

Animal instincts

If a bird falls out of its nest in the forest, does anyone hear it?

Bob Zink does. By **Jennifer Uscher**

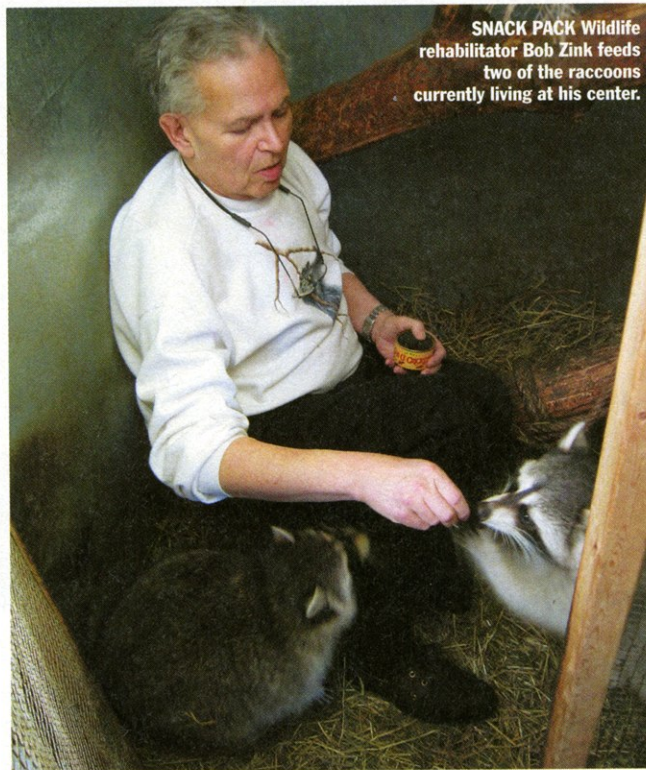
In the crowded headquarters of the United for Wildlife Rehabilitation and Education Center on Staten Island, Bob Zink is bracing for his busiest time of year. Each spring, Zink, 66, fields hundreds of calls from concerned citizens wondering what to do about the squirrels they've found in their attic or the pigeon with the broken wing in the park. And that is when Zink springs into action.

As one of only two dozen wildlife rehabilitators in New York City licensed by the State Department of Environmental Conservation (Zink is also licensed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, but not all his colleagues are), he is the go-to guy for injured critters found anywhere in the five boroughs. He responds to calls from regular citizens, veterinarians, and the parks, fire and police departments.

Despite being governmentally licensed, rehabbers are generally independent, self-funded volunteers; many also work out of their own homes. In fact, Zink's UWREC is the first and only place dedicated to caring for sick, injured or orphaned wildlife in New York City. Run entirely by volunteers, it is a nonprofit organization that receives no government funding and relies mainly on grants and donations.

Zink grew up near the Central Park Zoo, where, he says, he became "imprinted on the animals at a young age." While working as a civilian comptroller for the Navy, he began taking in injured animals and began doing so full-time when he retired ten years ago. Back then, he worked out of his Staten Island home. "But I got tired of red-tailed hawks on my dining room table and mallards in my bathtub," he says. In 1999, sensing a need for a center that could serve the whole city, Zink made his case to the NYC Parks Department for an official facility. Agreeing that one was long overdue, the agency donated a renovated two-story house at the edge of the William T. Davis Wildlife Refuge. "Historically, we always have issues regarding the care of injured or lost wildlife," says Staten Island Parks Commissioner Tom

Paulo, "and we never had a way of really addressing it except on an ad hoc basis. Bob saw the need for this center himself, and through our mutual efforts, we were able to accomplish something."



SNACK PACK Wildlife rehabilitator Bob Zink feeds two of the raccoons currently living at his center.

Zink and his staff of six volunteers deal daily with common city creatures like pigeons and squirrels. Raccoons Zeus and Princess found their way here when a contractor chopped down a tree at a nearby construction site and discovered a nest of babies inside. Zink also sees some unexpectedly exotic creatures. Priscilla, a large green iguana, took refuge here after being brought to him by the ASPCA, as did a 140-pound Burmese python that police had found slithering across a bike path in Brooklyn.

Zink's most recent crusade is to raise \$200,000 for an emergency oil-spill station on Staten Island, since none exists in the metropolitan area and New York has suffered some large spills in the past. In order to be prepared, he has studied with Jan White, one of the lead veterinarians

on the Exxon Valdez spill, and, as a result, is occasionally called in to aid birds and other animals which become exposed to petroleum. But despite his education and special certification in this area, Zink can't always help. He may be well trained, but he isn't well funded, and he bemoans the lack of resources available to acquire proper equipment. Recalling a past spill, he says, "I was embarrassed because I just showed up with a bottle of Dawn detergent."

