

Creative Therapy for a Keystone Species

In April, a volunteer arrived at South Florida Wildlife Center with a female gopher tortoise who had been hit by a car. She was dragging her back legs and had a cracked shell. A radiograph revealed no other fractures.

Our staff veterinarians repaired her shell and consulted with certified veterinary acupuncturist Dr. Carolina Medina with Coral Springs Animal Hospital about the tortoise's back legs. The decision was made to start electro-acupuncture – a form of treatment in which electrical leads are connected to acupuncture needles with the goal of using mild electrical current to

improve the stimulation of damaged nerves.

Although she could still walk, it was essential that the tortoise regain the best possible mobility in her back legs; otherwise, she might not be able to successfully dig burrows. Gopher tortoises are a threatened species in Florida, so breeding, which requires deep burrows, is essential.

Her burrows are also important on an even broader scale (see sidebar).



We are delighted to report the electro-acupuncture and related therapies are working! Our doctors are optimistic she'll successfully return to the wild once her rehabilitation is completed.



WHAT IS A KEYSTONE SPECIES?

A *keystone species* is a plant or animal that plays a unique and crucial role in the way an ecosystem functions. Gopher tortoises are considered a keystone species because their burrows are utilized by more than 350 other species, including gopher frogs, mice, foxes, skunks, opossums, rabbits, quail, armadillos and burrowing owls. Some of these animals share the burrows with the tortoises, others use them after the tortoise has moved on, but all of them are reliant upon the burrows for safety and survival.

You're Invited! SUMMER OPEN HOUSE

We're proud of our efforts and truly want to show them off; however, because our patients require solitude to recuperate and remain wild, we seldom host public events.

We've combined our staff's expertise to create open houses that will protect our patients' well-being while offering an overview of SFWC's operations, and the chance to watch the release of a rehabilitated patient (weather and patient's health permitting).

The dates and times are:

Sunday, June 25 — 10:30 a.m. to noon

Saturday, July 22 — 10:30 a.m. to noon

Friday, August 18 — 3:00 to 4:30 p.m.

These events are restricted to 25 people.

*Reservations **are** required.*

Donations are appreciated. RSVP online at:

www.southfloridawildlifecenter.org/about/open_house

indicating the date of interest and the number in your party.



DID YOU KNOW?

- Our nursery cares for hundreds of orphaned Virginia opossums each year
- Opossums are North America's only marsupial
- Opossums are rarely aggressive despite their snarls and hisses
- Opossums do not carry rabies!
- Opossums eat grubs, insects, mice and ticks that carry Lyme disease
- In one season a single opossum can kill up to 5,000 ticks!

Armadillos— A Naturalized Neighbor

Three one-week-old nine-banded armadillos were recently admitted to South Florida Wildlife Center. Although the Center has not often cared for armadillos, we expect to see many more as the species continues to expand its range in South Florida. Nine-banded armadillos are native to southwestern North America and are now considered naturalized in our area, which means there are enough of them to successfully maintain population levels.

Nine-banded armadillos are fascinating creatures! For instance, they give birth to identical quadruplets. And when they need to cross narrow bodies of water, they often walk underwater along the bottom - they can hold their breath for up to six minutes. (For wider bodies of water, they swim.)



Although some homeowners don't care for armadillo burrows in their yards, armadillos do play a valued role in our ecosystem. One of their biggest contributions is that they eat fire ants; this protects animals including lizards, turtles, birds and deer, whose young can be killed or maimed by fire ants.

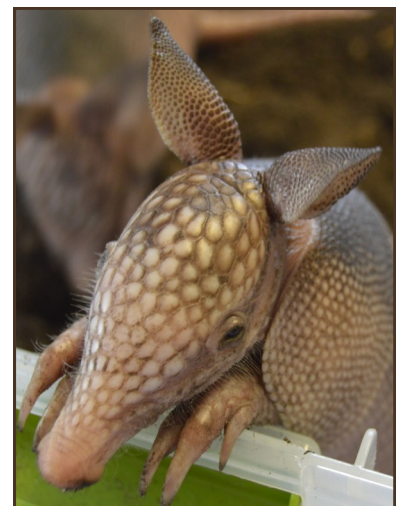
When the trio of armadillo infants arrived at SFWC, staff reached out to other experts to ensure we were providing the most updated care. Our Center is strongly committed to collaboration and counts among its

partners South Florida Audubon Society, the Florida Shorebird Alliance, Pelican Harbor Seabird Station, state wildlife authorities and many more.

In this case, staff consulted Dr. Frank Knight at University of the Ozarks in Arkansas. Dr. Knight is a recognized expert on armadillo rearing and has detailed knowledge about the special components of armadillo milk – something we needed to know to make sure our patients received the best possible nutrition.

Once we knew the nutritional requirements unique to this species, our staff created a specialized diet which includes the high levels of protein and specific minerals armadillo infants need to grow and flourish. We also customized the infants' habitat so they had the temperature, humidity and substrates required for healthy development.

