

ALABAMA WILDLIFE CENTER

WILDLIFE TIMES

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LETTER FROM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Picture a moment when nature first captivated you, that unforgettable instant of revelation. Perhaps it was witnessing a kaleidoscope of birds soaring against a backdrop of sunset hues, encountering a playful family of foxes in a meadow of flowers, or being drawn by a familiar call, only to lock eyes with a wild owl. These are the "aha moments" – those instances of sudden insight, inspiration, or profound understanding. Merriam-Webster describes them as moments of epiphany, where the beauty and wonder of the natural world unveil themselves in all their splendor. For me, this experience came early in life, yet its impact was unknown at the time. Growing up in a town with fewer than 10,000 residents, my family resided in one of two trailer parks. Despite the challenges and traumas of poverty, isolation, drug use, verbal abuse, and physical & sexual abuse that colored my childhood, I found solace in the surrounding dense forest.

I disliked every aspect of the environment that I was raised in, and at a very early age, I began spending a significant amount of time outside to get away from everything I was experiencing. My first big aha moment came around the age of nine. This was around this time that my parents were using methamphetamine daily—their drug use directly correlated to the hours I spent immersed in nature. Early one Saturday morning, I ventured to one of the many fallen trees I had claimed as a treehouse. In the quiet dawn, with flora and fauna still, I witnessed the forest awaken. As the sun rose, birds orchestrated a symphony of song, and life pulsed around me. It was a moment of profound peace, security, and safety, a realization that amidst chaos, nature offered sanctuary. All around me, nature came alive, and it was one of my first memories of true peace, security, and safety.

I realized that I could escape the noise that had been so deafening, and experience this true peace where nothing could hurt me and that I knew everything was going to be okay in that moment. I think about those woods often, and I'm so grateful they exist. Reflecting on those woods fills me with gratitude. I often wonder if another child wanders those same trails, seeking solace as I did. If so, I hope they find the same peace that shaped my life, that amidst the chaos of the world, nature's embrace offers comfort and understanding. At its core, our Nature for All Initiative was born from a simple yet profound realization: there are children in our state who lack access to nature and wildlife. This realization strikes a chord with me personally, as I firmly believe that access to the outdoors played a pivotal role in saving my own life. Last year, fueled by the generous support of the Daniel Foundation and Vulcan Materials Foundation, we launched our NFAI program. Since then, we've delivered over 62 free programs to Title I Schools across Alabama. Originally intended to run for just one year, the program's impact has surpassed all expectations. Witnessing the joy and wonder on the faces of these children has been nothing short of extraordinary.

I'm thrilled to announce that due to the overwhelming success of the NFAI program and the undeniable need for it, we've made the decision to make it a permanent offering of the Alabama Wildlife Center. This is just the beginning of our journey, and we're eagerly looking forward to the future of this initiative. Together, we can ensure that every child in Alabama has the opportunity to experience the transformative power of nature. If you feel compelled to join us in supporting this program or our critical work of rehabilitation & education, please consider making a donation or becoming a member. Together we are making a better world for birds, today, tomorrow, and forever.



Chris Sykes

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chris".

Executive Director



Species
Spotlight...

BLACK VULTURES

Coragyps atratus

Meet Noir, the newest addition to our education team! Noir, a 2-year-old Black Vulture, joined us from the Raptor Rehab of Kentucky. Taken from his nest as a baby and raised by humans, Noir became imprinted on humans – making him non-releasable.

Black Vultures are fascinating birds of prey with a distinctive appearance and a critical ecological role. Native to the Americas, they thrive in diverse environments from forests to urban areas, spanning from the southeastern U.S. to South America. As scavengers, they are essential for ecosystem health, consuming carrion and thus helping to prevent the spread of disease. Their strong beaks allow them to tear through tough hides, and their keen eyesight helps them spot food from afar.



Interesting Facts...

-  **Sunbathing:** Black Vultures regulate their body temperature by spreading their wings wide to absorb more sunlight.
-  **Social Behavior:** These birds are highly social, often seen roosting and foraging in large groups – known as “kettles”.
-  **Defense Mechanism:** When threatened, they can vomit to deter predators, a unique & effective protective strategy.



Commit
to Feathers

by...

BECOMING A MEMBER

Join our flock by becoming a member & play a pivotal role in wildlife conservation. With 3 levels of membership, choose the one that best fits your commitment to wildlife and enjoy a range of benefits.

