

Making Ripples Wildlife Rehabilitation Superheroes

by Amanda Bancroft

Ever fantasize about what it would be like to don a cape and become a superhero with special powers that you could use to save the world and rescue innocent opossums? Perhaps this is not a dream of the majority, since recent superhero movies like *The Wolverine*, *The Amazing Spider Man* and *Ninja Turtles* are devoid of wildlife rescue. A hero can become animal-like (think Batman) but rescuing animals isn't popular enough for the big screen.

Yet there are other kinds of animal-inspired heroes and heroines besides the scantily-clad ones on screen, and these saviors are no fantasy. Northwest Arkansas is home to many certified wildlife rehabilitators for mammals, birds, native species and more. They work in the shadows of woods and cages rather than skyscrapers, and are showered with bird droppings instead of bullets.

I was fortunate to meet one of these heroines recently. Lynn Scuimbato of Morningstar Wildlife Rehabilitation Center in Gravette, Arkansas, gave an educational presentation at the Fayetteville Public Library. The audience was introduced to a screech owl, a red tailed hawk, a turkey vulture named Igor, and three adorable baby opossums that had been orphaned. For the first time in my life, I was actually petting a baby opossum – but not under the premise that I was ready to raise one; even a brief exposure to the nature of wildlife rescue taught me that it takes experience and knowledge, not just an admiration of cuteness, to successfully raise and release a wild animal.

Lynn taught the audience about raptors, and emphasized that their beaks were more like forks while their talons were real weapons. We learned that screech owls don't screech, turkey vultures have a keen sense of smell and bald heads that promote hygiene (a head stuck in carion is bound to get dirty, and cleaning head feathers is too challenging) and red tailed hawks can be identified in part by their white underbellies.

If you aspire to make a meaningful contribution to the world that requires strength the Man of Steel only wished he had, try rehabilitating a wild baby cottontail rabbit that requires intensive care under the right temperatures, feeding times, and specific handling instructions or they quickly die. For more information on how to become a wildlife rehabilitator or to search state and national listings, check out Ripples' blog post on wildlife rehabilitation.

Wildlife Rehabilitators in Northwest Arkansas:

Morningstar Wildlife Rehabilitation Center, Gravette, AR: contact Lynn Scuimbato at (479)795-1515 or by email: wildlife@mc2k.com

New Hope Animal Hospital, Rogers, AR: (479) 202 - 9670

Most Animals: Cheryl Swartout, Springdale AR: (479) 502 - 2843

Native Species except Birds: Mitzi O'Dell, Prairie Grove AR: (479) 267 - 0230

Mammals Only: Daniel Jones, Lincoln AR: (479) 824 - 5837

Small Mammals Only: Vivian Stockton, Siloam Springs AR: (479) 524 - 8718

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