Early on a spring day last year, a driver in Belmont accidentally hit a coyote crossing the road. He pulled over to see if the animal was alive and was met by a complicated set of circumstances. The coyote, an adult female, had not survived the impact. But nearby was a tiny pup, very much alive, newly orphaned and in need of care. Unwilling to leave the pup to fend for itself, and uncertain of what to do next, the driver put the pup in the car and drove on to work. He then called N.H. Fish and Game, which in turn contacted the Squam Lakes Natural Science Center, where Animal Care Manager Nancy Kitchen agreed to take in the orphaned pup.

Scenes like this are repeated in every season in every corner of New Hampshire. Citizens encounter wildlife they believe to be in distress and are faced with a tough decision. Should they intervene? Those who call Fish and Game for guidance are most often advised to give the animal time and space. Fawns that appear abandoned have most likely been left safely in hiding by a careful mother; birds that fly into windows often just need a bit of time to recover and fly away. Sometimes intervention is called for, however, and in those cases Fish and Game looks to its network of wildlife rehabilitators for help. Licensed by the state to care for injured or orphaned animals, these dedicated individuals combine their passion for animal welfare with expertise gained through years of hands-on experience to provide an invaluable safety net for animals in need.
Fawns that appear abandoned have most likely been left safely in hiding by a careful mother.
FROM OWLS TO OTTERS
The coyote pup was lucky to
end up at the Science Center, a
large facility in Holderness with
the experience to care for any
native New Hampshire species.
As Animal Care Manager at the Science Center, Nancy Kitchen is
responsible for nearly 80 resident animals, most orphaned, injured
or otherwise unable to return to the wild. Many of these animals
serve as ambassadors for their species, allowing the public to
observe them up close through educational programs and a net-
work of trail exhibits. When Kitchen evaluated the coyote pup and
found it to be only ten days old, she knew that a decision had to be
made. Raising the pup to adulthood would require intensive, hands-
on care, producing an adult coyote fully habituated to humans and
unable to live in the wild. So the Science Center committed both to
raising the pup and to providing it a permanent home.

Animals come to the Science Center from across the state and
sometimes across the country. For Kitchen and her two associates,
the first goal with any new arrival is stabilization; after that, the
hope is to provide the time and necessary care that will allow the
animal to return to the wild. When that is not possible, the animal
may become part of the Center’s exhibits or educational program,
or Kitchen will work to find it a home at another facility. The
Science Center’s current list of animals runs the gamut from the
common blue jay through otters and owls to black bears. During
more than forty years in operation, rehabbers at the Center have
rehabilitated eagles and owls hit by cars, taken in injured skunks,
and raised a pair of orphaned mountain lions from Montana.

The resident animals at the Science Center receive expert care
designed to live out their lives as essential elements of the Center’s mission
to provide the public with a deeper appreciation of native wildlife.

WATCHING OVER TURTLES
While rehabbers at the Science Center are prepared to work
with any species, Epping resident and licensed rehabilitator Chris
Bogard has been working exclusively with turtles for more than
thirteen years. She spends long hours caring for injured turtles,
keeping up with the latest turtle research and fielding calls about
wild and pet turtles.

Bogard’s devotion is inspiring. She will drive to just about any
place that needs her services and will do whatever is in her
power to get each individual healthy. Ninety-eight percent of the
calls she receives are about turtles injured by cars. From early spring
to late summer, turtles are on the move looking for mates, traveling
to nesting sites, and later moving towards hibernation grounds.
For turtles, movement means danger. In a typical spring/summer season, Bogard will answer as many as sixty calls about turtles hit
by cars. Each is given proper care and time to recover, and in every
possible case, returned to where it was found for release.

Fish and Game Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program Coordinator John Kanter calls Bogard’s work vital to the survival of
threatened and endangered New Hampshire turtle species. Many
of Bogard's rescues each year are Blanding’s turtles, which can live
up to seventy years and do not reach sexual maturity until the age
of 15-20, making reproduction rates very low. “A single Blandings
turtle, rescued and given a second chance,” Kanter says, “can have
an impact on the survival of the local population.”

Bogard’s advice when it comes to encountering turtles is simple.
Resist the urge to pick them up and let wild turtles stay wild.
The one exception? Turtles crossing a road can be gently moved
to the side of the road, always in the same direction they were
traveling. If a turtle is injured, keep it safe and quiet and contact a
rehabilitator immediately. Bogard, who has learned from some of
the country’s top turtle experts, stresses that licensed rehabilita-
tors are more than just compassionate animal lovers. They have
the training and experience to provide the best possible care for
injured wild animals.

All Creatures Great and Small
In the case of threatened and endangered animals, the rehab-
ber's role is directly supportive of Fish and Game’s mission to
conserve and protect native wildlife. But not every rescue or
rehab saves a member of a threatened species. One rehabilitator
recalls trying to save orphaned baby mice, and though many New
Hampshire residents might see squirrels and raccoons as nuis-
sances, rehabilitators will take them in as well. Rehabilitators are
driven by their compassion for all living things. For every animal in need, regardless of species, there is a rehabilitator ready to step in. And when they do step in, seasoned rehabbers bring with them years of hands-on experience and the type of practical knowledge and skills that can mean the difference between life and death for an imperiled animal.

Cathie Gregg at the Elaine Conners Center for Wildlife in Madison exemplifies this type of rehabber. In 28 years as a wildlife rehabilitator, she has worked with almost every native New Hampshire species, but her specialty is the fawns and moose calves orphaned or injured every spring and summer by highway accidents. These youngsters find a safe haven with Gregg, who holds special licenses for her work with fawns and moose calves and for more than a decade has partnered with Fish and Game to raise and rehabilitate them.

The work is hectic, intensive and around the clock; fawns need to be fed 4-5 times a day and also must be kept quiet and isolated from the activities of the Center. Gregg and her volunteer caretakers must provide the proper care without allowing the fawns to get habituated to people. Along with the injured and orphaned, Gregg also finds herself raising fawns brought in by citizens who find them alone and assume they've been abandoned. For the animal-loving public, Gregg is emphatic about one bit of advice. “Seeing a fawn alone is not proof that it has been abandoned,” she cautions. Does regularly leave their fawns hidden while they feed. “Give the fawn time,” Gregg says, “and if you feel it is truly in need of assistance, contact a rehabilitator before intervening.”

**Pure Devotion**

Last November, Conservation Officer Delayne Brown received a call from a Henniker police officer who had hit a bobcat kitten crossing the road. The young cat was unconscious, but not seriously injured. Brown took the kitten to Maria Colby at Wings of the Dawn rehab center in Henniker, where it was kept safe and given time to recover. Two weeks later, Brown and the police officer returned to the spot where the kitten had been hit and released the healthy youngster back into the wild.

The bobcat rescue made the local paper and was rightly celebrated as a successful partnership between local police, Fish and Game and rehabilitator Colby. But not every rescue is deemed as newsworthy as a bobcat kitten, and the daily work of New Hampshire’s wildlife rehabilitators goes largely unnoticed by the public. In fact, when Nancy Kitchen made the decision to handraise that coyote pup, she was well aware that coyotes are considered by many to be a nuisance and that some would question her efforts to save a single orphaned pup. But for wildlife rehabilitators, every single animal, regardless of species, deserves a fighting chance at survival. And it is this pure devotion to animal welfare that makes rehabbers such an essential partner in Fish and Game’s work to conserve and protect our state’s precious wildlife!

Nancy Skarmeas is a free-lance writer based in Hopkinton, N.H.