



The Canopy

Animal Ambassadors celebrates 13 years of Wildlife Education

Who says 13 is an unlucky number? As we head into our 13th year, we feel its anything but unlucky. Since its creation in 1996, Animal Ambassadors has presented thousands of programs across the metro area and reached many thousands of children and adults.

During an Animal Ambassador program, audience members get up close and personal with amazing animals from around the world. Many of our smaller programs actually allow for hands on interaction with ambassadors such as our hedgehog, rabbits, chinchillas or even a corn snake. Our programs offer amazing diversity and can transport an entire assembly to the tropi-

cal forests of South America or the blistering hot deserts of Northern Africa without ever leaving your seat!

Throughout the last 13 years we have traveled to area schools, libraries, fairs, festivals and special events. Our coatimundi, Maya was featured along with Becky Shore on Animal Planet's What's to Love? Valentine's special and our beautiful macaws have made numerous appearances at area vineyards, galas and even weddings.

We look forward to another wonderful year doing what we do best—Bringing Education to Life!



Sophie, one of the Fennec Foxes. At only 3 pounds, these are the tiniest foxes in the world. Sophie shares her den with sister, Kelly. Both foxes are an important part of our wildlife programs and visit many schools and libraries yearly.

Having a party? Invite the animals!

Want to turn your next birthday party into a jungle safari? Well you can with Animal Ambassadors' birthday parties. Winter birthday parties might seem to have less options because of the obvious cold, ice or snow on the ground but never fear, that's where our animals come in! We will bring five of our won-

derful ambassadors for you and your friends to meet and touch. The birthday child is the guest of honor, touching the animals first, getting to take a picture with an ambassador and receiving a special certificate to celebrate his or her day.

Our parties are unique, mess-free, have no set up

or take down time and will be the talk at school for weeks!

Call today to schedule your party at 571-252-0036.



Animal Ambassadors

Volume 1, Issue 1
Winter 2009

Special points of interest:

- See our rain forest show at *The Chocolate Lover's Festival February 8th in the City of Fairfax*
- *Animal Ambassadors will be on stage again this year for Leesburg's Flower and Garden Festival April 18 and 19*
- *Call now and book a wild birthday party for your little one!*

Inside this issue:

<i>American Wildlife program</i>	2
<i>Animal Spotlight</i>	2
<i>Leesburg's First Night</i>	2
<i>Migratory Bird Permit</i>	3
<i>Preschool Programs</i>	4
<i>Kid's Corner</i>	5
<i>Letter from the Director</i>	6

2008's New Program: American Wildlife

Have you ever heard a mother bird or rabbit will not return to her young if she smells human scent on them? Or perhaps you've found a nest of "abandoned" bunnies or "abandoned" fawns laying in the woods by themselves.

These myths and misconceptions are the very thing that led to the creation of our newest program "American Wildlife". Although we share our yards, farms and sometimes garages with them, often times we don't know enough about our wild neighbors to help them without hurting.

This new program addresses many of

the myths surrounding our native wildlife as well as providing insight into their lives, habits and benefits to the ecosystem. In addition to the ambassadors (an orphaned opossum, a corn snake, an injured screech owl, and wild box turtles that were "stolen" from the wild), the program also offers audiences the opportunity to touch numerous artifacts including deer pelts, skulls, bison pelt, pronghorn pelt and horns and many others. Many of the artifacts were generously donated to Animal Ambassadors this year.



Virginia opossum are the only marsupial in North America, raising an average of 9-10 young in their pouch. Opossum are beneficial backyard neighbors as they eat harmful insects as well as venomous snakes in the area such as copperheads.

Animal Spotlight: Kernel the corn snake

Snakes are all too often misunderstood and sometimes even despised but most snake species are hugely beneficial.

Kernel, our resident corn snake was donated to Animal Ambassadors last winter from a family that could no longer keep him. Although corn snakes are found state-wide, Kernel was bred in captivity and is albino both of which would be detrimental to life in the wild.

Being albino, he could not camouflage

from predators or prey making survival very hard. Corn snakes, like many other species of snakes are excellent rodent control. Corn snakes get their names from their fondness of corn fields where they eat mice who would otherwise destroy the corn. Most snakes in our area are harmless. Two species in Northern Virginia are venomous—the copperhead and the timber rattlesnake, the latter of which is mostly found in the mountainous areas

toward West VA. The best rule of thumb with all snakes is to leave them alone. Most bites occur when people harass or try to kill snakes.



Wild Times at Leesburg's First Night

For over 7 years now, our ambassadors have been celebrating New Year's Eve with families attending Leesburg's First Night. This wonderful event offers many entertainers throughout the evening for children and adults to enjoy.

This year, Oliver the green-wing macaw stole the show with his beautiful colors and silly antics. Our other ambassadors in attendance were

the fennec foxes, giant millipedes, corn snake and a chinchilla. It was a very cold and windy night, but that didn't keep the crowds away.



We presented 3 shows to a full house. We look forward to 2010!

Pictured: Oliver, a green-wing macaw, the second largest member of the parrot family.

