccoons. Trina has experience with song birds and opossums.

Trina's response when asked about joining NWRI, quite possibly, summarizes the feelings of many rehabbers. "I want to use my love for animals to benefit them in the most positive ways possible and work with people who are just as compassionate as I am!!"

IF YOU HAVEN'T ALREADY DONE SO, PLEASE TAKE THE TIME NOW TO RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP SO YOU'LL CONTINUE RECEIVING THE QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER.

Page 4 THE CRITTER CHRONICLE

Bird Survives Blow Dart To HeadWildlife experts baffled by survival

Of all the birds that Roger Schuette has seen at his bird feeder in Plattsmouth, he's never seen a bird like the one his wife spotted last fall. It had been shot through the head with a blow dart and it was still alive. Roger says, "Came to me the other day and she says, 'there's a bird in the birdfeeder and it's got a hat pin sticking through it,' and I, yeah right." But then he saw it with his own eyes. It wasn't a hat pin piercing the house finch but rather a blow dart.



Roger says he, "watched it for quite a while. He seemed very happy and flew off a couple of times and comes back in." Schuette says the bird seems to act like there is nothing wrong. "It's unreal he wouldn't catch himself in a tree flying through it," he says.

While it may be odd, Schuette is not amused and neither is Kathy Kramer-Leibert who specializes in nursing injured animals back to health as a volunteer for Nebraska Wildlife Rehab. She got one look at a picture of the finch and said, "I've never seen anything like that." She's also at a loss to explain how the bird manages to remain alive. "I'm at a loss but there's hope," she says. But Schuette's hasn't seen the bird for two days now. He says, "We hope he comes back again. It'd be nice to catch it and extract that thing from him."

Wildlife experts say that using blow darts on birds is not only cruel, it's illegal because birds are federally protected. It's also illegal to shoot blow darts inside city limits.

Courtesy of the Omaha World Herald Sept. 2003

A Message from our President

(continued from page 1)

As ever, we are continuously engaged in raising funds to feed and treat the animals. You can adopt a species or an individual animal by making a contribution to provide care for that mammal or bird. Leave a message on our hotline or send a contribution directly to NWRI with the details regarding the species you'd like to adopt.

A special thanks to our caregivers ... their wallets may be lighter but their hearts never fail to embrace every animal and its special challenge. It's a pleasure to work with them and for them as they carry out N W R I 's vital work.

And now a little about the current NWRI Board ... while I will be the first to admit that additional Board members could certainly help out with the large number of responsibilities and tasks associated with our organization, this group of folks manages to handle numerous activities and still keep things afloat.



Dr. Kay Ferguson Center Technology and Education

Dr. Ferguson, most recent NWRI President, has been a member of the Board of

Directors for the past six years. During that time frame she has designed and implemented environmental technology programs for children and youth. The highly successful NWRI TREK (Technology Resources Exciting Kids) engages participants in using NASA technologies to study ways to preserve the environment. Dr. Ferguson is a Professor of Education and Psychology at Dana College.



Phyllis Futch
Animal
Operations

Phyllis joined NWRI in November 2000. Since

2001, she has chaired NWRI's Animal Operations Committee (AOC) and joined the Board this year. Phyllis also co-leads the Rabbit Team. She became interested in wildlife rehabilitation because a dog, belonging to another board member who shall remain nameless, dug up a nest of baby bunnies. From this catalyst event, she has been involved in the rehab of many thousands of bunnies. Phyllis brings more than 20 years of corporate financial services industry experience to NWRI's Board. She is

currently the Director of Strategic Facilities Planning for First National B u i I d i n g s I n c .



Colleen Haley Treasurer

Colleen joined NWRI in 2002 as Treasurer but has also assisted in numerous

unrelated projects. She volunteered to handle the first four newly formatted editions of our newsletter and also headed up the membership renewal mailing for 2003. She is employed full time as a Chief Financial Officer for a small privately held work release facility and volunteers her spare time to NWRI because of her love for animals.



