Ardastra rescues wildlife in distress

●SUPER SOREN: Ardastra Gardens Zoo & Conservation Centre senior zookeeper, Hendrew Haley with rescued barn owl, Soren

●REHAB & RELEASE: Ardastra Gardens animal curator, Dalene Young releases a rehabilitated American Kestrel into the wild

★IT takes roughly five minutes and some prompting for the American Kestrel—a small, colourful falcon—to realize its free.

Discovered two weeks ago flapping around on the ground, a do-gooder brought the young bird to Ardastra Gardens, Zoo & Conservation Centre believing it to be lacking the flight and survival skills that it would have been taught by its parents had it not fallen from its nest. "Ideally you want these birds to stay in their natural ecosystem. Not all of them are going to survive. That that's part of nature. We want to let nature do the picking and choosing as much as possible," said Dalene Young, Ardastra's animal curator.

Of the 14 kestrels that come back to this month, three have become permanent residents, four have been released and the rest are recovering. Certain kestrels, small, up rated, will be an influx of non-migrants and migrators, followed by white-crowned pigeons, a species classified as "near threatened" by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

Spring brings new life and with it a busy season for animal rescue and rehab at Ardastra, introducing the conservation organization that is part of its mission, the highly trained staff is largely called upon by rescue workers and members of the public.

Originally opened as a botanical gardens in 1937, the late Aaronson Johnson added the zoological aspect to Ardastra when he purchased the property in the early 1980s.

Known the world over for its vibrant flamingo park, flamingos (Ardastra's mascots) are displayed within Ardastra's world-class zoological park. As you visit have an artistic appreciation. In 2011, the centre took in 19 rescues and made. Last year that number skyrocketed to 238, not counting pet turtles released.

Inexplicably, seemingly low mortality and risks, despite the pains of rescue and care, despite the pains of your hands, people have been bringing up baby wild animals, which grow up and quickly outgrow a shoebox, place and quickly outgrow a 20-gallon tank. More importantly, they have a very long lifespan.

Ardastra "visits" has 200 turtles in its possession. A few turtle "parents" in its possession. A few turtle "parents" might leave a little food for their newborn pet, the hatching the rest.

Ardastra has to use resources and funds to take advantage of every animal in need. The expense associated with caring for each temporary boarder varies, in general, it costs a minimum $5 per day to feed and care for them. The price goes up if the animal requires medication and ongoing veterinary care. A single vet visit ranges from $15 to $80 per animal, x-rays cost $50, if necessary, some animals could require specialized feeding every the clock care.

Although it's a costly undertaking, Ardastra takes care of pocket but all animals in its care including food and veterinary services for temporary boarders recovering from injuries, prepared to be released back into the wild. Even if the conservation centre could take every animal in peril, doing so could disrupt the function of natural ecosystems and survival of the fittest, unnecessarily bringing about the flourishing of the weak and vulnerable.

"Our first option always is to hopefully get these animals back into the wild. We don't always wish to keep them. Unfortunately once they imprint it's very difficult to do that. They lose that fear of humans," said Hendrew Haley, Ardastra's senior zookeeper.

"They will start to associate humans with food and that could lead to them endangering themselves by approaching humans for food or getting aggressive when they don't receive it and potentially attacking humans."

Consequently, when these wildlife rehabilitators receive rescue calls, they try to stay as hands off as possible.

Post examination, rehabbed animals are kept isolated, away from human traffic, in partially covered cages so they won't realize humans hands are behind the songs covering. Most of breaking free. The goal is to prevent them recognizing and relying upon human interference.

Still, the outlook for wildlife populations is bleak. Of the 120 rescues which took place in 2018, for nearly dire extent and injuries were come too late. Only 34 animals were able to be returned to their natural habitat. Some found a permanent home at Ardastra.

Two of the gardens' greatest rescues stories are North American barn owls, Aaron and Grandpa.

Soren was rescued from the Grand Bahama Crystal Palace Resort just before it was impacted last October. She was 28 days old at the time and required round the clock care. "Of course, she progressed very quickly so we started to work with her to train her up. Now she is an ambassador for that area. She has done about two to three visits," said Mr Haley last month.

Over a month old at the time of his rescue, Grandpa came to Ardastra Gardens shortly after hurricane. He was named for his less than pleasant demeanour, making these early days at the facility.

The dilemma of whether to intervene is a tough call to make when an animal is injured or orphaned.

"There's a lot to thinking. Some baby feathers big enough for flying are going to end up out of the nest, maybe on the floor. But that's a natural process in learning how to fly. They do have the ability to call, so their parents can find them and bring them food," explained Mr Haley.

Visit the Ardastra Facebook page to see videos of the release of two American Kestrels. Support Ardastra's work in one of three ways: become a member, donate, or adopt species as member. Contact 323-2898 to find out more or email guestservices@ardastra.com.

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