MEMBERSHIP LEVELS

Cardinal



Owl



Eagle



MEMBERSHIP PERKS

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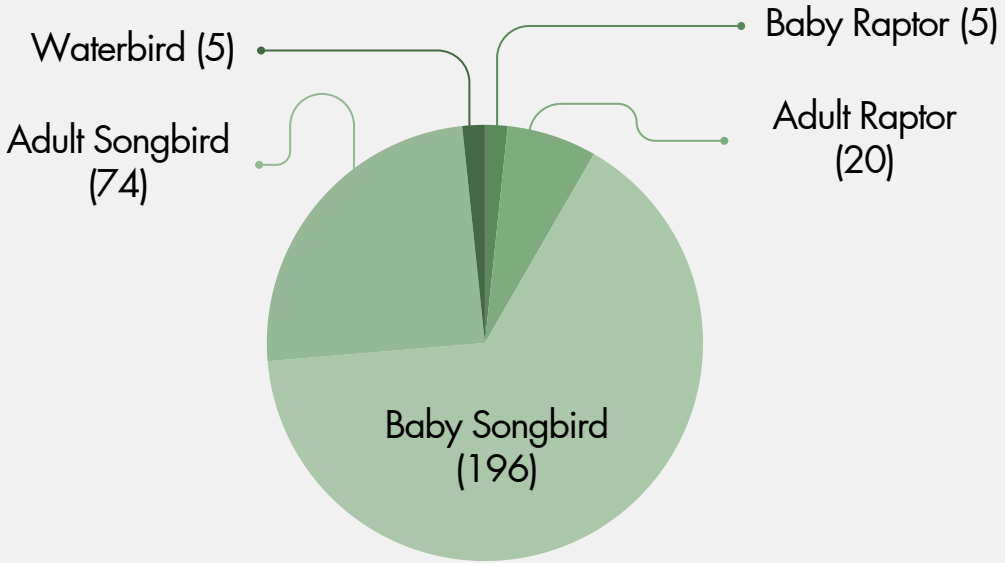
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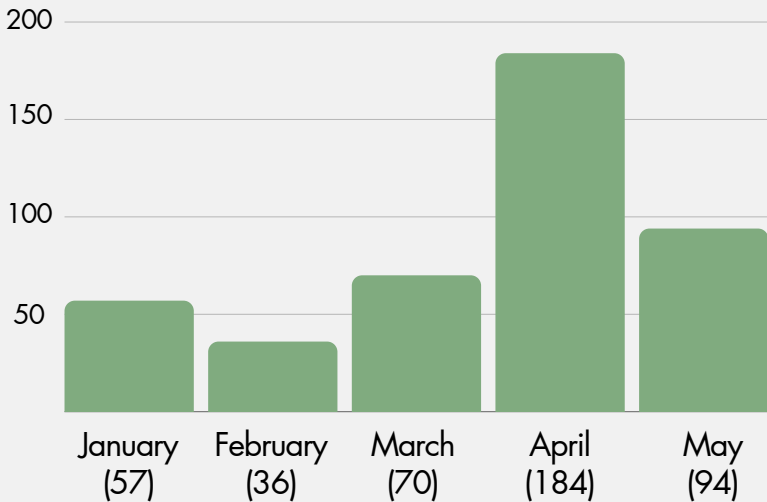
To learn more, or to sign up, please visit our website:
www.alabamawildlifecenter.org/memberships

REHABILITATION CLINIC NUMBERS

INTAKE AS OF MAY 10, 2024



HELPLINE CALLS AS OF MAY 10, 2024



CLINIC

Patient Highlight



A Pileated Woodpecker was brought in from Bibb County on April 17th following a collision with a car. The bird suffered a soft-tissue injury to its neck and a shoulder injury on the left side. She is receiving convalescent care and will soon be moved to an enclosure to prepare for her release.



A Great Horned Owl hatchling was brought to our facility on February 26th from Chilton County, after its nest tragically fell, resulting in the loss of a sibling. Newly hatched and weighing only 68 grams, the owlet has shown remarkable growth. Now a fledgling, it resides in a release preparation enclosure under the care of a surrogate Great Horned Owl parent. The owlet now boasts a healthy weight of 1520 grams.

AWC'S RESIDENT AMERICAN BALD EAGLE

Shelby

Shelby arrived at the Alabama Wildlife Center on January 18, 2018, after surviving a car accident in Washington that left her blind in the left eye. Since diurnal birds of prey need excellent vision to hunt, and Shelby lacked experience, she was deemed unfit for release and has been under our care. Over the past six and a half years, the team, initially led by former Education Directors, has focused on training Shelby to perch on a glove. Mary



Stockard, her primary trainer and caregiver since July 2023, has been diligently working with Shelby. The training sessions, which involve Shelby flying to designated stations for food

rewards & accepting food directly from Mary's glove, are popular among visitors who appreciate observing Shelby's interactions and progress. Despite her cautiousness about sitting on the glove, Shelby has shown willingness to try, marking progress in her training. Weighing 9 lbs. with an 8-foot wingspan, Shelby benefits from these daily routines that not only strengthen her relationship with Mary but also provides essential enrichment.



WILD BIRD SPOTLIGHT

Loggerhead Shrike



Distinctive Appearance: The Loggerhead Shrike is easily recognizable by its black mask and gray upper body, giving it a striking, bandit-like appearance.



Unique Hunting Tactics: Known as the “butcher bird”, it impales its prey on thorns or barbed wire to store and tear apart its food, using its sharp, hook-tipped beak.



Habitat and Range: These birds prefer open grasslands and rural fields, primarily found across the southeastern United States and parts of the Midwest.



Conservation Needs:

Loggerhead Shrikes face challenges from habitat loss and declining prey populations, highlighting the importance of conservation needs to protect this unique species.





**FOUND AN
INJURED BIRD?**

(205) 663-7930

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