



# THE WILD LIFE

## *Kentucky Horsewoman Cares for All Creatures Great and Small*

By Rena Baer | Photos by Boo Hardy

**T**his past spring, volunteer wildlife rehabilitator Karen Bailey had an offer she could not refuse: a few days in New Orleans for some well-deserved fun and relaxation. No hungry mouths to feed; no cages to clean; no towels to wash — just the Final Four and the Louisiana Derby on the itinerary. What could be more appealing to a woman who lives and works on a Bluegrass Thoroughbred farm?

Try the river otter exhibit at the city’s Audubon Nature Institute. Even all the excitement in the Big Easy couldn’t keep her from ducking out of the festivities and spending several hours with the zoo’s river otters. The more she could learn about them, the better care she could provide Oliver, a river otter who became her ward last year and now has a Facebook following that might rival some of the more well-known horses produced on her family’s farm, Summer Wind.

The 700-acre horse farm in Scott County is known for its broodmares, including the Hold Your Peace mare La Paz, whom Summer Wind purchased at the 2000 Keeneland November mixed sale. La Paz produced Mission Impazible, a gray son of Unbridled’s Song who won the 2010 Louisiana Derby and the 2011 New Orleans Handicap and is a possible contender in this year’s Breeders’ Cup older male division.

But, even with the excitement of breeding successful Thoroughbreds, rescuing

wildlife is Bailey’s passion. While she was growing up, her father, Frank Lyon Jr., was chairman of the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, and her mother, Jane Lyon, was constantly taking in abandoned or injured animals and nursing them back to health at their Arkansas home. Frank Lyon bought Summer Wind Farm for his wife in the mid-1990s so she could indulge her love for Thoroughbreds and the beauty and nature of the Bluegrass.

“One of the real intangible benefits of the Thoroughbred industry is the type of people it attracts,” said Keeneland president-elect Bill Thomason. “Frank and Jane and daughter Karen are here because of Thoroughbreds. They are beautiful people who are great stewards of the land.”

*Karen Bailey strives to return all rescued and rehabilitated wildlife to their natural habitats, but Lucas the raccoon, above, lives at Kentucky Wildlife Center as a “permanent resident education ambassador.”*

Providing a helping hand to all creatures great and small is in Bailey's blood, every drop.

Every day is a mix of routine and adventure. She takes care of a cornucopia of residential animals that include pot-bellied pigs, gopher tortoises, cats, dogs, a zebra, and, of course, horses, while serving as a conduit back to Mother Nature for thousands of displaced, abandoned, or injured wildlife.

Oliver the otter had been found as an almost lifeless baby near a Kentucky creek, taken to Broadbent Wildlife Sanctuary, and then sent to Bailey's Kentucky Wildlife Center to recover and live. The center is at Summer Wind. Unlike the vast majority of the other animals Bailey receives, Oliver could not be returned to the wild because he could not fend for himself. He was deathly afraid of water and could not swim, a skill that is, surprisingly, not innate. Mother otters teach their babies to swim.

Bailey gradually worked to assuage his fears and built a small, heated rock pond for him to use. At first he would not enter the water unless she went in as well. Slowly, though, he laid claim to the pond, even tossing out the fish Bailey's stepsons



Oliver the otter is another ambassador for Bailey's work.



A baby gray fox nestles happily in a blanket as Bailey cares for its needs.

had caught in a nearby creek to stock it. These days Oliver has the run of the yard around the pool and delights in his friendships with the family's pot-bellied pigs, particularly with Wilbur, who was dropped off and discarded at the farm one day when his owners decided they didn't want him anymore.

Though Bailey has ended up as a permanent caretaker of several animals that cannot return to the wild, 98 percent of those that come to her (not including those that are humanely euthanized because of insurmountable injuries or problems) are rehabbed and released back onto protected land.

During the spring, things get particularly hectic as abandoned newborn wildlife turns up all over the Bluegrass: tiny baby raccoons, foxes, skunks, opossums ... a veritable wild kingdom that lands on her doorstep needing bottle feedings at all hours of the day. She is constantly on the move from dawn til well past dusk, taking care of every animal and knowing that their lives depend on it. Her family's multi-car garage has been converted to a nursery, complete with state-of-the-art incubators, the ability to pipe in oxygen, and

enclosures of varying shapes and sizes.