Tim HellerPublic Relations

Tim Heller is our Public Relations Director and joined the Board in 2002. When he's not faxing out

press releases and updating our web site, Tim works full-time managing his family business, Heller Art Images. Tim is married with four children. He just finished a 4-year term on the Papio-Missouri Natural Resources District B o a r d o f D i r e c t o r s .

Roger Kassebaum has



Roger Kassebaum Education

over 20 years of classroom experience in high school science education. He is presently

teaching science and serving as science department chair of a private school in Los Angeles.

Previously, Roger taught in Omaha, Nebraska. He holds a BS and a MS degree from the University of Nebraska and is working toward a second Masters Degree in Learning and Technology from Western Governors University. He is an avid proponent of educational technology and has had success in acquiring funding for student science research opportunities.

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What's Your Animal IQ?

Are you as smart as an owl, dumb as an ox, or just plain silly as a goose? We often assert our knowledge of the animal kingdom, but do we really know what we are talking about? Take our Animal IQ quiz and see how good you are at keeping your animal facts straight. (Answers on page 7)

- 1. Who has biger ears: an African elephant or an Asian elephant?
 - A. African elephant
 - B. Asian elephant
 - C. Neither, they have same-sized ears.
- 2. How do scientists distinguish between the black panther and the leopard?
 - A. Leopards climb trees, black panthers don't
- B. Scientists don't distinguish between these two animals leopards and black panthers are the same species
- C. Black panthers live in North America, leopards live in Africa
- 3. Who typically has a longer snout: alligators or crocodiles?
 - A. Alligator
 - B. Crocodile
 - C. They both have about the same size snout
- 4. A platypus is a
 - A. Bird
 - B. Mammal
 - C. Fish
- 5. Is a spider an insect?
 - A. No
 - B. Yes
 - C. Maybe
- 6. Honey bees communicate by
 - A. Buzzing
 - B. Dancing
 - C. Leaving trails of honey
- 7. Which of the following is true about toads?
 - A. They never go in the water
 - B. You can get warts from touching them
 - C. They have no teeth
- 8. The sting of a killer bee is fatal
 - A. To all humans
 - B. Only to highly allergic people
 - C. To no one
- 9. Which of the following are differences between apes and monkeys?
 - A. Monkeys have tails; apes don't
 - B. Apes' arms are usually longer than their legs
 - C. Both

- 10. Which of the following makes the reindeer unique from other types of deer?
 - A. They can fly
 - B. Both male and female reindeer grow antlers
 - C. They have white hindquarters
- 11. Anteaters vs. aardvarks: which of the following statements is true?
 - A. Anteaters have teeth; aardvarks do not
 - B. Aardvarks are native to South America; anteaters are not
 - C. Anteaters have long bushy tails; aardvarks do not
- 12. Another name for cougar is
 - A. Puma
 - B. Lynx
 - C. Bobcat
- 13. Consider two aquatic mammals; the porpoise and the dolphin. What is the difference?
 - A. Nothing
 - B. Porpoises are related to whales; dolphins are not
 - C. A porpoise is smaller
- 14. Do flying squirrels really fly?
 - A. No, they soar from tree branches
 - B. Yes, they have wings just like a bird
 - C. No, they don't fly or soar at all

Rare Bats Blamed for Rabies Deaths

Atlanta (AP) Bats ... not dogs ... cause most of the few rabies deaths in the United States, and the types of bats that usually are to blame are rare, federal officials said.

The national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said that most of the 35 U.S. rabies deaths since 1990 can be traced to two species, the reclusive silver-haired bat and the eastern pipistrelle bat. Both are found in wooded areas of the Southeast and Northwest.

Because of vaccinations, rabies, in dogs has dropped dramatically in the last century. Rabies in bats caused three U.S. deaths last year. A 20-year-old in lowa and a 13-year-old in Tennessee caught rabies from the silver-haired or eastern pipistrelle bats; the same strain of rabies appears in both. A 28-year-old from California got rabies from a Mexican free-tailed bat

(Courtesy of the Omaha World Herald on February 17, 2003)

Dr. Sue Fairbanks Visits NWRI

Dr. Sue Fairbanks presented a program on the Ungulates (Pronghorns and Bighorn Sheep) of Nebraska at the February meeting of NWRI. Sue is currently conducting studies on these populations in Nebraska. Sue is an Associate Professor of Biology at the University of Nebraska-Omaha. Her specialty is in Behavioral Ecology and Conservation Biology.