Our armadillo patients continue to thrive. After several months of care, we expect to set them free on a large property away from people and pets, where they can positively impact the species with whom they co-exist.



Five Ways You Can Be More Wildlife Conscious

1. If You Care, Leave Them There!

Every year in our community, thousands of people come to the aid of wildlife they believe to be in peril. Many times, this selfless act is truly lifesaving. Regrettably, sometimes an act of “rescue” actually harms or dooms a wild animal who would have been far better off left alone.

Although we provide excellent care for wildlife orphans, we cannot replicate the unique care provided by their parents. Also, “rescued” infants can be harmed by too much human contact. Raccoons, for instance, can become habituated to people if they are handled extensively while they are young. This blunts their natural survival instincts and can make it impossible for them to survive in the wild.

To help keep wild infants in the wild, South Florida Wildlife Center offers a brochure, “If you Care, Leave Them There,” which provides re-nesting and rescue techniques for the wildlife most often encountered in our residential neighborhoods.

For more information about dealing with displaced wildlife, and to download a copy of the brochure, visit:

www.southfloridawildlifecenter.org/rescue_advice



2. Be Storm Savvy

Did you know that palm trees are naturally adapted to withstand hurricanes and other storms with no need to prune their fronds? Cutting them is not only unnecessary, it could harm nesting birds protected by the Federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act and might even damage the tree. This is just one of the many things you need to know to be storm savvy!

Thanks to donor support and many volunteers, we are well-prepared here at SFWC, where evacuation could mean moving hundreds of wildlife patients to safety. Please remember companion animals in your own storm plan and always monitor the weather and storm-related advisories. For more hurricane-preparedness tips, visit our website at:

www.southfloridawildlifecenter.org/hurricane

3. Become a Rescuer & Help Us Re-nest

South Florida Wildlife Center is leading the field when it comes to the proactive practice of re-nesting. Our experience has shown that most raptors, squirrels, raccoons, songbirds and other wildlife do better if they are re-nested and remain in their parents’ care, even if their original nest has been damaged. SFWC’s trained staff helps rescuers re-nest wildlife, then monitors the animals to ensure long-term success.



4. Your Land Could Be a Release Site

One of the most rewarding things we do is releasing wild animals back into their natural habitats. Finding suitable release sites is growing more and more challenging, though, due to human population growth and expanding development. We need suitable release sites for opossums and raccoons. If you own property in our tri-county service area of Broward, Palm Beach and Miami-Dade and would allow us to free rehabilitated wildlife on your land, we would love to hear from you! You select the



species and how many/how often we release. For more information, contact Director of Wildlife Rehabilitation Renata Schneider, DVM at: rschneider@southfloridawildlifecenter.org

5. Think Before You Trim

Trees and shrubs in our yards create important urban habitat for wildlife, but tree-trimming and other landscaping activities can be dangerous for nesting birds, squirrels, bats and other animals. Pruning trees can damage nests, injure wildlife or separate parents from young. To find out more about tree-trimming practices that protect wildlife contact the SFWC Resource Center.

A Limpkin Grows Up



In the U.S., if you want to see a wild limpkin, you have to be in Florida. They aren't found anywhere else. Even here, they can be hard to find; their numbers have been diminished by hunting, wetland conversion and development.

Limpkins prefer freshwater marshes, swamps and shores and their diet consists almost exclusively of apple snails. Their screaming cry is distinctive – so much so, that it was used for the call of the Hippogriff in “Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban.”

Limpkin youngsters require a longer stay in our nursery than any other species. In the wild, they stay with their parents for at least four months; at South Florida Wildlife Center, depending on their age and condition, they can be here up to six months.

Our nursery is currently caring for five little limpkins. Three of them were found all alone in the middle of a road; the other two were found together, with no parents or nest around.



**Follow the limpkins, and our many other
fascinating patients, on Facebook –
www.facebook.com/southfloridawildlifecenter**

The Peregrine Falcon Returns

The peregrine falcon population was nearly decimated in North America by pesticide poisoning in the mid-20th century. According to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, by 1975, there were only 324 known nesting pairs. Since the banning of DDT in the 1970s, the species has rebounded and there are now between 2,000 and 3,000 breeding pairs in Canada, Mexico, and the United States. Rodenticide poisoning, however, continues to be a threat to many raptor species. South Florida Wildlife Center

recently rehabilitated and released these peregrine falcons successfully.



**South Florida
WILDLIFE CENTER**

In partnership with The Humane Society of the United States

3200 SW 4th Avenue
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33315

www.southfloridawildlifecenter.org

**CONTACT US
954.524.4302**

Resource Center: **ext 10**

Volunteers: **ext 40**

Donations: **ext 25**

Email

info@southfloridawildlifecenter.org

HOURS OF OPERATION

8 a.m. to 6 p.m. 365 days/year