"It's a good thing that God grants me amnesia," Bailey said. "Every year I forget how hard the last spring was."

This spring might be hard to forget. Wildlife has been arriving in droves; every incubator and every ICU unit is full, including one that holds a weeks' old baby beaver, a rarity to be rescued.

Bailey works with several other licensed home wildlife rehabbers in the area and a team of volunteers. Most of the rehabbers fill different niches, said Bailey, who specializes in orphaned wild mammals, particularly aquatic ones and neonatal raccoons.

"A majority of the calls we get are from people who have found orphaned wildlife — whether they've been found on the side of the road, blown out of trees, or in the attic," Bailey said. "The sooner we get them, the better their chances of being returned to the wild."

And, for Bailey, "that's what it's all about." Nothing matches the feeling of releasing the animals that came to her in the spring in late summer. It's a feeling, she said, that is shared by all her fellow rehabbers.

“Some of these people go without for themselves so that they can care for these animals,” she said.

Like Bailey, no one else in the network receives any federal or state funds, relying strictly on donations and volunteers to survive. The volunteers include several veterinarians who have been amazingly generous with their time and skills, said Bailey, particularly singling out Dr. Scott Tritsch of Georgetown’s Central Kentucky Veterinary Center.

Their efforts have included saving a raccoon that was severely shocked when he gnawed through a main power line in Lexington’s Masterson Station. Now dubbed “Sparky,” he needed much more care than anyone initially realized because so much of the damage was internal. He also lost most of his sight, leaving him unable to return to the wild. He and a few other raccoons that could not be released because they would not survive now live together in a large enclosure. Several earn their keep, donating blood to save other raccoons and for research, another component of the work that Bailey does.

Though Bailey said people have questioned her about using resources on a case such as Sparky’s, she said he has been integral in providing information about what happens to an animal that is nearly electrocuted. “Had I known then what I know now, he might have been euthanized,” she said. “But, we chose to save him and provide the best life we can for him. In return, he’s taught us a lot.”

And while Sparky is teaching them a thing or two, Bailey and her organization always welcome the opportunity to spread the word about the importance of conservation and peaceful co-existence. She and other volunteers go into schools, Oliver often in tow as their ambassador, hoping to build students’ sense of compassion for animals as they teach about native Kentucky wildlife. Groups also are welcome to visit the center and see its nursery and learn



This baby raccoon is among a veritable wild kingdom that turned up on Bailey’s doorstep this spring needing bottle feeding and TLC.

about its mission to return wildlife to its natural habitat.

A lot of education also goes on over the phone. Bailey frequently fields calls from farms and residents dealing with unwelcome critters. And though she is quick to say she is not nuisance control, she is more than happy to talk the problem through and suggest peaceful solutions that do not involve trapping or relocating.

“Most wildlife that move into a home or farm have an alternate habitat nearby; a place they can go that they’ve staked out as theirs,” she said. “If they are relocated, they are moving into another animal’s territory.”

Instead, she suggests using deterrents that make farms and homes much less desirable for wildlife, such as cats and dogs. And, if wildlife does take up residence in the attic, she recommends things such as strobe lights and turning on loud, annoying music before leaving

for work in the morning. (Unlike humans, squirrels and their like are not big fans of disco.) Ammonia-soaked rags can also make for a less-than-hospitable atmosphere that encourages them to return to the wild.

Meanwhile, Bailey’s dream is to build a large, freestanding wildlife rehabilitation center in the Bluegrass with a teaching hospital and plenty of educational components for the public. She wants to see a facility that not only will allow her full nights of sleep during the months of April, May, and June, but also will be there for perpetuity.

The bottom line for Bailey is doing all we can to preserve the creatures with whom humans share the earth. It might seem an odd career choice for a woman who has an MBA from Vanderbilt University, but it is obvious that it’s in every part of her being. Her husband, Mark Maloney, who manages Summer Wind, loves and understands her enough to know that even after a hard day working on the farm, he’ll be cooking the family dinner. She already has enough mouths to feed. 🐾

To donate or find out more about the Kentucky Wildlife Center, please go to its website at [kywildlife.org](http://kywildlife.org).