Migratory Bird Permit allows Raptors in Our Program

Last year, Animal Ambassadors applied for a Special Purpose Possession Permit to keep non-releasable Migratory Birds for our educational program. This permit is part of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and will add so much to our programs.

Our first raptor came in this fall. When thinking of raptors, visions of huge, dinosaur-like animals might come to mind. "Pigwidgeon", an Eastern screech owl, is definitely not huge as he measures only about 8 inches tall. This small woodland owl hunts for a variety of prey including insects, rodents, small birds, toads and salamanders. When frightened, this species will stretch its

body and tighten its feathers in order to look like a branch stub. Predators are numerous including larger owls, minks, weasels, raccoons, skunks, crows and blue jays.

Pigwidgeon came to Animal Ambassadors from Blue Ridge Wildlife Center in Clarke County. He was treated there for a broken foot that did not heal. Since raptors rely on their talons to kill prey, this owl could not be released back into the wild as he would not have been able to catch food.

He will be making his first appearances at a handful of schools this winter.



Eastern Screech owls have two color morphs— a grey phase and a reddish brown phase. The owl pictured here is the reddish brown phase as is our program owl,

"Pigwidgeon". Other commonly found species of owls in Virginia are the Barred owl, Barn owl and the impressive Great Horned owl.

Preschool Programs at Loudoun Valley Community Center

Thursday afternoons at Loudoun Valley have gone to the birds, and the mammals and the reptiles.....

Come join us every Thursday from 12:30-1:15 at Loudoun Valley Community Center to meet a live animal, make a craft and play a game. Themes vary and change from week to week. This class is for ages 3-5 and allows preschoolers to get up close and personal with some amazing critters from around the world.

*Loudoun Valley Community
Center, Thursdays 12:30-1:15
p.m. for ages 3-5*

Please contact the community center at 540-338-4122 to sign up. We hope to see you there!

We offer afterschool programs for preschools, elementary and middle school, science clubs, 4-H clubs, and scout groups. Call Animal Ambassadors to set up your afterschool programs. 571-252-0036.

Wild Bunch Club— Kid's Corner

With the extreme cold temperatures outside, winter can get long and sometimes boring. Although most nature activities occur outdoors, you can still create nature fun from indoors! Ever played Bingo? Well take this favorite game and turn it into Bird Bingo. Birds are still numerous and easy to spot from windows around the house, even in the dead of winter. Make a bingo sheet with 9 squares. The squares can

either be 9 different types of common winter birds such as Cardinals, Blue Jays, Phoebes, Chickadees, woodpeckers, crows and Finches or you can make 9 squares showing different things birds do: eating, preening, singing, perching, etc. Draw your pictures or cut them out of magazines and glue them onto a piece of construction paper. Play indoors or on a nature walk. The first one to find all 9 birds yells Bingo!





Animal Ambassadors

Becky Shore
Director

PO Box 84
Paeonian Springs, VA 20129
Phone: (571)252-0036
zoo2u@comcast.net
www.AnimalAmbassadors.info

Our mission is to expand educational awareness and to foster a commitment from children and adults to protect wildlife and preserve wild habitats both locally and globally.

Our ambassadors are the backbone of this program, providing the human-animal connection that draws our audiences in and allows them to take the next step in protecting our natural world for generations to come.

Many of our ambassadors are from homes that could no longer keep them, the county animal shelter, other wildlife programs or they are permanently injured and non-releasable wildlife.

Animal Ambassadors is licensed with USDA APHIS, Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services. We are fully insured and are a member of Bluemont's Artists In Education program.



Please recycle this newsletter or pass it on to a friend. Thank you.

The Start of Something Wild by Founder, Becky Shore

Catching toads, tomato hornworms and tadpoles was a huge part of my day at age 5 in rural Pennsylvania. Living on a pond and watching the wonders of nature daily and how they changed with the seasons were all part of the early wildlife education that led to a passion as an adult.

After graduating from Virginia Tech with a major in Speech Communications and Wildlife Biology, I couldn't wait to start my job as the Education Coordinator at Ross Park Zoo in Binghamton, NY. The job was wonderful but the weather was a different story. Homesick for the four wonderful seasons of Virginia, I returned but the possibilities for wildlife education were slim. It was at this point in 1996 that Animal Ambassadors was created. The last 13 years have been an amazing journey and have only solidified my

desire to spread my enthusiasm and love for nature to children and adults. Being able to teach people the beauty and importance of everything from spiders to opossums has been well worth the 24 hour a day job I set for myself.

Juggling raising our own children with the raising and caring of approximately 40 animals has its challenges but the rewards are large. Many people have become regulars at my programs, kids who were in my camps went on to volunteer to care for the animals and many people wanting to be more involved have donated supplies and food for the animals. But most of all, I believe people become connected with the ambassadors and strive to become involved in recycling, habitat preservation or teaching our children to respect all nature, no matter how small.

If you haven't experienced Animal Ambassadors, this is the year! With so many programs available, we hope to hear from you soon!



Becky Shore, with Maya, a coatimundi native to Central America. Coatimundis are close cousins to the raccoon. Maya has been a vital part of our rain forest programs and was a guest on Animal Planet's What's To Love?