Dr. Fairbanks shared information about both species and described a disease that she is observing that appears to be unique to some of the newborn Bighorn lambs in Nebraska. A small group of Bighorn sheep were transplanted to Scottsbluff. Nebraska from Colorado about two years ago, and it appears some lambs are being born with elongated hoofs. Since there is no indication of inbreeding or any other obvious reasons for this malady, the source of the malformations remains a mystery and a major focus of Dr. Fairbanks and her graduate students at UNO.



Her study involv-Pronahorn ina antelope has covered three states, Colorado, Utah, and Nebraska. The pronghorn antelope, sometimes referred to as the prairie ghost, is found only on America's Great Plains. Smaller

than the white-tailed deer, the mature buck weighs from 100 to 130 pounds and the female from 75 to 100 pounds. The male develops large pronged horns that average about 12 inches and are shed each year. The female sometimes develops smaller horns that are rarely as long as her ears.

The pronghorn is extremely fast, with a top speed of about 60-70 miles per hour and can easily outrun any other animal that tries to catch it. Predation, therefore, is not a major factor in the lives of these animals except during fawning. It has a large-capacity respiratory system and slender, strong legs that lack the usual dewclaws of the deer family. An antelope has large eyes that protrude from the side of its head and

provide wide-angle vision believed to be about the same as that of a man looking through 8-power binoculars. The pronghorn has dark brown hair on its back and sides with lighter colored hair on its belly, throat and rump patch. A male has black check patches, some black over his face, and black horns.

Dr. Fairbanks' pronghorn study involves understanding why females select certain males for breeding. A male's territory is much smaller than the "home range" of females which may cross the territory of several males: therefore, females have several choices when it comes to breeding. The majority of her study was conducted on Antelope Island in Utah where the population is isolated on the 17-mile long island. DNA samples of all adults and offspring were taken when the herd was transplanted to the island and then among newborn fawns in an attempt to clarify the breeding selection process.

Dr. Fairbanks interest in animal behaviors began many years ago when as a child she would go hunting with her father, a muzzle-load hunter. Since muzzle loads are limited in range and require close proximity to the prey, Sue had the opportunity to observe the behavior of the animal as they waited for them to come close enough to hunt.

Dr. Fairbanks was able to provide a fascinating look at these large ungulates here in our own state where their eastern most extent is the Sand hills. Historically, the Pronghorns ranged as far east as Lincoln. According to Dr. Fairbanks, the Pronghorn population in Nebraska is low but seems stable. She attributes the drop in the population in part to the drought over the past year and a half. Unlike other ungulates such as deer, Pronghorns do not eat grass. They have an extremely high metabolic rate which necessitates a more nourishing diet. Pronghorns dine on forbs of plants as diverse (and toxic) as jimson weed and sago lilies Pronghorns can consume toxic plants because they have extremely large livers which detoxify the material. The livers are so large that they occupy most of the abdominal cavity.

Be sure and watch for details of our next meeting, open to the public, on May 22

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Quiz Answers from Page 6

- 1. A 2. B
- 2. B
- 4. B
- 5. A
- 6. B
- 7. C
- . B
- 10. B
- 11. C
- 12. A
- 13. C
- 14. A

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See us on the web at http://nwri0.tripod.com/

Upcoming Event (Hosted by Backyard Birds)

Please mark your calendars. On May 22, NWRI will sponsor a Bat seminar at the Nebraska Humane Society auditorium at 8929 Fort Street in Omaha.



This informational seminar is being offered to the general public and will begin at 7PM. Voluntary contributions will be gratefully accepted at the door.

Become a NWRI donor! Please, help give our wild friends a second chance.

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