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NURSE RY

*For Wild Care's staff, it's second nature to take care of the Cape's injured or orphaned birds, mammals and reptiles.*

**W**ild Care's nursery is never a dull or quiet place. Between the large number of baby squirrels that need to be hand-fed to the fledgling robins that noisily await their meal worms, the work at Wild Care is intense and never-ending. The volume of chirps and tweets seems to rise with the approaching meal times. And then there's "Quackers," Wild Care's mascot domesticated duck, who was rescued by Wild Care more than seven years ago. Quackers now helps raise orphans and puts adult waterfowl at ease. He can often be seen waddling around Wild Care's infirmary, visiting its eclectic patients, quacking perfunctorily, as if to declare his opinion about a particular patient.

The real task of feeding, treating and caring for this unusual collection of patients, however, falls on Wild Care's passionate staff, interns and volunteers, many of whom have dedicated hundreds of hours to Wild Care over the years.

A nonprofit organization whose mission it is to treat injured, ill and orphaned native wildlife for release back into the wild, Wild Care takes in Cape Cod's smallest and most vulnerable creatures—birds, mammals and reptiles. The organization

Wildlife rehabilitator Andrea Dedekam, of Orleans, shares a sweet moment with one of Wild Care's squirrel orphans after hand-feeding it a mixture of walnut water and puppy formula. So far this year, Wild Care has taken in more than 25 baby squirrel orphans, which will be cared for until they can be released back into the wild.



Wildlife rehabilitator Niki Howes, of Brewster, checks on the progress of mature baby squirrels in one of Wild Care's outdoor enclosures. This particular enclosure contains a squirrel habitat with branches and foliage which allow them to practice nest-building, climbing, jumping and other skills needed to survive outdoors.

Below: Wild Care's Animal Care Coordinator, Jennifer Taylor, holds a juvenile pigeon brought in with foot injuries after he fell from his nest in Harwich. Taylor fashioned tiny splints, which she carefully attached to his injured feet. After several weeks, the pigeon made a full recovery and was released back into the wild with an adult pigeon he had bonded with at Wild Care's facility.



is located in an old converted farmhouse in Eastham, and outbuildings accommodate its patients. The main house serves many purposes—the intake area, infirmary, nursery, kitchen and office—and the outbuildings provide space for



patients on their way to recovery. The outbuildings are primarily wooden shed-like enclosures containing various habitats. For instance, there's a squirrel habitat with branches and foliage for older squirrels to jump around in; there's another enclosure with a temporary pond set up for an injured snapping turtle. There's even a specialized elliptical raptor aviary that enables hawks, ospreys, eagles and owls to have sustained flight around its continuous outer ring to strengthen their wings after injury.

Above left: One of the many baby opossums brought into Wild Care this spring. Opossums are marsupials and can often survive inside their mother's pouch after a car's impact, which is how this opossum ended up at Wild Care. Above right: This baby bunny was treated by Wild Care for a cat-inflicted lesion. At left: A nest of baby house finches eagerly await mealtime. House finches are common on Cape Cod and are often found on people's porches. Since baby birds need to be fed every 25 minutes for 12 hours a day, volunteer schedules are arranged to provide this kind of intense attention. Wild Care's spring intern Katie Aviszus whistles to her charges as she feeds them. "It encourages them to eat," she explains.



"In the spring, people doing yard work can inadvertently disturb nests and winter resting spots of many kinds of animals, scaring parents away, which means baby animals are on their own."

Jennifer Taylor, animal care coordinator and wildlife rehabilitator at Wild Care

Springtime is especially busy at Wild Care's nursery. "In the spring, people doing yard work can inadvertently disturb nests and winter resting spots of many kinds of animals, scaring parents away, which means baby animals are on their own," explains Jennifer Taylor, animal care coordinator and wildlife rehabilitator at Wild Care. "For instance, when people take down and remove dead trees, they don't realize there are frequently nests in them, so we've had lots of orphans or injuries coming in from those types of scenarios," says Taylor, who has been working at Wild Care since 2002. Then there's the large number of baby opossums who are brought in after their mothers are killed by vehicles. Opossums are marsupials and can often survive the car's impact inside their mother's pouch.

