



Chihuahuan Desert Wildlife Rescue Inc.

Vol. 13 No. 3

THE EAGLE

2002

Alligators on My Porch by Bill (Gator-aid) Howe

Living in an area of the world that has to irrigate its swamps to keep them from drying up and blowing away it seems almost a contradiction of terms to use the words crocodile and Chihuahuan Desert in the same sentence. However, El Paso has a long association with these creatures that goes back to 1883 when a railroad worker dropped a burlap bag of young alligators here. The animals quickly developed celebrity status and spent the next 80 years in a pool at San Jacinto Plaza and became quite an attraction to tourists and locals alike.

Every year Chihuahuan Desert Wildlife Rescue receives several calls on errant crocodilians. Usually they are escaped or abandoned caimans – a Central/South American animal common in the pet trade. However, true alligators are not all that unusual. Even rarer species sometimes show up here. A few years ago a Morelet's crocodile, an endangered species from Mexico, was confiscated by local wildlife officials.

I've been helping Helen and the C.D.W.R. for over 20 years and have had numerous calls on caimans over that time. My first call on true alligators came in August of 1997 when a fellow named John called to say he had two baby alligators that had been dropped off at his lower valley home by a trucker friend. He wanted the animals out of his house immediately and offered to bring them over. When he arrived I was surprised to find that the animals were indeed alligators. They were little more than hatchlings at the time and were placed into one of my outdoor pools. As alligators receive some form of legal protection throughout their natural range, calls were made to U.S. Fish and Wildlife as well as Texas Parks and Wildlife to apprise them of the situation. T.P.W.D. was, at first, very reluctant to approve my holding of the animals since I did not yet have my Texas Zoological Permit. However, they quickly became quite cooperative when I mentioned that I could drop them off at their local office.



One of the two gators basking beside the pond at Bill's "Gator-aid" facility

Within days of their arrival, a solution to the problem seemed at hand. Local T.P.W.D. game wardens would transport them to Austin where they would be transferred to wardens from southeast Texas. They would eventually be released into their natural range. However, these plans evaporated at the last moment when state biologists decided that the animals, whose origin was thought to be Louisiana, could not be released in Texas waters. It was feared that the animals

(Continued on page 3)

*** CDWR DIRECTORY ***
www.whc.net/cdwr

Whom can you call in the El Paso/Las Cruces area when you find an injured/orphaned wild bird/animal?

