



This Red-tailed Hawk will be released soon



A Common Loon healing from a nasty bite

Brunswick Wildlife Oak Island's Wildlife Rehabilitator

In early January I visited the Sea Biscuit Wildlife Shelter on Oak Island run by Mary Ellen Rogers. The shelter cares for injured and orphaned birds, providing food, minor medical care, and shelter from predators and the elements. The shelter's goal is to release birds in the wild if they are eventually able to care for themselves.

I worked with Mary Ellen twice over the past year as a go-between trying to help two homeowners save a Great Blue Heron and eight baby Wood Ducks. Sadly neither attempt was successful.

During my visit the residents included three Eastern Screech Owls and two pelicans plus the Red-tailed Hawk and Common Loon pictured here.

According to Mary Ellen, the hawk was found by hunters in December in the Green Swamp area. Its most critical injury is a broken leg that has been splinted. He is slowly using it for balance and grasping the perch and should be able to be released in the next five or six weeks. The cool part? The hawk had smiley faces on its cast.

The hawk is eating well. Raptors prefer live mice but will eat dead ones. Since he is unable to hold and tear his food, she prepares dead mice for him.

I watched while Mary Ellen moved the hawk to a larger cage. Prior to the move, she cut up four dead mice after removing feet, tails, and intestines. It did not take long for the hawk to pounce on the dish. He was briefly interrupted by my taking photos; however, he quickly finished lunch after I left the room.

I helped Mary Ellen hold the loon while she force-fed it. My assignment was to hold a small metal flashlight between the tips of its bill, placing my thumb and forefinger on the sides of the tips.

There was a struggle! Unfortunately, I let the bill slip once. Fortunately, neither human got speared. If you think that bill looks sharp from a distance, you should have had it in your hand.

My reward? During the process, the loon cried out and I got to hear that beautiful sound from a distance of two feet instead of hundreds of feet.

The loon is fed five dead mullet fingerlings twice a day, one laced with medicine. Somehow in the struggle, the loon managed to spit one out. After its meal Mary Ellen placed the loon in the tank. I have never seen a bird more happy to be back in water.

Before completing this article, I called to ask about the loon's progress. He still loves life in the tank and is now eating live fish.

To prepare for opening her own clinic and gain required state and federal permits, Mary Ellen completed 170 hours of training and volunteer work at the Center for Birds of Prey in Charleston and the Outer Banks Wildlife Shelter in Newport.

Sea Biscuit's 2007 statistics show that 153 birds, representing fifty-five different species, were treated. Nineteen gulls, eleven pelicans, nine loons, eight gannets, and many raptors and waterbirds were among those admitted. Fifty-three birds died within twenty-four hours. Fortunately, thirty-four birds were rehabilitated and released.

Patients included fifty-nine from Oak Island, nine from Caswell Beach, eight from Southport, and a combined twenty-one from Shallotte, Sunset Beach, Holden Beach, and Ocean Isle Beach. The others were brought in from around Brunswick, New Hanover, and Pender counties.

Most birds needed help due to natural causes such as emaciation and injuries caused by predators. There were, however, many injuries caused by fishing line entanglement and vehicle collisions.

I stopped afterwards for a flounder special at a nearby Oak Island restaurant. Experiencing the above did not ruin my appetite, even after I smelled my hands on my way to wash them. The loon can have the sushi. I'll have the fried flounder please.

To prevent stressing the birds, the shelter is not open to the public; however, please contact Mary Ellen at (910) 278-7871 or on her cell phone (910) 294-2555 if you have a bird emergency, would like to make a donation, or would like to volunteer. Non-cash donations of cleanings supplies and kennels are also badly needed. Volunteers are needed for care, maintenance, and transportation. Sea Biscuit's e-mail address is wildlifeshelter@bellsouth.net.

For other North Carolina regions and other types of wildlife, you can find licensed wildlife rehabilitators at: http://www.ncwildlife.org/fs_index_06_coexist.htm. Also, a national wildlife rehabilitators list is available: <http://www.tc.umn.edu/~devo0028/contact.htm>

These websites contain information about caring for and transporting injured birds until you can hand them over to a rehabilitator. Mary Ellen will also give you instructions over the phone while arranging a handoff.

Want to volunteer? The world of wildlife rehabilitation can be heartbreaking at times and very rewarding at other times. There is nothing I can ever do to erase the memory of those ducklings that died. Likewise, I will never forget the joy of seeing rehabilitated birds fly away or the cry of that loon.

John Ennis



**The proper way to place the hawk
in the new kennel was on its back
and upside down**