Dear Members,
I often like to reprint stories I wrote some years ago. Since egrets have recently been in the news and their plight an issue that WRR continues to address, it seems fitting to share this story with you again. As we approach Wildlife Rescue & Rehabilitation’s 45th year, I cannot help but be reminded of those early days and the countless memorable events, situations, animals, and people during that time. The following story took place when WRR was very young; I wrote it for one of our early newsletters.

Always there have been the animals. Animals in need and animals simply being themselves, teaching me what I had to learn to better care for them. Animals I rescued and held for only a moment and others who remained with WRR over a decade. And of course, there were the people. A good friend to WRR in those early days, actor Earl Holliman, once said of WRR, “They have never received a call from a raccoon.” I told him how often I have used his statement to make an important point — WRR has been here for animals, of course, but every animal we have helped started his or her journey to WRR because of some human.

Sometimes those humans were on the periphery watching, like the time I was called to rescue a great egret who was taking up residence in a neighborhood near the San Antonio River. He had been seen by an elderly woman and her grandchildren who were enthralled by this regal white bird who was taller than the youngsters. Seemingly not able to fly, he made his way from house to house stirring —

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OUR MISSION
To rescue, rehabilitate, and release native wildlife, and to provide sanctuary, individualized care, and a voice for other animals in need.

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CONTACT US
wildlife-rescue.org
info@wildlife-rescue.org
P.O. Box 369
Kendalia, Texas 78027
Phone: 830-336-2725
Fax: 830-336-3733
WRR Sherman Animal Care Complex
1354 Basse Rd.
San Antonio, TX 78212

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Lynn’s Letter

the family dogs to raise a ruckus and scattering the intimidated cats in his path. He covered considerable distance as his long legs carried him gracefully from front to back yards.

It is important to remember that this occurred in the days when our “rescue equipment” consisted of one pair of heavy gloves, several cardboard boxes (to this day I cherish cardboard boxes!), and various types of bedding. We had no impressive paraphernalia, only endless determination to make what we had work in any way required to do the job. It was with these meager trappings that I arrived in the neighborhood, eager to aid the supposedly injured egret.

Since he could not fly, I was fully aware that I might have to devise some way to carefully trap him but I knew he was not going to simply stand still and let me get the upper hand. Egrets are high-strung, like so many wading birds, quick to be frightened, and can easily hurt themselves when trying to avoid human contact. I approached this beautiful bird as he stood surrounded in the distance by a crowd of neighborhood children and adults. Because he was not taking flight it was reasonable to assume that he could not fly though his wings looked fine and he seemed in the peak of health. He was distracted by the crowd so my plan was to toss the voluminous sheet over him and make my approach.

Not surprisingly he had the exact opposite plan in mind and as the sheet floated softly down over his body, this was his cue to beat a hasty retreat. As he extended his long legs and broke into a graceful run the sheet magically managed to remain in place creating
the image of a tall, elongated bird with a massive wingspan flowing gracefully down the street followed by an entourage of children, followed by a chorus of screaming adults, followed by me, the “expert rescuer” who was wondering how everything could go so wrong so fast! As I overtook the crowd the egret mercifully slowed down just long enough for me to step on the sheet as he gracefully took flight and left behind the residents and me watching as he made a beeline toward the San Antonio River. He was last seen flying headlong down the middle of the river making his way far from all the excitement he had created. What in the world went through his mind I will never know, but I feel certain that for the rest of his life he gave humans an even wider berth than before. As with so many things that animals do every day, it remains a mystery why this egret chose to linger in a neighborhood where he was getting so much attention that would usually have frightened him away. But for reasons he alone knew he did what he did that day and made a lasting impression on all who had the privilege of seeing this beautiful bird so close up.

Though this story had a happy ending, every year WRR is made aware of yet another egret rookery being threatened with destruction. These birds have for eons built their nests in massive stands of trees and the more we drive them away and cut down their trees, the fewer homes they and their young will have. In making their plight public, WRR hopes to garner sympathy and support for these magnificent birds.

