

The Wild Times

A newsletter from Wild Things Sanctuary, Inc. • Winter 2017

Happy Holidays Wild Things Sanctuary Supporters!

Have you ever had a year in which it feels like you've had one test after another? Certainly on a global scale many of us have been feeling that way in 2017, but here at Wild Things Sanctuary it has been no different; every time one crisis seemed under control, another popped up. Even the weather was one of our biggest foes this year, making everything topsy-turvy!

Warm temperatures last winter meant bats woke up more often than usual, only to encounter freezing temperatures when the weather turned cold again. So, the year started with an influx of winter bat patients, some found in homes where they were trying to find shelter, and many of them more underweight than usual.

But then it became unseasonably chilly during the spring, so it wasn't possible to start releasing winter patients until much later than usual. That meant a houseful of more than 40 patients who had to be fed and cared for until it warmed up.

The warmer winter also meant an early baby season with a few patients having pups as soon as April. Baby season in Upstate New York is usually June and July, but this year wild babies started arriving in May. A season expanded by at least a month meant more weeks of sleepless nights caring for pups.

Many patients had severe infections this year, and a lot of time was spent gathering samples for testing, and administering medicine. A few mothers became so sick after giving birth that their pups had to be raised by hand so the moms could recover. Patients came in with abscesses, broken bones, white-nose syndrome, erosive dermatitis, parasites, unexplained joint swelling, glue trap injuries, pox, and more. I learned not even to think about "what-ifs" because they inevitably happened days after I imagined them!

WTS welcomed about four times as many pups compared to previous years, so there were many days when feeding was almost constant around-the-clock. As soon as all the babies were fed, I had to start feeding them all over again!



Little Klausy is a Big brown bat, but you'd never accuse him of being big in this photo! Here, he is just under 4 grams. His mother became very ill after giving birth and so he was raised by hand. He was released in the Wild Woods in August.

And just when many of the pups were ready to be released, a cold August put release plans on hold. It did warm up, but too late for many of the inexperienced juveniles to go free. So, there are now about three times as many patients overwintering at WTS compared to previous years.

The higher number of patients translated into a lot of food and medicine. As of early December, there have been over 100 bat patients this year, and the mealworm bill alone has been more than \$3500!

But, we made it through the year! I remember opening a box of babies to find seven infant pups, four of whom weighed less than four grams. I could only think, "How am I going to handle this?!" Answer: one step at a time, one day at a time, sometimes one HOUR at a time!

I am so grateful for all the kind comments in emails, phone calls, text messages, and social media. Your support made a big difference—it helped me get through endless hours of feeding babies, and gave me courage to face some tough cases.

Thank you to one and all, and many happy wishes for the coming year!

Victoria Campbell, President & Founder

Bat Buddies: Let's Hang Out!

"Hey! I didn't see you tonight, were you checking out that new place for dinner?"

"I was. But don't bother, it wasn't great and I'm still hungry."

"Sorry about that! But there were lots of chickens where we went, so we got more than enough food. Want some?"

"Oh, that'd be great!"

"It's the least I could do because you shared last time. How are your pups, are they hungry?"

"Oh, they're fine, they went along with some friends and got food, but thanks for asking."

This is a common enough conversation between human friends, but you may be surprised to learn that vampire bats have the same kind of conversation. If a bat goes hungry for more than a couple of nights, it can starve. That's why these bats often share food by regurgitating part of their blood meal for their hungry friend. And sharing isn't limited to family members—bats share with unrelated individuals who, in turn, share with them.

Researchers have been intrigued by the way vampire bats build social relationships, share food, and groom each other. They originally assumed that bats kept track of who they shared with, and food sharing was based on a tit-for-tat kind of "reciprocal altruism." There is some evidence of this, but the truth is even more interesting. Food sharing is actually more like the kind of relationship that humans have with their "besties." You know that your best friend will pay you back sometime in some form, so there is no need to keep track. And like humans, bats with more friends do better because they have a wider network for support if they lose a close companion.

When you think of most species of bats, you think of them clustered tightly together. They are definitely animals who appreciate a good cuddle, so it shouldn't come as a surprise that friendships are an important part of their lives. Males are often more independent, but females form close bonds, often grooming each other and helping raise each other's young. There are even reports of bat "midwives." At Wild Things Sanctuary, we have often observed pregnant Big brown bats being attended by other females who cluster around the mom-to-be to keep her warm. Once the baby arrives, these "aunties" stay close by. In the wild, females will babysit each other's young while the mom goes out hunting, even letting the baby suckle (the babysitter may not have milk, but it appears to give the baby comfort).

