Notes to assist in the successful release of a variety of Wildlife Species & Background Information for Select Species.

HARES - JACK RABBITS & SNOW SHOW HARES

We have found that the baby hares have a very good chance of surviving upon release if we wait until they are about 3/4 grown. At this age they have few predators. In addition, we include, prior to their release a wide range of foods including: willow branches, fresh alfalfa, dandelions and when we can find it alsike clover. Other food we gradually introduce as they wean themselves off of milk include carrots, apples, peeled bananas, rabbit pellets and good timothy hay.

The Sites we pick for release are very specific. I will described Donna Bart's Site north of the Borden bridge. It has been a very successful release site. The farmstead has a wide 50+ metre hedgerow consisting of a wide variety of trees and shrubs with a dense understory. The hedgerow encloses a large area which includes a variety of paddocks and open out buildings. Ground cover is largely grass and a variety of herbaceous plants. Less that one half of the area is lawn. The farm is a mixed operation with both grain and cattle. Cattle are fed grain and hay all winter. The land surrounding the farmstead consists of cultivated fields with some vegetated slough areas. It would be nicer if there were some grassland or pasture adjacent but otherwise it is an excellent location. Donna has dogs and the dogs keep coyotes out of the

farmstead. The Site is suitable for the release of both Jack Rabbits and Snowshoe Hares.

* A large farmstead surrounded by a wide dense hedgerow with grassy areas adjacent to the hedgerow is very suitable for the release of Snowshoe hares. The dense hedgerow provides good escape cover and the adjacent grass and herbaceous species provided good forage.

- The large areas of grass and herbaceous species, much of it uncut with lots of tall grass and herbs. The open paddocks and out buildings and the overgrown areas enclosed by the wide hedgerow provide and ideal site. In addition they feed hay and grain all winter. Finally and very important
- the dogs keep the coyotes out of the farmstead so the bunnies can get a good start. Jack Rabbits can exist in quite high densities and therefore we can let a number of rabbits go at one time and they will not drive each other out of the area.

This last winter we released at least five Jack Rabbits and one Snowshoe Hare at this site and all appear to have made it through the winter. Donna has seen rabbits in all directions from her farmstead so they do spread out from the farmstead.

SHOULD I LEAVE THEM IN THE WILD OR PICK THEM UP.

I must admit we err on the side of caution more than others. The question I ask myself is - does the baby have much chance of

survival? If it is in a very large parking lot and no good place to move, if it continually runs out in the street or if it is in school yard and has been discovered by the kids then I pick them up. Also if it is a Snowshoe Hare and the adults are eating peoples garden then I pick catch up the babies. Jack Rabbits eat grass and NOT ORNAMENTAL PLANTS OR GARDENS. **Snowshoe hares do.** I have lots of places to relocate Snowshoe hares and they are relatively easy to raise. Mortality rates for Jack Rabbit babies in the wild in the City are likely 80 to 90%. We have been 40 to up to 75% until this year. With our new knowledge I would guess next year we will only loose 10 to 15 %. So even at the high rates we probably did better than the wild. Their are exception in the wild if the mother picks avery good spot but that does not often happen I don't think.

I should also make a note. if you are moving the babies to a safer spot, remember you can not move them very far. **50 or a 100 feet is probable the maximum**. Don't forget the mother knows where they are and will concentrate on looking for them there and normally could follow a scent trail if they moved a bit. If you ave to move them much further for safety reasons then you may as well pick them up and call us.

FOXES

In the southern half of the Province and into the boreal forest we have the Red Fox. Colour may vary in some instances as fox farming was at one time quite prevalent and escaped individuals

of different colour phases breeding have produced cross foxes, silver foxes etc. In the far north we do have some arctic foxes which followed the grey influx of Barren Ground Caribou from the arctic into northern Saskatchewan in 1979. Large herds of animals were found as far south as at least Collins Bay on Wollaston Lake, Key Lake and likely lower.

The Red Fox is now not particularly abundant on the southern Prairies. When I moved to the Province in the early 1970's the Red Fox was very common through the cultivated areas. The reasons for the decline are likely several.