EL PASO AREA

CDWR CHIEF DISPATCHER

Helen Bigelow (raptors).....505-882-2910

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

Gloria Villaverde..... 577-9505

REHABILITATORS

Central -

Bill Howe (turtles/snakes/lizards/small exotics)..... 772-0695

Debbie Lofton (birds/water birds)..... 772-6011

Amy Rembold (doves & small mammals)..... 566-8682

Mickey Rupperecht (small birds)..... 774-9997

Gloria Villaverde (reptiles)..... 577-9505

East -

Sheila Barnes (birds) 852-4079

Debbie Lofton—Area Dispatcher..... 772-6011

Northeast -

Charles/Carrol Bella (raptors/reptiles/mammals)..... 751-4711

Holly Sanchez (small birds)..... 822-1902

Deacon Foote..... 757-9330

West -

Carol Miller (water birds)..... 584-7088

Josie Karam (small mammals/birds/turtles)..... 920-7867

Danika Seidel (birds/reptiles/exotics)..... work 833-4883

COOPERATING VETERINARIANS

Central -

El Paso Veterinary Hospital, 4101 Montana..... 566-7387

Montana Animal Clinic, 1015 Chelsea 778-9588

El Paso Animal Emergency Center, 2101 Texas 545-1148

Dog, Cat, Bird Hospital, 3233 N. Mesa..... 533-9070

East -

Johnsen Animal Hospital, 1851 N. Lee Trevino..... 592-6200

Desert East Animal Hospital, 11635 Pelicano 855-4100

Eastwood Animal Clinic, 9509 Montana..... 593-0713

Americas Animal Clinic 858-1971

Animal Clinic, 7184 Alameda 778-5355

Northeast -

Skyline Veterinary Hospital, 4424 Titanic 755-7647

Northeast Veterinary Clinic, 9405 Dyer 755-2231

Bridges Animal Hospital, 3410 Hondo Pass 755-8314

Fairbanks Animal Hospital, 5320-C Fairbanks..... 757-8387

Harwood Veterinary Clinic, 4404-A Edgar Park..... 755-5653

West -

Crossroads Animal Hospital, 4910 Crossroads..... 584-3459

Country Club Animal Clinic, 5470 Doniphan 833-0645

Anthony Animal Clinic, 901 Franklin, Anthony TX..... 886-4558

TRANSPORTERS/TROUBLESHOOTERS

Northeast -

Joe/Inga Groff 755-2957

Charlene Ruddock..... 755-5575

West -

John/Jane White..... 505-589-3320

Susie Jensen..... 877-4036

East -

Linn Anderson 859-5413

Phyllis/Jim Harris

Alan Phelps 598-2103

Chaparral, NM -

Jochen Lange..... 824-3090

LAS CRUCES AREA

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

Geri Tillett 522-4966

REHABILITATORS

Geri Tillett (birds)..... 522-4966

ELEPHANT BUTTE

Roberta Hirschhorn (birds, etc.)..... 505-894-9420

SILVER CITY

Margaret Cejka (birds, excluding raptors)..... 505-537-6624

COOPERATING VETERINARIANS

Calista Animal Hospital, 162 Wyatt Drive 525-1000

Jornada Vet Clinic, 2399 Saturn Circle 382-1710

East Lohman Vet. Clinic, 1700 E. Lohman 523-5654

TRANSPORTERS/TROUBLESHOOTERS

David/Sherri Byrd (raptors)..... 524-2314

Remember

Support our cooperating
Veterinarians!

**To Our Generous Supporters of
2001—Thank you!**

El Paso Veterinary Medical Association

Thelma B. Goans Endowment

Condon Trust

Viva Environmental

| | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Victoria Adamson | Joe & Linda Liebech |
| Bergen Southwest Steel | Debbie & Jay Lofton |
| Robert & Lisa Candelaria | Pam Porter & Scott Vance |
| Fred Chilton | Pat & Andrew Rosenthal |
| John Colquitt | Mary Speer |
| Sandra & Richard Geiger | Rick & Cerena Suarez |
| Jeanne & William Gilbert | Maryann & George |
| Annie & Ron Gordon | Thibodeau |
| Marylin & Warren Harkey | Shain & Julie Vinikoff |
| John & Debbie Hartmann | Nell Wilson |
| Mary Legoretta | |

2001 Stats Note: Coyote and Fox numbers are for New Mexico only

Alligators on My Porch *(Continued from front)*

might carry disease or parasites that could infect native populations. John Sproul, of the El Paso/Trans Pecos Audubon Society, also nixed the idea of releasing them at Feather Lake when I (tongue-in-cheek) proposed it.

As colder weather was quickly approaching I made connections with an expert at Florida State University and the El Paso Zoo. They both felt that, while adult alligators would have no problem surviving El Paso's winter outside, hatchlings probably did not have the body mass that would allow them to make it through the colder months. The first winter the animals were housed in a large aquarium in my den. By the next winter the animals were too large for even a 55-gallon tank and over-wintered in a stock tank on my enclosed back porch. Over the next few years the animals were gradually conditioned to spend the entire winter outdoors with no protection.

In the fall of 2001 Mario Ramos of the El Paso Zoo contacted me and asked if I would consider donating the animals. As the gators were now over four feet long and quickly changing place with me on the food chain, I relented – under the condition that the animals remain in El Paso. A few weeks later he made a visit to my wildlife holding facility to inspect the animals. In April of this year Dr. Kelly Helmick, veterinarian at the El Paso Zoo, came by with her vet tech and two keepers to draw blood for testing. She wanted to make sure the animals carried no unwanted baggage that could prove to be a future problem. At first, I was somewhat apprehensive about the proposed procedure. These were, after all, my *babies*. I soon learned I had nothing to fear. Dr. Helmick did her master thesis work on alligators and is an expert in the field. I'm sure that even the famous (infamous?) Steve Erwin would regard her with great respect.