Reflections on Respect For Fish Day and WRR Fish Week

In August, Wildlife Rescue and Rehabilitation recognized the importance of protecting fish by taking part in Respect for Fish Day and launching WRR Fish Week. The week-long campaign raised awareness of the fact that fish feel pain, experience emotions, and are intelligent, as well as addressing the dangers of aquaculture and the problem of animal cruelty toward fish. We reflect on these efforts by calling attention again to the plight of marine wildlife through the accompanying article.

Scientists Find That Fish Feel Pain

The idea that fish suffer runs counter to almost everything Americans have been taught about them: that their brains are not complex enough to experience pain; that their behaviors when stressed — such as wriggling violently on a hook or desperately gasping for air — are just unconscious reactions, disconnected from the suffering of sentient beings; that they are essentially unfeeling creatures that don’t deserve animal welfare protections.

— Cont’d on page 6
Since San Antonio has been certified as a Bird City by Texas Parks & Wildlife, you may find the following information all the more ironic and inconsistent with that. This tragic and unnecessary conflict goes back over 20 years. As early as 2000, WRR began to advocate for the preservation of egret rookeries on public and private land where they were being destroyed. We were also seeing the number of injured and orphaned egrets coming through our doors increase exponentially as a result of the assault on these birds’ homes. Even the City of San Antonio, Kelly Air Force Base, and the San Antonio Zoo became involved against them, using dangerous chemicals, pyrotechnics, firecrackers, decoys, balloons, and other harassment techniques to scare birds away from rookeries.

Claims were made by Kelly officials and City Council representatives that the birds were a safety hazard, that they distracted pilots and collided with planes, but in a 2019 public meeting, the Public Engagement Officer at the City’s Government and Public Affairs Department, Ashley Alvarez, reported that “since 2010, eight bird strikes have been reported at Joint Base San Antonio Kelly Field,” which is less than one per year. But based on this, thousands of egrets have been killed and displaced from around the base, efforts that continue even today.

Something called Bird Buffer, methyl anthranilate chemical spray, has been used at Elmendorf Lake Park. This fog keeps birds from crossing into or out of certain areas by irritating the pain receptors associated with their senses of taste and smell. In 2019, the city determined that Bird Buffer was

Katie Fine
Director of Development and Outreach
not effective enough to keep egrets away from public areas at Elmendorf Lake Park and amplified their efforts by leveling Bird Island — a historical safe haven within the park and home to thousands of egrets. Trees were cut down or topped, ground vegetation cleared, and 70% of the island’s canopy removed. To make matters worse, visual and audible deterrents are still used to deter the birds from returning.

Brackenridge Park rookeries have been the second most targeted city park in the campaign against egrets. Methyl anthranilate was deployed at Brackenridge Park beginning in 2018, but it took less than one year for the Texas Department of Agriculture to ban it due to human health risks and unlawfulness of use around endangered species; even so, its use continues even today at Elmendorf Park and the neighboring San Antonio Zoo. (In 2017, the National Institute of Health’s Toxicology Data Network declared Bird Buffer to be a hazardous irritant to humans as well as the birds.)

When methyl anthranilate use began at Brackenridge Park, WRR formally launched a public awareness campaign around the disruption of the lives of these egrets and other federally protected birds. Temporary signage was installed at the Park educating the public on migratory nesting, federal protections, and WRR as a resource for any injured or orphaned birds. Unfortunately, in recent years the signage and cones once allowed by the City of San Antonio and Parks and Recreation are now being removed daily, causing rising deaths and injuries to birds by motorists. When paired with the regular topping and removal of trees in the park, the most recent in January of 2021, the plight of egrets at Brackenridge Park can only be expected to worsen. Apparently the City and some of its collaborators will not be satisfied until all such birds are evicted permanently from San Antonio. Their harassment continues and has extended into the King Williams District using the same egregious tactics.

Wildlife Rescue and Rehabilitation opposes the mistreatment and blatant disregard for these wild animals. We will continue advocating for the protection and respect of egrets and all wildlife, who, after all, were here long before its present human occupants. Despite this sad history, WRR remains committed to working alongside City, County, and State officials as well as private entities to make this region a safer and more respectful place for animals of all kinds. To learn more about the history of egrets in San Antonio and WRR’s efforts to protect them, please follow the link to our website at www.wildlife-rescue.org.
In recent years, ichthyologists and biologists have been pushing back on our antiquated perceptions of fish pain through scientific research. Some have argued that fish and other aquatic species meet the criteria for sentience, including the ability to experience positive and negative emotions.