• Due to extensive cultivation of cereal type crops, canola, mustard. lentils, etc. small mammal populations are relatively low in many of the cultivated fields and tend to be highest along the roadside grassy borders and around sloughs etc. Foxes are often observed hunting the roadside and they are often hit by vehicles.

- Roadsides also provide very acceptable denning sites. It is not uncommon to see whole families of foxes killed over time on an adjacent roadway.
- The high coyote population likely also contributes to the decline. Coyote populations are very high through out the area inhabited by foxes and the list of coyote food does include the much smaller fox.

What is the most suitable type of site to release young foxes raised in captivity. To answer this it is worth looking closer at this animal.

a) Foxes are very comfortable co-existing with humans

b) The often adopt active farmsteads with old out buildings.

c) Like farmsteads that are not meticulously maintained and are of large enough size that the out buildings are some distance from say the house or machine sheds.

d) The area often has sloughs with grass and treed borders, good roadside areas for hunting.

e) The farmstead is not on main road so that traffic is light.

If all of these conditions are met you have just found a suitable site to release young foxes. It is suggested that a pair of unrelated foxes be released and there is an excellent chance they will adopt the site and raise their young.

MULE AND WHITE-TAILED DEER

I gather the use of deer calls sometimes works to attract receptive females to adopt orphan fawns. A very good way to re-introduce these orphans was shown to me a number of years ago when I delivered two fawns after I had to put down the mother when she was badly hurt in a vehicle collision. A woman RCMP officer living on the outskirts of Martensville **had been successfully re-**

introducing fawns for a number of years. Her method was simple. The game department had supplied posts and wire to make a relatively large paddock in the back of her property. The paddock included several trees and bushes. She fed the fawns deer milk replacement as long as they wanted it and gradually they weaned themselves off to green forage and deer pellets. In mid September she simply opened the gate a released the deer. They stayed in the vicinity for some time and would at times come back to eat pellets through the fall and winter. She said they at times brought wild deer back with them. The success of this system depended on the area being in a non hunting area and the domestic raised fawns simply attached themselves to the local deer herd(s). A very simple method that worked extremely well. She did have to interact with the fawns but they seemed to "wild-up" quite well when they were released.

RAPTORS

The time honoured method of releasing young raptors has a long history in the sport of Falconry. It is essentially a soft release where a downy hawk is fed in a small shed or similar enclosure and as it grows the shed is opened to allow the "eyasses" as they are called to become bracers and finally to fly. The falconer would continue to feed the young. When they began to catch prey, he would catch up the bird or birds and train them for the sport of Falconry. In our case we want them to have a permeant release and so we continue to provide food for some length of time until

they do not return. This is called a soft release as the animal can fall back on our food as long as is needed. It is quite a good method of releasing young raptors. However, a number of sites should be developed since the species cannot be released in a mixed manner.

A comment should be made regarding one species of hawk, i.e. the Swainson's Hawk. This bird has a very long migration route down into South America and in most cases any young Swainson's Hawks should be held over till next spring.

GREBES & HERONS

Both the larger grebes i.e.. the Western Grebe and Herons and Bitterns have the potential to do signifiant damage to the face of the rescuer. We get numerous calls throughout the year for injured ducks that turn out to be grebes.

What often happens is that the grebes flying at night mistake the paved roads for water and land. This often happens after a rain when the roads are wet. Grebes have their legs located far back of the body and once on the ground are essentially stuck. They must be on water to take off. It should be noted that some of the diving ducks such as the Ruddy duck have a similar leg configurations and can often become stranded on land. The smaller grebes, Horned, Eared and Pied-billed do not present a safety problem due to their size. Grebes are not easy to keep in captivity and therefore we often check them over carefully, maybe

apply some antiseptic cream to scrapes on their legs and then release them. They should always be released in ponds that have fish. If you can find a pond with existing grebes of similar species then you know you have the right type. One good pond for the smaller grebes is the sanctuary located near the new bus terminal. Western grebes are much bigger and have a long neck. They will naturally go for your eyes and therefore when you pick them up you always grab their neck as well as the body. Controlling the neck controls the beak. These birds should be released in larger water bodies. Black Strap Lake is a good example. Should you find one of these birds after freeze-up the area downstream of the power plant on the river is a good spot to release these birds. This spring we had a wave of smaller grebes come back prior to spring thaw and these had to be kept in captivity and fed meal worms before there were suitable water bodies open.

