



Treehouse Wildlife Center Talks Helping Animals, Expanding Education in Riverbend

by Sydney Sinks, News Reporter
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DOW - Kelly Vandersand, executive director of the Treehouse Wildlife Center, knows the value of a dollar. After all, that's what it takes to provide one meal to any of the 36 birds or 13 mammals who are permanent residents at the sanctuary.

“You might not enjoy the experience, but I will still sing and dance for \$10,” she joked. “About a dollar will feed any animal there, sometimes two animals. So we value a dollar donation. We’re looking for that million dollar donation, I’d love to have one of those someday, but a dollar donation we appreciate just as much because that will feed one animal.”

The Treehouse Wildlife Center is known for rescuing, rehabilitating and releasing animals throughout the Riverbend area. They also have a few permanent residents at their sanctuary, and they emphasize the power of education to help more people connect with nature and wildlife.

The center is currently looking for a new education manager. Vandersand explained that they regularly provide programming at schools and libraries, or sometimes organizations will visit the sanctuary in Dow. Since education is a “cornerstone” of the center’s mission, they’ve been eager to expand these programs with the help of [a new scholarship](#).

“We try to keep it affordable so that our local school systems and things like that can afford to have us come out,” Vandersand said. “We do have a scholarship program now so that if your organization or school does not have funding for any type of onsite programming or coming out to do a tour or anything like that, we are able to at least help. So that was huge in our ability to extend what we were already doing.”

But first and foremost, Vandersand cares about the animals they help. While she is fond of all the animals who live permanently at the center, she noted that the Treehouse Wildlife Center’s mission is to rehabilitate and release. They don’t want to keep animals at the sanctuary permanently, but sometimes euthanization is the only other option if the animal can’t survive in the wild. The Treehouse Wildlife Center works with other organizations to find placements for injured animals who need to stay in captivity.

Sometimes, an animal has no injury but still can’t survive in the wild because of human interference. Vandersand tells the story of Nyx, a bobcat that was kept as a pet and socialized like a housecat. By the time her owner realized they couldn’t care for a fully-grown bobcat, Nyx was unable to survive on her own.

This is one reason why Treehouse Wildlife Center discourages people from taking on wild or exotic animals as pets. These animals usually don’t get their needs met in domestic situations, and they can become more aggressive as they grow without a mate and adequate nutrition.

“Sadly that is the case where a lot of people are like, ‘I’ve got this animal, look at this animal, look at me,’” Vandersand explained. “And then they realize that they’ve made a

mistake and then they have to try to find someplace to place it, and then sadly it ends up in sanctuaries, where it might not be given the life it should have had. We are huge advocates that wildlife does not make great pets. They should be in the wild.”

The Treehouse Wildlife Center will care for every animal who comes to them, but they need some help from Riverbend residents. Vandersand encourages people to consider [sponsoring an animal](#). This frees up funds for the center to do more rehabilitative work while still caring for their permanent residents. They are also always looking for [donations](#) so they can do more for local wildlife.

Even if you can’t make a monetary donation, there are still ways to help. Vandersand encourages everyone to educate themselves or check out the center’s programs for more information about the environment and local wildlife. You can find out more at the [Treehouse Wildlife Center’s official website at TreehouseWildlifeCenter.com](#).

“If you’re an animal lover, just understanding how nature works is a huge important factor, and then you can make some small changes,” Vandersand added. “And if everybody made a few small changes, then it would be an enormous impact on the natural world.”