Researchers at the University of Guelph in Canada concluded that fish feel fear when they’re chased and that their behavior is more than simply a reflex. The “fish are frightened and ... they prefer not being frightened,” said Dr. Duncan, who headed the study.

In a 2014 report, the Farm Animal Welfare Committee (FAWC), an advisory body to the British government, stated, “Fish are able to detect and respond to noxious stimuli, and FAWC supports the increasing scientific consensus that they experience pain.”

Dr. Culum Brown of Macquarie University, who reviewed nearly 200 research papers on fishes’ cognitive abilities and sensory perceptions, believes that the stress fish experience when they’re pulled from the water into an environment in which they cannot breathe may even exceed that of a human drowning. “Unlike drowning in humans, where we die in about 4–5 minutes because we can’t extract any oxygen from water, fish can go on for much longer. It’s a prolonged slow death most of the time,” he says.

Though it may still come as a surprise to some people that fish feel pain, for those who believe that animals are not ours to use in ways that unnecessarily harm their vital interests, this new research further validates these values. Like a person, like a kitten, like a pig...fish wish to continue living and without avoidable pain.

We at Wildlife Rescue believe that the gathering evidence of fish consciousness is strong enough that we should take it seriously, and as with other wild animals think about the ways our actions impinge on their lives.
What it Means to be a Member of the Founder’s Circle

Some of Wildlife Rescue’s most committed supporters seek to elevate their level of assistance to ensure that the work being done on behalf of Nature and wildlife continues as long as it is needed. For these individuals, we created the Founder’s Circle.

Members of the Circle commit to a minimum contribution of $3,000 annually and/or include Wildlife Rescue in their estate planning, usually through their will. You may be assured that these dollars are critical to WRR’s long-term financial stability, particularly during difficult economic times. Founder’s Circle members can be proud to help fund an organization with a staff that does exemplary work for which they and Wildlife Rescue have come to be known and respected nationwide and that will continue to be the primary Central Texas provider of rehabilitative care and sanctuary for wild animals in this state and far beyond.

Founder’s Circle Member Benefits

• Recognition as a member of the Founder’s Circle on a permanent display at the WRR Sherman Animal Care Complex in San Antonio
• Your name listed on Wildlife-Rescue.org and WRR’s Annual Report
• Invitation to annual Founder’s Circle event & Exclusive Tour of the Sanctuary in Kendalia, Texas
• Founder’s Circle Quarterly Update with behind-the-scenes information

For more information or to join the Founder’s Circle, call Katie Fine, Director of Development and Outreach, at (830) 336-2725 ext. 314 or visit Wildlife-Rescue.org/Support.

Correcting Our Mistake

We gratefully acknowledge the gift made in honor of Dr. Richard Burr through the Greater Kansas City Community Foundation by Demi Lloyd, a former student of Dr. Burr. We incorrectly credited this gift in our most recent Annual Report and apologize for the mistake. The gift made a substantial difference to WRR and our considerable need for wildlife medicine, food, and supplies. We are deeply grateful for this gift. We also want to thank Drs. Richard and Pat Burr for their years of dedicated support to WRR.
Wildlife Sustainer

Wildlife Rescue Sustainers are a special group of WRR supporters who make a monthly contribution to underwrite our life-saving work. Imagine the benefits that add up over the course of a year when many of you come together in this way. Every month your credit card will be automatically charged for your designated gift. But you remain in control, meaning you can change or cancel your monthly commitment anytime you choose. The advantage to this way of helping is that a monthly gift can be made with little or no effort on your part. Over months your gifts will add up to more than you usually give in one or a few larger gifts throughout a year.

Your monthly contribution will help:
• Keep the lights on
• Feed hungry orphaned babies
• Rehabilitate injured wildlife
• Provide Sanctuary for native and nonnative animals

As a Wildlife Rescue Sustainer:
• Your membership will continue year after year unless you request that it be discontinued
• You will have the satisfaction of knowing your monthly gift is helping save thousands of wild lives every year

For more information on how to become a Wildlife Sustainer, contact:
Katie Fine
Director of Development and Outreach
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