The same advice would be suitable for handling loons as they also are capable of piecing the eyes and face.

Perhaps the most potentially dangerous species to rescue is the Great Blue Heron. They have an extremely long neck and again tend to attack the face. You should for sure secure the neck prior to picking up this bird. Other potential problem birds would be Bitterns and Night Herons and we do see some exotic herons from the south at times.

DUCK RESCUE

My wife and I relocated large numbers of ducks each year. The majority are female mallards nesting in the City in back and front yards of residential areas, down town gardens and in commercial areas in shrubs and under trees. When they hatch and then attempt to reach water the problems begin. They are run over, present traffic problems, are predated by crows, etc and ducklings often end up down storm sewers. We get numerous calls from private citizens, police, fire department, City, Animal Control and many others. The important thing is to respond quickly as they are often highly mobile and the sooner you respond the better the success. We use a large dip net to catch the female and have numerous butterfly nets to catch the ducklings. We enlist as much help as we can to catch the ducklings because as soon as the female is caught the ducklings scatter and hide. We do not like to leave ducklings behind and we seldom do. We have a number of kennels in the car as we often get multiple calls and may have two or more females and young in the car before we have time to release them. The mother goes in a small cat kennel and the ducklings in either a box or a cat kennel which has had extra wires or string added to the front gate to reduce the size of the mesh on the door. The duckings can get through very small holes. If a box is used it should be 14-16 inches deep, have no holes for handles and have a cloth on the bottom. The following is the sequence of events we use to catch and release the duck family.

1) Reach the Site. Prior to reaching the Site you should already have a release pond in mind. A suitable release pond **should not** be surround by cattails, rushes or dead fall as this increases the chance of duckling becoming lost. It should have several areas with grassy border that slope to the water. These are ideal loafing spots for the mother and babies. If the ducklings are very young the pond should be relatively small or have a narrow section so the mother duck can get the ducklings out of the water soon after release. The most suitable ponds are those where other ponds are nearby as the mother generally likes to move the babies out of the pond you put her in.
2) Talk to people and explain the plan
3) Get a kennel ready in the car for Alverta to put the mother duck.
4) Get out a kennel for the ducklings, the large net and butterfly nets - distribute these to people. Don't forget ducklings can squeeze through the mesh on the door of most kennels. They can also jump out of a box. Box should be 1.5 to 2 feet deep.
5) Find a spot where the ducklings cannot get under a fence etc.
6) I stand to the side and have someone slowly walk the mother by me.

7) Net the mother by dropping the net down on the mother. Do not try to swipe the net to catch her. She will get out. Be prepared to have to catch her in the air.

8) Grab her, net and all and give her quickly to the one (Alverta) who will take her to the car - all windows closed in the car. She will untangle the mother and put her is the cat kennel and cover the kennel with a towel to keep her calm.

9) Immediately after catching the female people will catch all the ducklings, putting them in the other kennel. When it is confirmed that all are caught this kennel is put in the trunk so the mother cannot hear them. Tell people not to be too gentle. Grab them by the head or whatever they are tough and **you do not want any to be lost**.

10) The family is driven to a suitable pond. We generally put the babies in their kennel in the trunk and the mother in the front. She gets very agitated when she hears they calling. If it is going to be quite a while, however, till you release them then we will bring the baby kennel in the front for a bit before we get to the water to make sure she is existed to re-unite with her babies.

11) TO RELEASE THE BIRDS.

a) The ducklings are transferred into a box that does not have any cloth in the bottom. They are counted as they are transferred. If you release them right out of the kennel where

they have been carried you may leave one under the cloth. We know - that has happened early in our revue history.

b) Alverta then walks to the water's edge, carrying the box of babies.

c) I take the mother out of the other kennel in the car with windows closed. I hold her by folding her wings in a loosely holding her around the neck.

d) I hold her at the water's edge and Alverta dumps the ducklings in the water. After they have swum a couple feet out I reach down to the waters's surface and drop the female so she can gather up the ducklings and go.

