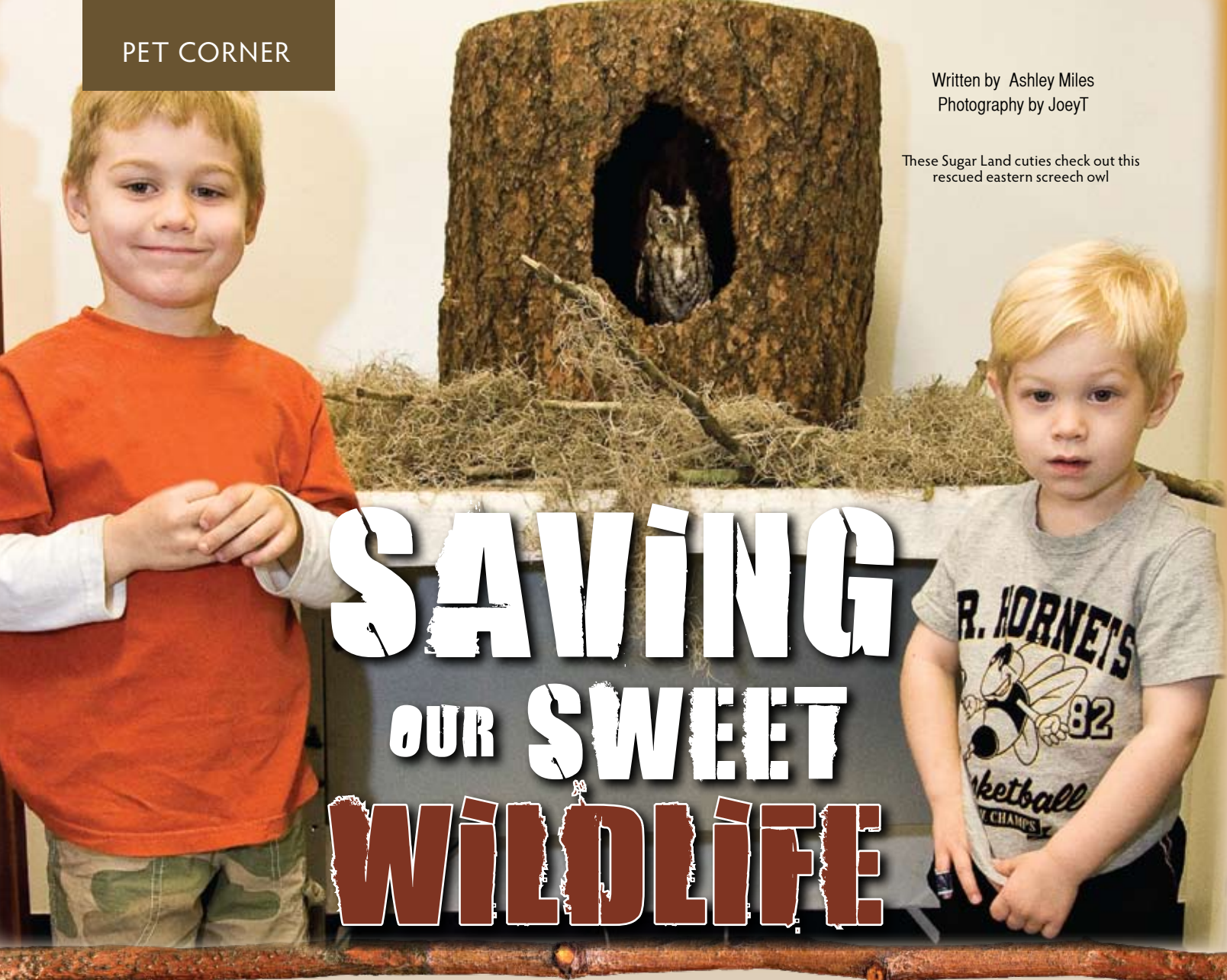


Written by Ashley Miles
 Photography by JoeyT

These Sugar Land cuties check out this rescued eastern screech owl



SAVING OUR SWEET WILDLIFE

What Sugar Land Families Should Do with Injured or Abandoned Wild Animals

Each spring brings in a breath of fresh air with budding flowers, spring showers, and precious new wildlife. With the growth and expansion of our great city, chances are residents may find themselves face to face with an injured or orphaned animal. Wildlife experts and rehabilitators offer a few guidelines should you happen upon one of these animals.