On May 11, 2002, the results of the blood tests came back negative and the final OK was given by the Zoo for the transfer. That same day zoo personnel came over and the move was finalized. While I was pleased that the animals would now have much better and larger housing than I could provide, it's hard not to develop an attachment to even such unlikely critters as alligators.



Dr. Kelly Helmick taking a blood sample from one of the gators

Since the arrival of those first animals, two more alligators and several caimans have found their way to my place. Two of the alligators were eventually placed at Cheater Bella's, since he had the necessary permits and more space than I. However, caimans, especially larger ones, are much harder to place in qualified homes. While most alligators have a very mild disposition, the caiman has an attitude problem and can pose a real danger. People who are attracted to these animals and purchase the hatchlings as pets don't seem to have the foresight to realize what they are in for should the animals survive to adulthood. Last year all species of caiman were placed on the CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) list so fewer and fewer of them should be showing up here.

There have been the occasional humorous moment. One episode I vividly remember occurred last summer as I took a brief respite from my chores and enjoyed a glass of iced tea on the back porch. The neighbors were hosting a visit from the "Cable Guy." My yard is separated from the neighbor by 5 feet of rock wall topped by 3 feet of redwood fencing. To make his repair, Mr. Cable Guy had to gingerly make his way along the top of this structure to a utility pole. Unseen on the porch I was able to witness as to what transpired. Just as Cable Guy was about to reach his destination, he made a big mistake and looked down. There, directly below his precarious perch, were 5 pairs of inquisitive eyes watching his every move. Cable Guy froze, uncertain as to what to do next. The expression on his face was priceless. To this day I swear that, once he reached the safety of the pole, I heard him whistling that popular 80's song – "Hungry Eyes."

I have requested that the El Paso Zoo eventually install a sign at the alligator pond that reads, "Animals Donated by Chihuahuan Desert Wildlife Rescue." Next time you are at Washington Park, stop by the alligator pen and say hello to Bruno and Brutis.

- Bill Howe

Board of Officers

President: John White

Vice President: Carol Miller

Secretary: Gloria Villaverde

Treasurer: Susie Jensen

Board of Directors

Dr. Nancy Crider, DVM

Inga Groff

Debbie Lofton

Enrique Rodriguez

Barbara Snow

Newsletter Editor

Susie Jensen

The Purpose of CDWR

Wildlife rehabilitation is the care of injured or orphaned wildlife for return, where possible, to the wild. Successful rehabilitation takes a lot of time, a lot of effort and no small amount of money.

It is challenging work, done by special people. Chihuahuan Desert Wildlife Rescue is a nonprofit organization which exists to help the rehabilitators in the El Paso/Las Cruces area. Our purposes are to:

- ◆ provide a volunteer network to assist active rehabilitators in their work
- ◆ support wildlife rehabilitation programs financially
- ◆ provide education and instruction in wildlife rehabilitation
- ◆ educate the public about wildlife conservation problems
- ◆ work for the reduction of pressures on native wildlife from domestic animals and humans

The Pet Duck

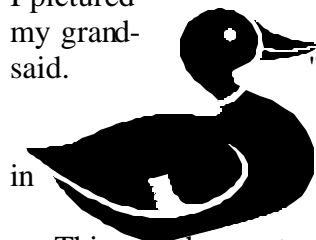
It is so sad when people get tired of their pets and dump them off somewhere. It happens to dogs, cats, reptiles, etc.-- and even ducks. I always wonder why they do that, probably breaking their children's hearts, having lost a beloved friend. Many ducks are deserted at the wetlands and ponds around town. This particular yearling duck that was left at a large neighborhood pond was so terrified at losing her home that she ran to the nearest house to sit on the front porch behind the planter. She wouldn't budge, and the next day the owner finally called CDWR (we deal with wild birds and ducks, but obviously get calls for all who are in trouble). My grandson and I went over and chased her around the lady's porch and front yard till we caught her in a net. She was a beautiful white duck who was glad to get into my wad-wash and ing pool (after some struggle getting her out of the carrier) to wash and straighten all her feathers. She then looked very clean and neat and all my other ducks seemed impressed.