This past spring, Wild Care saw an unusual number of baby squirrels. The squirrels are hand-fed a mixture that includes walnut water and puppy formula every four hours with small syringes until they gradually begin to feed themselves and are weaned around 9 weeks old. "When baby mammals are at a critical stage, we take them home. Volunteers and staff feed them every three hours!" says Taylor of the intensity of caring for their young charges. After several weeks of this intensive feeding schedule in a warm indoor location, they are eventually moved to Wild Care's outbuilding, which allow them to practice nest-building, climbing, jumping and other skills needed to survive outdoors. Eventually, they are released back into the wild—preferably close to where they were originally found.

Above: An eastern painted baby turtle sits on the gloved hand of wildlife rehabilitator Nikke Howe. Facing page: Animal care coordinator Jennifer Taylor examines a baby great horned owl that fell out of its nest in Truro.





Wild Care's animal care coordinator Jennifer Taylor looks inside a box containing an injured woodpecker brought in by Brewster resident, Amy Bourbon (left). Below: "Quackers," Wild Care's mascot domesticated duck, who was rescued by Wild Care more than seven years ago, now helps raise orphans and puts adult waterfowl at ease. He can often be seen waddling around Wild Care's infirmary, visiting some eclectic patients.

Wild Care raises a large number of native baby birds each spring. Since baby birds need to be fed every 25 minutes for 12 hours a day, volunteer schedules are arranged to provide this kind of intense attention. On any given day this May, one could find a host of volunteers or an intern whistling to baby birds in an incubator as they fed them. "It encourages them to eat," says Katie Awiszus, Wild Care's spring intern.

Other nursery patients this year have included baby bunnies, an eastern painted turtle the size of a quarter and a juvenile pigeon brought in with foot injuries after he fell from his nest in Harwich. For the pigeon, Taylor fashioned tiny splints which she

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carefully attached to his injured feet. After several weeks, the pigeon made a full recovery and was released back into the wild with an adult pigeon he had bonded with at Wild Care's facility. "We wanted to release him with an older pigeon for guidance," Taylor explains. A five-week-old great horned owl, too, was brought in after falling from a nest in Truro.

The nest was never located, so, after an initial period of recovery, the owl was turned over to Norman Smith, director of Mass Audubon's Blue Hills Trailside Museum in Milton, who specializes in matching orphan baby raptors with potential adoptive raptor parents.

While Wild Care encourages the public to be concerned about injured wildlife or abandoned wild infants, they suggest taking necessary precautions before acting. "We like people to call us first if they see an animal in distress, rather than moving it, because it can end up being harmed," Taylor explains.

"We can walk people through the process to see if the wildlife really needs care or if the baby has actually been abandoned."

Wild Care's in-depth website also offers advice on how to gauge whether wildlife needs the help of a rehabilitator.

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"Knowing we are here and available every day allows people to take action instead of having to ignore wildlife situations and feel helpless," Taylor emphasizes. "Over the years, we've helped get a squirrel out of the bank, a baby fox out of the miniature golf course and a hawk out of a clothing store!" she says, laughing.

For those vulnerable creatures in need, it's clear that Wild Care's community of caregivers will do their best. "I consider it a joy, honor and privilege to share in the lives of the animals we help," Taylor concludes.

In the background, Quackers, who is finishing up his visit with a new goose, quacks a few times in seeming agreement. 🦆



If you encounter wildlife potentially in need of care, please call **Wild Care's** hotline at 508-240-2555. To support **Wild Care Inc.** or to become a volunteer, visit [wildcarecapecod.org](http://wildcarecapecod.org)