<u>The Release of Small Orphan Ducklings</u>

Small orphan ducklings can not be released in a pond by simply finding a pond with similar ducklings. There is a chance the mother will drown the new ducklings. Orphan ducklings can, however, be released if this is done as part of the mother-duckling release. The mother duck does not count. The ducklings should be at least as old as her clutch and they can be quite a bit older. The reason for this is you want the orphan ducklings to keep up with the group. Ducklings that have been hatched in captivity can also be released in this manner. In this case the hatched duckling should be placed with wild duckling for several days so they bond with these. Then the mixture of wild and hatched ducklings are released in the same manner as above. What happens is the

wild ducklings are bonded to the female and the hatch ducklings are bonded to the wild ducklings. You can not tell them apart when they are released.

The Release of Older Ducklings.

As the ducklings associated with a wild mother get older the hormones change in the female and she becomes less possessive as the duckling now forage well away from her. They do, however, respond to her calls and she still is a central focus for the duckling till they are essentially full grown. If you have a ducking that is starting to get a few body feathers you can drive around until you find a family of ducks, the same species and approximately the same age. You simply try to get as close a possible to the group without disturbing them and release the ducking towards the family. It will rapidly swim to the group and be accepted

Introducing Canada Goose Gosling into a Family Group

Unlike ducks the geese readily accept new gosling. It is a matter of finding a family group of similar age and releasing the gosling(s). A word of caution however. The wild goslings do not always accept the new gosling and can bully and sometimes kill the new one(s). Therefore after releasing the gosling(s) you should sit back for a time and observe whether the new birds are accepted by the other goslings.

MUSKRATS

Muskrat calls are received each year. Often we get a call for a baby beaver and it turns out to be a muskrat. The thing to remember is that muskrats are a very nasty animals. They should not be picked up by hand. Either use a net or better still corner them and run them into a kennel. They will jump at you and are often very aggressive.

A bit of background on muskrats. They live in ponds that are deep enough that they do not freeze to the bottom in the winter. They eat spiked rushes (Juncus sp.) cattails (Typha sp.), sedges (carex sp.) and grasses. They also eat meat and will eat ducklings etc. They are sometime encountered in the summer moving from pond to pond and are also seen in the fall and even the middle of the winter. In the latter two cases their pond has frozen to the bottom and they are forced to move. In the summer they can be relocated to a suitable pond but in the fall and winter they must be kept in captivity till spring. Like beaver they make up winter food caches to sustain them as well as a winter home out of vegetation. The food caches are called push-up and can be seen on the ice surface of suitable ponds.

BEAVER

Beaver do sometimes move overland looking for new territories. This is generally juvenile animals but can be adults. Adults can weigh over 50 plus pounds. They can bit if you give them a

chance. Younger ones can be picked up by the tail and dropped into a kennel. Older ones are pretty heavy and best is to try and walk the into a kennel. Kennel should be very sturdy as they are extremely strong and can bash the average kennel apart. Beaver should be relocated to the river. Because the City does kill beaver you want to drop them off NORTH of the City so they have all of the stretch of river to Prince Albert and beyond. A good place is the first ferry crossing near Warman. You can drive right down to the river and there is a flat spot to let them go.

There are two types of beaver or two ways beaver live. Bank beaver hollow out a hole in the bank and in the fall you will see the food cache in front of the hollow. Most beaver on the river are bank beaver. Beaver houses are used in ponds and lakes. The beaver build a house out of twigs, branches and mud and live inside. Access to the lake is by escape routes under water. The food cache in the fall is in front of the beaver house. A food cache consists of edible branches (largely trembling aspen) weighed down by less edible plants. The edible portion is below the surface ice. They also will eat red osier dogwood, willows, balsam poplar and in the north even jack pine.

PORCUPINES

Porcupines are a very gentle animal. They eat greens and bark and can cause considerable damage to ornamental trees and shrubs. Cattlemen and farmers often hate them as the castle are often so stupid that they stick their nose down to smell them.

