

Rehabilitation animal of the month: Barred owl

BY FREDDY MOYANO
CORRESPONDENT

BROWN COUNTY – Known for its classic, “Who cooks for you? Who cooks for you all?” hooting call, this hefty, territorial barred owl is this month’s Rehabilitation Animal of the Month.

In partnership with the Bay Beach Wildlife Sanctuary (BBWS), The Press Times launched a monthly series focused on highlighting the many animals of the sanctuary and its efforts to rehabilitate its fluffy patients and release them back into the wild.

Curator Lori Bankson said as a general rule, injured animals admitted to the sanctuary aren’t given names, so as not to create emotional attachments.

“As a general rule, we do not do this,” she said. “They are here temporarily, and we will get them back to the wild.”

Though this feathered friend has no name, Bankson said he definitely has a personality, curious in nature.

“He is always checking us out,” she said. “He bonded very well with the female barred owl we just moved up, so we cannot wait to put them back together.”

First of the year

Bankson said this curious barred owl was the first animal the BBWS received this year.

“Most likely he was hit by a car,” she said.

Found injured on the roadside, Bankson said the family who brought him in took great care of him.

“The first thing we did was



Correspondent Freddy Moyano with February’s Rehabilitation Animal of the Month, a barred owl, who is recovering from an injured wing at the Bay Beach Wildlife Sanctuary.

to assess for any immediate injuries,” she said, “whether there are open wounds, any painful reactions, anything that might require emergency care. Our staff noticed the wing injury right away, and we were able to get him some of the pain meds that he needed.”

Bankson said staff works closely with Gentle Vet Animal Hospital to secure the necessary medication their injured animals need.

“We noticed he was very thin,” she said.

To help, Bankson said staff prepared a wildlife-made paste, which was his main source of nutrition for the first few days.

“We tubed this food right down into his stomach, and we slowly started him on pheasant chicks, chickens, mice and rats that we buy frozen and were able to thaw,” she said.

Bankson said the support BBWS receives from the community helps fund these efforts.

“We are very lucky with the community support we have,” she said.

Bankson said many of the owls admitted to the sanctuary take an average of two weeks to fully acclimate to their temporary caregivers.

“They think we are predators, or that we are going to eat them,” she said, “but once their pain subsides, and they are starting to eat on their own, things improve.”

Bankson said the barred owl shared a cage for a while with a female barred owl that recently “graduated” to a bigger cage.

“We have a lot of different-sized cages,” she said. “This will be the same cage he will soon be promoted to as part of his recovery process, which will allow for flight conditioning – a much needed step with wing injuries.”

Arriving at the sanctuary a little more than six weeks ago, Bankson said the barred owl still has a way to go.

She said the average wing



This curious barred owl was the first animal the Bay Beach Wildlife Sanctuary received this year. **Freddy Moyano Photos**

injury downtime for birds of prey is four to six months.

Yet, she said hopes are that he will be released around mid-April.

“We try to release them to the same territory they came from, but we also take into consideration territorial ties, nesting ties,” Bankson said. “It is very possible that when an owl leaves an area for days or weeks, another species will move in.”

If the latter occurs, or something of similar nature becomes evident, she said, staff will “hack them out” into a safe area with not a lot of barred owls, meaning volunteers monitor the owls, which includes leaving food out, so there is always a food source.

“If they are having a hard time adjusting, we can always bring them back here,” Bankson said.

Barred owl facts

Bankson said Wisconsin common barred owls are medium-sized owls and feed on small mammals, such as mice, voles, crayfish and even squirrels and rabbits.

They prefer nesting in tree cavities, and like mature forests that have both an abun-

dance of prey and trees with cavities.

“We are lucky that the Howard-Suamico area is perfectly wooded to provide habitat to these owls,” Bankson said.

She said barred owls hunt from a perch, where they sit and wait, scanning and listening for prey, silently swooping down when they pinpoint their meal.

In the winter, as snow starts to cover many of our roads, Bankson said some barred owls like to scout roadsides from lower tree lines at the edge of their favorite wooded areas, which can result in accidents, such as the one the rehabilitated animal of the month was likely involved in.

Barred owls mate for life and lay a clutch of two to three white eggs each year.

The female sits on the eggs while the male hunts for food.

Unlike most young birds, barred owls fledge – develop wing feathers that are large enough for flight – before they can fly.

On average, Bankson said they leave their nest when they are around eight weeks old, but don’t master flight un-

til they’re about 12 weeks old.

Bay Beach Wildlife Sanctuary

For 86 years, Bankson said the BBWS, located on Green Bay’s east side, has strived to protect, shelter, heal, rehabilitate and release back into nature many injured animals.

She said as many as 6,000 species per year are rushed to the sanctuary in need of rescue and rehabilitation.

Bankson said typically, the BBWS receives about 90 birds of prey per year – about half of them owls.

However in 2021, she said the sanctuary admitted around 200 birds of prey.

Supported by hundreds of volunteers and 4-10 paid staff depending on time of year, BBWS takes all kinds of native Wisconsin wildlife.

Bankson said if an animal in obvious need of help is found, residents should call the sanctuary’s animal care line at (920) 391-3685.

“Not all animals require long-term help,” she said, noting some species need is being put back into their nest or den or habitat area. “We are here to help.”

Bankson said volunteers are always needed, and anyone interested can find more information at baybeachwildlife.com.

Stay tuned

This month’s Rehabilitation Animal of the Month is in great hands at BBWS and is on the road to recovery.

Next month, sanctuary staff will introduce readers to another furry or feathered animal in its care.

With the variety of species staff and volunteers treat – your guess is as good as ours, as to what it might be.

Stay tuned.

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