

Wild about animals

Scotts Valley woman runs shelter for abandoned, handicapped, injured and homeless critters



Jeanne Milewski, founder and executive director of the wildlife center in Scotts Valley, explains that she operates the facility without government subsidies or grants.

SJmr 7-16-96



TERRI MORGAN — SPECIAL TO THE MERCURY NEWS

Animal Shelters

BY TERRI MORGAN
Special to the Mercury News

Hundreds of wild animals that no longer can survive on their own in the wild have found a home in Scotts Valley.

Since 1968, Jeanne Milewski, founder and executive director of the non-profit American Wildlife Rescue Service, has tended to countless cougars, wolves, bobcats, panthers, peacocks and former pets. All were given up by owners who no longer could care

for them or cope with their behavior. Rejected by zoos, illegal to keep as private pets and unable to be released into the wild, all would have been killed if not taken in by the center or a similar facility.

Located on a slope next to a sand quarry, the 10-acre wild animal care center also houses hundreds of birds, including many native species so badly injured in the wild they cannot survive on their own.

Only a handful of facilities to care for such creatures exist, Milewski said, and hers does not get any government subsidies or grants.

Today, the center is home to more than 50 mammals and 350 birds. While some wildlife rescue facilities shy away from accepting handicapped animals, Milewski has a soft spot for crippled or injured animals. "We take animals with three legs or one eye

See **ANIMALS**, Page 2B

Julie Hendriks, volunteer fund-raising director for the American Wildlife Rescue Service, makes contact with a bobcat from Oklahoma being housed in the Scotts Valley wildlife shelter.

Animal lover hears call of the wild

■ ANIMALS

from Page 1B

that others won't," she said. "We'll keep them here until they die of old age."

Some, like the goose born with a deformed wing, require no extra care. Others, like Sassy, a former organ grinder's toothless monkey, have special, costly needs.

"We have to feed her a special diet of strained baby food and canned monkey chow," Milewski said.

Milewski's eyes tear up as she describes how a female wolf living in a large, shady pen arrived at the facility.

"When she was 8 years old, her owner remarried, and the wolf couldn't accept the new wife," Milewski said. "Every animal's story is heartbreaking."

Milewski has forged a bond with most of her wild charges. Salomey, a 500-pound wild boar, ignores a group of visitors but responds when she sees Milewski. Then she rolls onto her side and squeaks until Milewski rubs her

belly.

A cougar named Samantha presses against a fence to rub her body along Milewski's hand as the director cautions visitors not to stick their fingers into the cage.

Working seven days a week, Milewski divides her time among caring for the animals at the refuge, conducting tours and struggling to keep the facility going on tax-deductible donations. Volunteers assist with the constant feeding, watering, cleaning and other chores.

Living in a tiny house on the site, Milewski is available 24 hours a day to rescue injured wildlife.

"She's an exceptional woman," said Julie Hendriks, who serves as the refuge's volunteer fund-raising director. "She's the only one I know who goes out to Highway 9 in the middle of the night to pick up an injured raccoon."

Funding for the center is erratic, Hendriks said. An annual wildlife art raffle brings in money, and donors contribute cash, food and supplies.

Scout troops, senior groups, school classes, families and other visitors pay a nominal fee to tour the site. For \$10, sponsors can adopt an animal for a month or have a memorial message honoring a person or pet published in the refuge's quarterly newsletter.

While caring for wild animals is a labor of love for Milewski, it's a constant challenge. Regular inspections are held to keep the four state and federal permits required to operate the center current.

Construction materials, chain-link and wooden fencing, dog houses to shelter the animals and volunteers to build and repair pens are always needed, said Hendriks.

"We're also looking for volunteers to work on an erosion control problem," Hendriks said.

IF YOU'RE INTERESTED

To contact the American Wildlife Rescue Service, write 1296 Conference Drive, Scotts Valley, Calif. 95066 or call (408) 335-3232.