



After undergoing emergency surgery and a five-month rehabilitation process, this male barred owl was released back into the wild.

Freddy Moyano Photos

Rehabilitation animal of the month: Opossum

As the first patient of the year is released, marsupial rehabilitation season is in full swing.

BY FREDDY MOYANO
CORRESPONDENT

BROWN COUNTY – The Press Times kicked off its Rehabilitation Animal of the Month series in the Feb. 28 issue – highlighting Bay Beach Wildlife Sanctuary’s first rehab animal of the year, a barred owl.

Curator Lori Bankson said the feathered creature was most likely hit by a car which injured its wing.

After undergoing emergency surgery and a five-month rehabilitation process transitioning between varying sizes of cages – the male owl was released back into the wild.

“He has been doing very well and it is time for him to go back into the wild,” Bankson said, a bit emotional, recalling the great progress made by the barred owl.

As Bankson released the owl, not far from the Observation Building grounds, his first instinctive move was to head for the nearest tree, where he was greeted by a flock of red-winged blackbirds – where he remained perched for about three minutes before heading off into a deep wooded area.

“At first, they think they still are inside the cage and will behave that way until they get a chance to realize the world is bigger

than that,” Bankson said, describing a typical bird of prey release. “We will monitor how he does in the coming days.”

When we first met the barred owl around mid-February, Bankson said as a general rule injured animals admitted to the sanctuary were not given names, so as not to create emotional attachments.

Yet there were visible signs of emotion in Bankson and myself, as our first rehabilitation animal flew into the wild.

Bankson said of the more than 500 species rushed to the sanctuary in need of rescue and rehabilitation so far this year – about 200 were birds of prey.

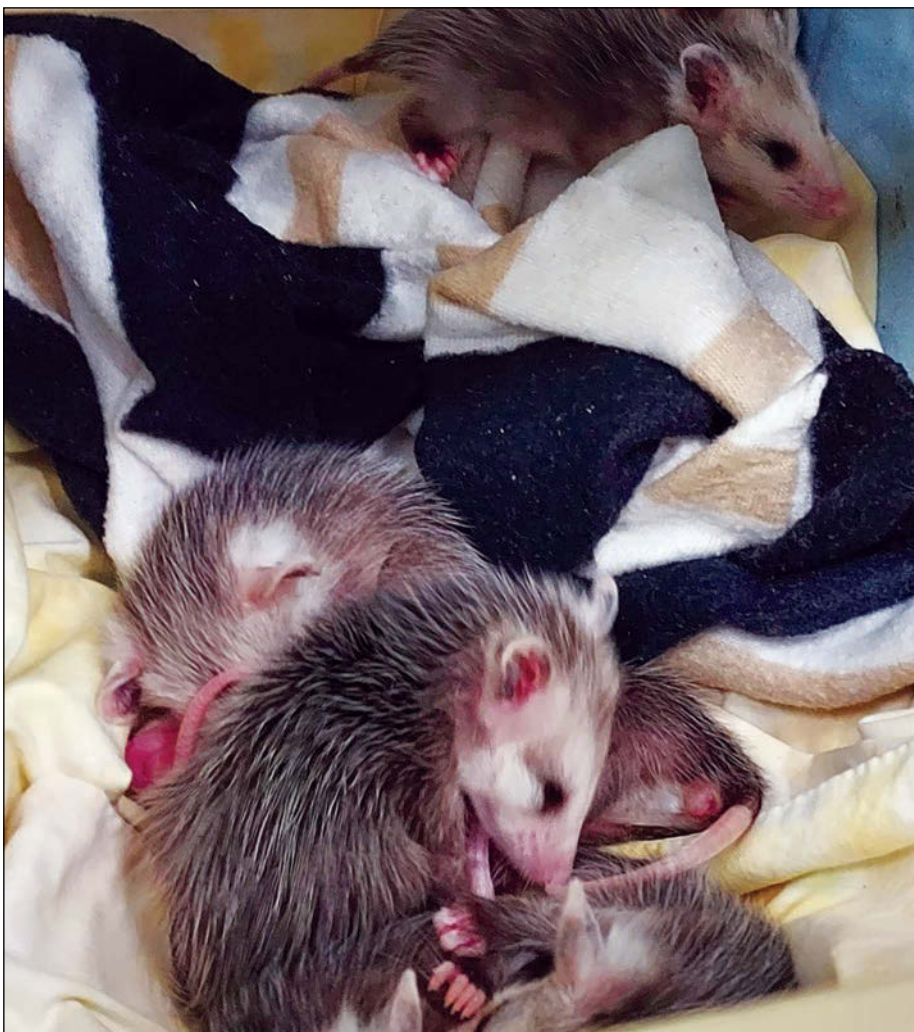
A bean in a pouch

Now for this month’s rehab animal – the Virginia opossum, also known as ‘possum’ (scientific name *Didelphis virginiana*) – is known as North America’s only marsupial.

“When they are born, they are just a little bigger than a jelly bean, then they travel into mom’s pouch and nurse constantly,” Bankson said.

She said these six-week-old possums arrived at the sanctuary in early June, found after their mom was hit by a car.

As orphans, these furry friends have plenty of needs, Bankson said, starting with the feeding process.



Instead of cages, baby opossums are kept in padded drawers around the sanctuary’s nursery room.

As opposed to raccoon cubs, who typically have no issues adjusting to being fed with a bottle, she said staff have to insert a tube all the way down into these little possums’ stomachs as they have a hard time nursing in the absence of mom.

Staff feed their possum

residents as often as four times per day, giving them the same formula they offer to cottontails and chipmunks.

Every feeding is recorded on each animal’s feeding forms to help staff keep track of their progress.

Instead of cages, Bank-

son said the opossums are kept in padded drawers around the nursery room.

“The possums typically remain with us until they are about four or five months old, so they have a few months left,” she said.

Sanctuary staff said opossums, as well as raccoons, often run similar

circumstances during breeding season in that young are either abandoned by their breeding mom or the latter ends up in an accident, such as being hit by a car.

“(Opossum mothers) monitor three to four nests at a time and can have anywhere from two to 13 little ones,” Bankson said. “Possums, squirrels, raccoons and cottontails are our four large groups we get year round.”

Snowy owl update

Bankson said March’s rehabilitation animal, a female snowy owl, has been progressing well with her flight training and should be releasable later this summer.

“I’m thinking August or September, so that she can meet up with the migration pack arriving soon after,” she said.

How to help

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 to be put back into their nest, 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.

NOW HIRING

WorkForWorthington.com

MAKERS OF BETTER

MINIMUM PAY

\$20

AN HOUR

PLUS QUARTERLY INCENTIVE PLAN

SIGN-ON BONUS

\$2,000

PRODUCTION

\$4,000

MAINTENANCE

ON-SITE INTERVIEWS