Dogs are just as stupid. We take injured Porcupines to Dr, Harvey. He has a soft spot for them and genuinely likes them and also they bring him lots of business with lots of dogs! Porcupines are very easy to handle. I pick them up by the tail if I have to, but a more sane way is just to slowing move them into an open kennel. **Where to release them. That is the important question.** They like areas of grassland and aspen and willow bluffs. There are lots of good areas in the Strawberry Hills just east of Saskatoon off of Hwy. #5. However, make sure you pick an area away from a house. Simply open the kennel and the porcupine will move out towards trees or willows. if they don't come out right away just take a stick and prod them through the holes in the kennel. If they have to be kept over for a day or so they like apples and carrots. They particularly like apples.

WEASELS

Weasels are very highly strung and can be easily stressed and die in captivity. We have three weasel species in Saskatchewan. The least weasel is quite rare and **very very high strung.** It is a very small weasel about 4 to 6 inches with a short tail. The ermine or short-tailed weasel is twice as large and no where near as high strung. The largest weasel is the prairie long-tailed weasel and is the most common one on the open prairies. It is also not quite as high strung. The weasels can be handled if you move very slowly, make no loud noises and make sure they have lots of cover in the enclosure they are in. They are extremely quick and the

latter two are quite inquisitive. I once got a family of ermine given to me when I had a zoo. The mother had been killed and the babies were full grown. Within 1/2 hour by being very quite I could handle them all. Weasels of course eat meat. If you were to keep them for a bit mice would be a good diet. Young ones we raised on meat dipped in raw eggs. The latter two should be released in an aspen bluff or on an old abandon farmstead for the long-tailed weasel. The shore tailed weasel in a larger bluff or along the treed part of the river. All three weasels turn white in winter.

MINK

Mink again, part of the weasel family are quite high strung. They are quite easy to handle though if you move slowly and are quiet. Again if put in an enclosure for a time, make sure their have lots of hiding places. They should be released along the river or along an extensive marsh area.

BADGERS

Badgers are also in the weasel family. Adult badgers are one of the nasty animals you may encounter. They must be approached very carefully and are very difficult to handle. If you can run them into a kennel that would be the only way you would catch them other than by live trapping them. It would take several people to catch them. They should be released in an area that has grasslands and gophers as that is their preferred habitat.

OTTER

We have otter living along the river even in Saskatoon. They are part of the weasel family and therefore can get quite agitated. Adults would likely have to be live trapped. If injured you would run them into a kennel. The young of all of the weasel family are generally fairly easy to handle. The otters diet is fish, birds and eggs. If an otter is to be released I would find a good stream or river. I would not release one in the City even though some are here.

MARTEN & FISHER

Not likely to encounter. These are also in the weasel family and should be treated similarly. The marten in particular is quite curious but very high strung. The fisher is large and not a very nice animal to handle. These are both northern species. The wolverine is in the same family and we are not likely to encounter. It likely does live up to its reputation for being a very bad tempered and nasty animal.

FLYING SQUIRRELS

These are nocturnal and seldom seen. They are quite tame and very easy to handle. To catch them we used to put the live trap on a branch above the ground. We would keep them for a day or two in our cabin and then let them go back in the same spot.

BABY MICE

I have raised likely 50 or more baby mice over the years. All have been deer mice. I used a mixture of canned evaporated milk with a bit of honey. Used an eye dropper. If they have any fur on them you should expect close to 100% success. The very young ones are more difficult and a key is keeping them very warm. They should be released in good deer mouse habitat. Old abandon buildings would be best. Pre-condition them by feeding seeds and natural greens before releasing them. House mice I don't raise, I bump them off and freeze them for bird food. If you want to raise the you would do it in the same manner as the deer mouse. House mice do not exist long outside and are generally found in buildings associated with people. Others you may encounter would be the voles. Harder to raise but use the same technique. Voles should be released in their habitat which varies by species. The most commonly encountered would be the meadow vole. This would be released in wet meadow areas. One interesting species you may at time get in would be the water shrew which is much larger than other shrews. It lives along running creeks and rivers.

COYOTES

They can be netted. We caught one last year and we just cornered it and I then picked it up by the scruff of the neck and put it in the kennel. You are the dominate animal when you do this and they just hang there. Do not, however, try it with a fox. They do not react like the coyotes. If the coyote has mange it will not survive

in the wild. Mange is quite treatable in captivity. Where to let go. A good bet is any of the grassland or sandhill areas. Lots of good habitat towards Pike Lake or to the west on the Biggar or Rosetown highways.