Although Zink can sometimes rejuvenate a creature with as little as a bottle of dish-washing liquid,

there are moments when he can do nothing at all. Most rehabilitators must bring animals to a vet or a shelter for euthanasia, but Zink is the only one in the state licensed to perform the procedure himself. "I cry if they're so badly injured that I gotta put 'em down, and I cry if I release them and I'm happy for them," he says. "But I know that eventually we're all going to meet up there at the rainbow bridge." If you're wondering, we think that's near the Verrazano.

United for Wildlife, 2240 Richmond Ave at Travis Ave in Staten Island. Travel: From the Staten Island Ferry, take the S44 or S94 bus. For more information, to volunteer or to make a donation, call 718-979-5104 or e-mail razraccoon@aol.com.

The Historic Districts Council, the citywide advocate for New York's historic neighborhoods, holds a conference that explores preservation issues affecting New York City's suburban communities. The event begins with an opening-night reception honoring newly appointed New York City landmark-preservation commissioners on Fri 7, followed by a day of panel discussions such as "How Did the Suburbs Become Historic Places?" and "Saving the American Dream" on Sat 8. Then on Sun 9, a series of six bus tours explores suburban areas located within the city (participants choose one). Visit the website for a detailed schedule.

St. Agnes Book Sale

St. Agnes Branch of the New York Public Library, 444 Amsterdam Ave at 81st St (212-877-4380). Subway: 1, 9 to 79th St. Fri 7, Sat 8 11am-5pm; Sun 9 noon-5pm. **FREE** New and lightly used records and books given to the library by publishers and readers are for sale. Proceeds go to the library to help compensate for its severely cut budget this year.

★Swisspeaks Festival Fair

Grand Central Terminal, 42nd St at Park Ave (www.swisspeaks.org or www.myswitzerland.com). Subway: 42nd St S, 4, 5, 6, 7 to 42nd St-Grand Central. 8am-8pm. **FREE** Throughout March, Switzerland Tourism is taking over Grand Central with displays, activities, food booths and more. Highlights include storytelling, a Swiss food court, Sunday brunches (visit website to reserve a spot) and a photo booth where you can have a picture taken with Heidi on the Alps. The festivities here are part of a larger, two-month celebration of all things Swiss. See also Around Town Museums, American Folk Art Museum.

Architectural Digest Home Design Show

See Thu 6.

Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus

See Thu 6.

Walking tours

Bizarra and Eccentric Tour of the East Village

Michael Kaback (212-370-4214). Meet at the Astor Place cube sculpture, 8th St at Lafayette St. Subway: N, R, W to 8th St-NYU; 6 to Astor Pl. 6pm, \$15. Reservations required. Michael Kaback points out where to get custom tattoos, body piercings, magic potions and leather collars with studs. Bring extra bucks for Belgian french fries and ale from a monastery-themed pub.

Chelsea Market and the Old Meatpacking District

Foods of New York (212-239-8561, call for reservations and meeting place). Fri 10:30am, Sat 11am; \$35 includes food tastings. Get a taste of the history and culture of the Meatpacking District, while chomping on samples from area shops.

42nd St: Off, Off, Off Broadway

Mainly Manhattan Corners (212-755-6199). Meet at the northeast corner of First Ave and 43rd St. Subway: 42nd St S, 4, 5, 6, 7 to 42nd St-Grand Central. 1pm, \$10. Reservations required. Explore the history and architecture of the Chrysler Building, Grand Central Terminal and more.

NYC Live Music Tour

Cool Cat Club Crawls (212-696-6617, call for reservations and meeting place). Mon, Wed, Fri, Sat 9pm; \$20. Reservations required. Music man Jerry Rose leads the party to three live jazz, blues, rock or funk bands at three Greenwich Village clubs.

Saturday 8

Urban affairs

Enlightenment for the 21st Century Atmananda Yoga Center, 552 Broadway between Prince and Spring Sts, third floor (212-696-8596). Subway: 6 to Spring St. 8pm, \$20. Andrew Cohen, founder of *What Is Enlightenment?* magazine, talks about the nature of enlightenment and the potential of spiritual inquiry.

Jean Fautrier and His Critics

Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St, Schermerhorn Hall, eighth floor (212-854-7288). Subway: 1, 9 to 116th St-Columbia Univ. Tue-Sat 1-6pm. **FREE** Columbia University's Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Art Gallery and La Maison Française