Bechstein's bats in Germany have demonstrated other ways that bat friendships are like those of humans. These bats live in colonies and appear to exchange information about things such as suitable roosts and good hunting grounds. They groom each other, keep each other

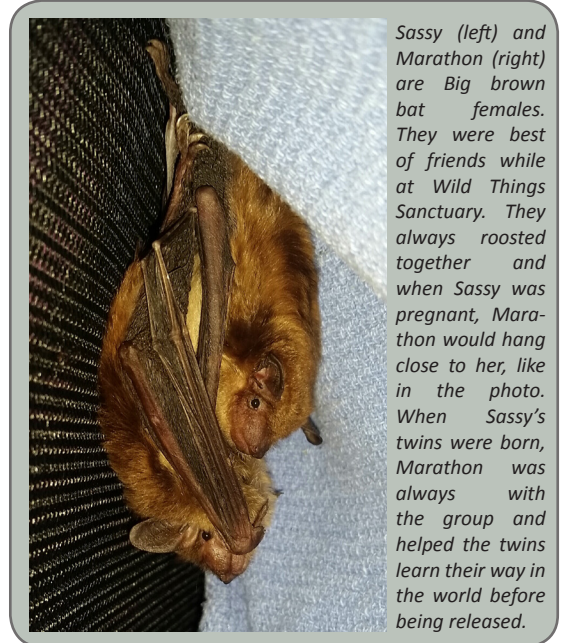
warm, and make flexible group decisions about where to communally roost. Members know all the individual bats in their colony. But look a bit closer, and you'll find something even more revealing: one-on-one relationships. Individuals prefer to hang out with certain bats, and maintain these long-term relationships despite an often busy and dynamic social scene going on around them. These bonds are not based on age, reproductive status, or relatedness. Older females even have a few friend "subgroups," in the same way that we may have several groups of friends who aren't necessarily close themselves. Only a handful of other species have these kinds of multi-level friendships that are maintained despite regular splitting and merging of groups, among them, elephants, dolphins, humans, and a few other primates.

How do bats recognize each other? They use sight, smell, and voice. That's right: bats recognize each other's chatter even though it may sound like a lot of noise to us. The Greater sac-winged bat's echolocation calls contain information that includes individual ID, gender, age, and even group affiliation. These vocal signatures help male bats avoid rivals and bonded pairs to find each other. When a lone Greater false vampire bat lands and calls, it is joined by members of its usual night roosting group. And these bats not only respond with more enthusiasm to their friends' calls, but can discriminate between new bats, old bats, and old bats making new calls. They also have a cute little way of touching each other to say hello, much like pals tapping each other on the shoulder.

Bat calls can also broadcast a lot of social gossip. A noisy colony of Egyptian fruit bats is a cacophony to us, but to the bats it serves as a rich information exchange about who is calling, what they are calling about (food, mates, a need for space), and sometimes even which bat is receiving the information. Recent work shows that when a young bat moves to a colony, the newbie learns that colony's way of communicating—it is not something that they are born knowing.

At Wild Things Sanctuary, once a recovering patient has gone through quarantine, if they still need time to recover they are placed with others of their species. It has been remarkable to see how relationships are formed and how some bats always choose to roost together, while others may always get in fights (and then are separated).

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Sassy (left) and Marathon (right) are Big brown bat females. They were best of friends while at Wild Things Sanctuary. They always roosted together and when Sassy was pregnant, Marathon would hang close to her, like in the photo. When Sassy's twins were born, Marathon was always with the group and helped the twins learn their way in the world before being released.



JanisJ (left) and Bobby McGee (right) were found roosting together in an attic this past winter. Because they were rescued together they shared an enclosure at Wild Things, and even learned how to eat out of a dish together. They had very different personalities, JanisJ being a bit more bossy, but that didn't stop them from always roosting side by side.

Your year-end gift makes a BIG difference to Wild Things!

Wild Things Sanctuary, Inc. is a 501(c)3 not-for-profit organization, EIN#: 68-0573815.
All donations are tax deductible to the full extent allowed by law.