Because I use my pens to raise baby orphaned wild ducks, I needed to find this duck another home quickly. I ran an ad saying "Pet Duck - Needs Home, call 584-7088" and a nice man called. "Have you had a pet duck before?" I asked. "Oh, I'm a country boy from way back." When the large and friendly man came over, he wanted to know if it would learn to use a cat box because he wanted it to be a house duck. I said no, you'd have to put newspapers around, in the room the duck is in. The big man asked, "Then it will learn to go on the newspapers?" I said "No, you can't potty train a duck as far as I know. You'll have to put newspapers everywhere the duck goes. And you'll need to get her a baby pool for outside when she wants to take a bath several times a day."

The portly man was excited at the prospect of having a pet duck. I gave him some food samples to take with the duck and he gave me \$10. I wondered if he'd call back and want to return the animal because ducks can be messy. The man did call back, about 4 days later, but just to let me know how much he loves the duck and how much it loves him. "She hears me when I come home and starts quacking, out in the back yard. She'll lie down at my feet and wait for me to pick her up, and then she puts her head on my shoulder. I take her for walks across the street in the park. And she likes me to cut up apples for her." (I had already suggested that he feed her watermelon, which I knew she loved, and suggested he try some other fruit too).

He wanted to know if he could order a duck leash for their walks in the park. I told him I didn't know of one and he might try a dog harness and modify it for her wings. He decided that was a good idea. "She likes to wander off and I have to run after her." I pictured the man running after the sweet duck and recalled the trouble my grandson and I had catching her. "A leash would be a good idea" I said. "It'll help protect her from dog attacks too. She will be much safer if you keep her close to you on some kind of leash while going on your walks, because a dog could attack and kill her no time." And, obviously, then he'd be brokenhearted.



This was the most unusual duck placement I've been involved in, ever. I hope I get a chance to see that man walking, and his duck waddling, around the park one day.

- Carol Miller

Gardens are Havens for Animals as Well as Humans

By Jackye Meinecke

As we go about filling the spaces in our garden, we can think about more than simply adding some pretty flowers. This is the season to plant with future bird and wildlife habitat in mind. Each morning, I awaken to the birds in the garden. The squabbling of the finches and the high whistle of the lesser goldfinches. These days, we watch for the turtles trundling across the yard, there should be at least half a dozen, if they all survived the winter. Other gardeners begin their morning with visits from foxes and their kits.

Many of us make an effort to coexist with these delightful creatures by creating a nurturing garden environment. Of course, we can plant flowers for the hummingbirds and butterflies. Last year, I was amazed at the attractive flower of Mexican sunflowers. This bright orange annual sunflower attracted hummingbirds, even though it is not funnel-shaped. Then it attracted butterflies by the dozens. We now have lesser goldfinches at our thistle feeder because the late summer sunflowers in the garden attracted them, then they found our feeder.

We plant flowers for the hummingbirds and butterflies, but we also include plants that make seeds and berries to attract songbirds and other beautiful birds. Old-fashioned, thorny pyracantha cannot be beat as a food supply for birds. The robins and mockingbirds thrive on the bright orange berries. The Mexican bird of paradise trees bring in hummingbirds to the flowers and verdins and vireos for the seeds. The Desert Willow also creates multiple food sources for birds.

Whether birds find food or not, they will stop in for water. Even though we have a drip irrigation system that keeps most of the water on the ground, the birds will bathe in the water from the small sprayers and sip water from any puddle that forms. I was entertained on the campus the other day by a pair of birds that had discovered a puddle created by a sprinkler. They were romping in the water with such unabated pleasure. The water system need not be fancy for birds and wildlife. A saucer, small pond, dip, or preformed birdbath will work fine.