Wildlife Rehabilitation

“Wildlife rehabilitation” is defined as the care of an injured or orphaned wild animal. The primary goal is to return the animal to its native habitat with an optimal chance of survival. Sharon Schmalz, with Wildlife Rehab and Education, says, “Each year, the state and licensed wildlife rehabilitees receive thousands of injured

or orphaned animals.” Rehabilitating these animals is a rewarding experience that not only benefits the animal but also people. Benefits include obtaining more information about the animal and a better understanding of how the wildlife relates to our world.

When to Intervene

If you happen to stumble upon a wild animal that appears to be alone, the first thing to do is make sure it is truly an orphan. According to Texas Parks and Wildlife, each spring hundreds of young animals are unnecessarily picked up by the general public and delivered to wildlife rehabilitators. A baby animal’s parent may not be far away. “The parent may just be out looking for food for the youngster, or in the case of birds, allowing their children to spend

A baby possum



Eastern Screech Owl



AREA WILDLIFE REHABILITATORS and RESOURCES

Texas Wildlife Rehabilitation Coalition, Inc.
595 Wycliffe
Houston, TX 77079
713-468-TWRC

Wildlife Rehab and Education
7007 Katy Road
Houston, TX 77024
713-861-WILD

Texas Parks and Wildlife information: tpwd.state.tx.us/huntwild/wild/rehab/orphan/

hours and sometimes days on the ground when learning how to fly," says Schmalz. Don't worry; the parents will bring the baby food when it is on the ground.

If you feel the young animal is in danger because a cat is nearby eyeing it for its next meal, then it's time to intervene. Make sure to use gloves to prevent the transmitting of germs and injury to you or to the bird. "In the case of birds, a baby bird can be placed in a basket or bucket suspended above the ground. It does not necessarily need to be in a tree, but just high enough to keep the baby bird out of reach of predators," says Schmalz. This method protects the bird from cats and allows the parents to still bring food to the baby. Some of us may have been told or taught that parents will abandon their babies if a human touches the baby; this is a myth according to Schmalz. Parents will always return and care for their young. If you are unsure about intervening, call one of the local wild life rehabilitators.

Rescue Tips

If you feel it's absolutely necessary to bring the animal into your home, some precautions need to be taken. Understand that the animal will be scared. Remember, these animals don't realize that you're trying to help them. Even if the animal appears "friendly" or "tame," you still need to use protection. Always wear gloves when you're considering approaching a wild animal. Its first instinct is to bite or scratch in self-defense. Wearing gloves will help prevent any injuries to you and the animal. "When you approach the animal, try to throw a blanket or towel over it. Then, gently

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Executive director Sharon Shmalz holding barn owl

nudge the animal into a box for safekeeping,” says Schmalz. “You may also use a broom to help you nudge the animal into the box. Make sure to cover and tape the box closed.” Immediately call 713-643-WILD for a list of wildlife rehabilitators who specialize in care for animals in our area. If you have to keep the animal overnight, make sure the box is placed in a warm, dark, and quiet place. Most importantly, do NOT feed or give water to the animal. “If given water, a young animal may drown or catch pneumonia,” says Schmalz.

Growth Impacts Wildlife

Due to the growing number of people, many of our area’s wild animals are hit by cars, injured by domestic animals, poisoned, shot illegally, kept as “pets,” displaced by habitat destruction, or entangled in fences, traps, fishing lines, and other paraphernalia. According to Wildlife Rehab and Education, wildlife rehab has become a necessity because of conditions like these. The population for the Houston-Galveston area is continuously growing, which means these problems are becoming more frequent.

Various animals play an important part in the landscape of our growing city. So, let’s remember to share our environment with these wonderful creatures because it was their home before it was ours. **SLM**

ASHLEY MILES is a recent graduate from St. Edward’s University with a degree in Communication. She hopes to share her love of writing through teaching.

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A baby squirrel



Judy Phipps feeding baby possum

Red Tail Hawk with Operations Manager, Margaret Pickell



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