Please send to: Wild Things Sanctuary, Inc., P.O. Box 713, Ithaca, NY 14851
You can also donate online at www.wildthingsanctuary.org

Enclosed is my tax-deductible gift of \$ _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

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Did you know your donation helps animals at other rehabilitation centers that are not set up to be non-profits? This year your generosity fed 11 recovering Eastern Screech-Owls, among others. Thank you!

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I joke that part of my bat rehabilitation work involves social planning! I've seen a bat mourn the loss of a roost mate, and that same bat be encouraged to fly again after making a new friend.

So, if you ever happen to eavesdrop on a group of bats chattering away, consider that in all the noise they may be gossiping about you, or perhaps coming up with a plan on where to go to eat all the insect pests that are so bothersome to us. And next time you come across a bat, treat it kindly and know that, like you, it has friends and family waiting for its safe return home.

Bats: Your Gardening Neighbors



Victoria Campbell
Ithaca, NY

Many thanks to the **Norwich Garden Club** for an invitation to give a talk about the benefits of bats to gardening and plants. It's always great when people want to learn more about the little superheroes who live among us! Interested in a bat talk? Let us know, we love spreading the batty word!

Special thanks to our 2017 volunteers, doctors, and batmobile drivers: Jodi McCarthy, Lyssa Buda, Megan Roblee, Pat Leonard, Sherwood Snyder, Drew Weber, Paula Burrell, Jen Bubel, Greenstar, the Cornell Animal Diagnostic Center, and our vet: Dr. Brian Collins.

Heckle the American Crow



Heckle the crow was not thrilled about being at Wild Things Sanctuary, but he needed a place to recover from the awful **avian pox** that had deformed his feet. This disease is highly contagious among birds, so he had to come to a place where there were no other bird patients. We were happy to help him out!

Heckle had suffered a wing injury that kept him grounded, but his human neighbors made sure he was well fed. When they noticed that something was wrong with his feet they were able to capture him. Pox can be a tough disease to cure, but with time and many foot baths he slowly got better. Once the pox lesions were gone, he was transferred to a facility with other unreleasable crows and he has settled in well with his new crow friends. Way to go Heckle and his rescue team!



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Mission Statement

Wild Things Sanctuary, Inc. (WTS) is dedicated to helping native wildlife through rescuing and rehabilitating debilitated and orphaned/displaced animals until they are ready for release back into the wild.

WTS is also committed to improving the well-being of wildlife through public education, focusing on how humans can safely and peacefully co-exist with native wildlife, and on wildlife's importance to man and the environment.



This newsletter is printed on recycled paper. Enjoy and share!



This little **Eastern small-footed bat** was not much bigger than a bumble bee.

Special Little Patients

Sadly, bats are still dying of white-nose syndrome, and some of the smallest species are the ones whose populations have endured the most dramatic declines. However at Wild Things Sanctuary we received more little-species patients in 2017 than ever before, including a **Little brown bat** almost dead from white-nose syndrome, who is slowly recovering.

We welcomed two federally threatened **Northern long-eared bats**, both juveniles who were having trouble hunting on their own.

We were also thrilled to look after a tiny **Eastern small-footed bat** youngster who was caught by a cat but recovered and was released. She is the first of her species recorded in Ithaca, New York, and a most impressive aerial acrobat!



A **Northern long-eared female** has more than doubled in weight, from 3.9 to 8.7 grams.

Keep up with us

Learn more about Wild Things Sanctuary and follow the stories of our patients:

- Check out our websites: www.wildthingsanctuary.org
www.bats911.org
- "Like" *Wild Things Sanctuary* on Facebook
- Follow *WildThingsNY* on Twitter
- Become a *Friend of Wild Things* by signing up on our website to receive our newsletters.

Easy ways to give



Do you shop online? Shop through *Amazon Smile* or *iGive*, where you can sign up to support Wild Things Sanctuary.



A portion of your purchase is donated directly to WTS.

How do donations help the wild things?

All donations made to Wild Things Sanctuary go directly to animal care and wildlife education. This includes animal food, medication, caging, and enrichment. Donations also help fund animal transport and the development of wildlife education programs and material.

We also believe in "sharing the love," and every year, if we have the funds, we help support other rehabilitators and their wildlife patients.

Please consider making a year-end gift to Wild Things to help animals in trouble. Why not make a donation in someone's honor or memory? Our website store has gift cards available!



A **Hoary bat** recovers from broken fingers.