WEST NILE DISEASE

West Nile effects raptors, crows, ravens and magpies commonly. Also in other birds. It is fatal in the wild but often treatable in captivity. There is likely a medicine that can be used but the best medicine is quite often food & water and quite. Many of them recover if they are not too far gone.

ADULT DEER

If you are handling adult deer, older juvenile elk and moose you must be careful of the feet. I was involved in an ear tagging program for Mule Deer one year in B.C in the fall. We used leg hold snares and checked them every 15 minutes. It was my job to go in and grab a free leg so the deer could not kick while we put her down for a minute to put in an ear tag. Several American biologist had been killed that year when deer kicked them in the head. Very sharp hooves and they use them as a very efficient defensive measure and are very accurate with them! If you have an injured door, secure the feet and cover the head to keep the deer quite. Need two people if possible.

BIRDS HITTING THE WINDOW.

Birds that hit windows often die of shock rather than a broken neck or severe head injury. Always tell people to quickly pick up the bird and put it in a dark box or paper bag and leave it in a quite warm room in the house for one or two hours. Often they will recover and fly away.

STARVING BIRDS

I have a paper I wrote describing how I treat starving raptors. I used the Snowy Owl as an example. Any starving bird you want to give it a bit of water and food and keep it quiet and not too cold. When they get in the final stages of starvation stress will kill them very quickly. Do not waste time examining the bird for injuries. Leave the bird till they start to recover. There is no use spending al lot of time examining a bird if the examination kills the bird. Do a very quick and dirty examination to make sure the starvation is the most immediate need. Stress is a killer. About 70-80% of juvenile raptors did the first year. May to starvation. So many of the raptors you get in will be juveniles. They may break a feather, just bump a wing and miss several meals and they are done. Often a wing may just be bruised and need time to heal.

HANDLING BIG BIRDS SUCH AS SWANS AND GEESE.

Both birds can hit you with their wing and cause a pretty good bruise. When approaching a goose or swan first catch it by the neck and then tuck the wings in and hold it against you,

continuing to loosely holding the neck. If you do not have a kennel to transport in an emergency you can simply hold it on your lap if you are a passenger and let it see outside. They will sit quite content if they can watch things moving by.

BOBCAT & LYNX

You are not likely to catch one of these unless it is in a foot trap or in pretty poor shape. The lynx is quite timid and fairly easy to handle, the bob cat is not. They should be pushed into a kennel if you are to transport them.

LARGE RAPTORS

Birds such as Ferruginous Hawks, Bald or Golden Eagles.

If capturing these birds make sure you trap there legs above there feet before you do anything. Hawks will grab you with their tailings but seldom bite. Falcons will grab you and bite. Adult Great Horned Owls have extremely sharp talons which will go through most gloves you would use. One of the worst gloves are the grey or brown welding gloves that are made out of split leather. You may as well use your bare hand if you use these as the talons very easily penetrate these. Best gloves are goat skin. Great Horned Owls should be grabbed above the foot before you attempt to pick them up. None of the owls will bite. All of the raptors can be kept quiet by loosely covering their head. That is why falconers use hoods on their birds.

PELICAN

Very easy to handle but you must watch the beak. Therefore when you pick up a pelican treat it like a goose but hold the beak closed. They can give you a very nasty bite with their hooked beak.

ORPHAN CROWS & MAGPIES

If you should get a call regarding an orphan magpie or crow, before you decide to take it to rehab pick it up and make sure it is healthy, no broken bones and let it squawks for a while. If the parents are in the vicinity they will soon make their presents known. They are often some distance away foraging for food for the young and it looks like the young bird is abandon. If the parent comes to the call leave it there. I did have a call this year, however, where the parents were there but the young were out in a very hot spot in a school playground. One of the young had already died from the heat. The other I gave a bit of water and move it 100 feet to a good shady area. The adults would find it as soon as it got hungry and started to call. Assess each rescue and decide on the best plan to insure the young have the best chance of survival. If I do not think the young will survive I pick it up and take it to the rehab. facility. I generally err on the side of caution. You can always phone some one for a second opinion.