Currently we have box turtles visiting our garden. Many gardeners are beginning to create habitat for these interesting visitors. Food and water set at ground level will keep these prehistoric looking creatures happy in the garden. They need a bit of space protected from the sun during the heat of the day, some low-growing fruits and greens, and a low source of water to thrive. We enjoy the lizards that skitter away from us when we surprise one in the garden. We do not have to add much to a garden to create habitat for lizards. However, we have discovered they need some rock or brush piles to have protected hiding places from predators such as roadrunners and cats.

I know many people are frightened of spiders. Certainly we have some very poisonous ones that live in our gardens. Most of the spiders are completely harmless to humans, but earn their keep by the number of insects they devour. People may think I am crazy but I even leave my black widow spiders alone. They generally hide out in the daytime when I am in the garden, do their best to stay out of my way, and eat a lot of insects that could be a problem in the garden. We take precautions against getting bitten.

Wear gloves when handling wood and pots and such that have been sitting around for a while. I also have a rule that I do not put my hands anywhere I cannot see what I am touching. I encourage my garden spiders and wolf spiders to hang around. Besides, hummingbirds need spider webs to create their nests. We also encourage ladybugs, praying mantises, lacewings and other beneficial insects to make their homes in my garden.

Remember insecticides are rarely specific. So while a gardener may be eliminating the roaches, the action may also eliminate the good guys in the garden.

Those living on the edge of town have even more garden visitors, which often makes gardening difficult. Rabbits are an eternal challenge. Unfortunately, they see garden plantings as free food. In the current drought, it is easy to imagine how incredibly hungry and thirsty they must be. Even though they can destroy the garden, I find it hard to resist their innocent pleasure in dining in the grass. Cottontails are so sweet looking, just the stuff of garden stories. I encourage gardeners to protect plants with chicken wire and share the environment with these charming pests.

Many gardeners living on the edges of town also have visits from foxes, squirrels, desert rats, coyotes, and deer. What a wonderful piece of the natural world their garden becomes. Despite their destructive habits, these visitors can be a pleasure to watch.

One very important way to protect these natural visitors in our gardens is to discontinue the use of harmful

(Continued on page back)

CHIHUAHUAN DESERT WILDLIFE RESCUE, INC.

P.O. Box 96

Canutillo, Texas 79835

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

I hereby apply for membership in the Chihuahuan Desert Wildlife Rescue as a/an:

INDIVIDUAL.....\$10.00

FAMILY.....\$15.00

CONTRIBUTOR.....\$25.00

Enclosed is my contribution for \$_____ in addition to my membership

NAME _____ PHONE _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

Membership gives you the opportunity to help orphaned and injured wildlife and to support the efforts of the CDWR volunteer rehabilitators. Membership includes a yearly subscription (4 issues) of the newsletter.

Gardens (Continued from page 5)

pesticides and insecticides, as well as providing food, water, and cover. For example, I no longer put insecticides on my roses to kill the aphids, because I have small kinglets visiting the roses to eat the aphids. I am fearful the poison could be passed from the aphids to the kinglets.

Hummingbirds are extremely sensitive to insecticide use. Remember, poisons often work their way up the food chain. So the insecticide used to eliminate the grubs can end up with the birds, and then the larger mammals. So I try not to use any poisons in my garden. As a garden environment reaches a natural balance, gardeners have fewer problems.

Observing the natural cycles in the garden becomes fascinating and sometimes painful. We were recently reminded how fragile these systems can be. We had thrashers make a nest in our cholla. We watched as the two babies hatched out and began to grow and put on

feathers. One by one, the babies disappeared or died apparently due to natural causes.

The natural world often is harsh and cruel by my standards. The least I can do is make my garden a little safer and more inviting by providing food, water, and shelter.

-Jackye S. Meinecke is a freelance writer, commentator on KRWG-FM's Images, and owner of Enchanted Gardens, a garden boutique in Las Cruces. Reprinted from the Las Cruces Sun News, May 5, 2002.



Thank you to the El Paso Electric Company for their generous contribution!



Chihuahuan Desert Wildlife Rescue Inc.

P.O. BOX 96 CANUTILLO, TEXAS 79835 www.whc.net/cdwr

Join us now and help make a difference for wildlife!

NON PROFIT ORG US POSTAGE PAID EL PASO TX PERMIT NO. 1085

