

## ***Animal rehabilitators urge caution in helping critters***

By Rob Phillips, Northwest Herald

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A wandering gosling crept into traffic on Route 20 in Marengo.

"We just slammed on our brakes, pulled over and got out of the car," Marengo resident Beth Maicke said.

Maicke and her friend, Keith Steinmann, rescued the little yellow bird and then searched for its mother without any luck. The two took it to the Marengo Public Library, which referred them to the Wildlife in Need Foundation in Woodstock.

The foundation is one of about a dozen in McHenry County licensed to handle the rehabilitation of wild animals.

"We didn't know what to do with it," Maicke said.

But Monica Young, founder and president of the foundation, said they had acted correctly by not taking it home.

"It's against the law for anyone to own, harbor or possess any wild animals unless they are licensed, she said.

Rehabilitators must be licensed by the state's department of natural resources.

Young and a handful of other volunteers run the non-profit organization from their homes.

The group answers about 50 calls a day and rehabilitates about 1,000 creatures a year, she said.

Young started rehabilitating animals 30 years ago.

"This is my life," she said. "If I can help it, I'll take it in."

Most people don't understand the importance of protecting and properly treating wild animals, said Lynda Sugasa, director of the Safe Haven Wildlife Refuge in Marengo.

More than 75 percent of animals cared by rehabilitators have been affected by human activities, such as nest and tree destruction, vehicle collisions, unrestrained pets, poisonings, and non-target trapping or shooting, according to the National Wildlife Rehabilitators Association.

"[The rehabilitators] are doing good work and just trying to right the wrongs," said Lisa Borgia, executive director of the association. "They are trying to give these animals a second chance."

But, Borgia said, the number of rehabilitators nationwide is dropping. The number of rehabilitators in the country has shrunk by one-third in the past five years, Borgia said.

The Illinois Department of Natural Resources licenses 19 rehabilitators in McHenry and Kane counties.

Wild animals should only be rescued if they are injured, in harm's way, or clearly orphaned. If an animal must be rescued, Sugasa and Young recommended immediately calling an animal rehabilitator.

"We'll probably first tell them to look for the mother or the den," Sugasa said. "Getting the animal back with its mother is the best thing."

If a the mother can't be found, Sugasa recommended placing the animal in a quiet, dark box until professional advice is received.

Young said getting baby animals with other similar animals is necessary for their development.

"If [a goose] doesn't know what a goose is, then it thinks you are a goose," Young said. "They need that to be capable of being released back into the wild."

And what happened to the gosling rescued in Marengo?

It's healthy and growing, Young said.

"It's is absolutely obnoxious," she said jokingly. "And turned into a regular goose."