

# Rehabilitating fisher in New Hampshire

The fisher is a fascinating animal to rehabilitate and its personality can be misunderstood. Although it is commonly called a fisher-cat it is not in the feline family and the only "Fisher Cats" found in New Hampshire would be the minor league baseball team in Manchester. The fisher is a member of the weasel family and related to the weasel, mink, marten and otter. The fisher has a long slender body with short muscular legs, which aid them in their climbing abilities. The fisher has inch-long, very rugged claws because it spends much of its time in trees and will "cache" (store or hide) their food in tree trunks and at the crotch of tree limbs. Fishers often den in hollows in trees about 20 feet off the ground. This New Hampshire mammal is nocturnal and, like the bobcat, tends to be elusive.

Callers to the Elaine Conners Center for Wildlife (ECCW) asking about a dark-colored animal they saw crossing the road "looking like a Slinky" may have seen a mink. The mink is smaller, runs with a hunchback gait and can be found near ponds and streams. The fisher is a larger mammal, more of a woodland dweller. Male fishers weigh up to 15 pounds or more, and are considerably larger than females. Other than mating season in March and April, the fisher is a solitary animal. Whenever I see a fisher in the wild, it is more of a glimpse or shadow. I can smell a fisher before I will see one. Once you have had a fisher in your care, you can easily identify it by its musky odor.

The first thing people say to me when we talk about fisher is "a fisher ate my cat." Fisher are opportunistic feed-

ers and will indeed take an available house cat if one crosses its path, but so will a Great Horned owl, bobcat, fox or coyote. Many more cats are killed by vehicles than by fisher. Most foods on the fisher's dinner plate consist of mice, songbirds, amphibians, squirrels, carrion and insects. Porcupines are also killed by fisher. Although a carnivore, it also eats a lot of fruits and nuts. In the fall the fisher feeds on apple drops which is why they can be seen at night in orchards.

We have had our share of fisher orphans, usually arriving in a litter of three to four kits. Oftentimes they will come in from loggers who call us advising that they fell a tree and kits tumbled out. In many cases, mom fisher will return for her young if one is patient. One caller who was having work done on a wooded lot called us after seeing fisher kits on the ground. They were newborns, almost like day-old kittens, and we advised the caller to WEAR GLOVES and to offer a heat source. In this case a soda bottle filled with warm water and wrapped in a clean rag did the trick. The babies cuddled next to the bottle and the caller watched from his window. The mother returned looking for her offspring. She reappeared over several hours, taking one kit at a time, moving them to safety. The caller was delighted with his part in reuniting the wildlife family. Note that it is important to leave the area. The mother of any wild mammal or bird will not return with people standing by. On-lookers are seen as a threat and she will abandon her young.

Although fisher are low on the totem pole for rabies, they ARE a carnivore and like any warm-blooded mammal, can carry rabies. For this reason when



fawns, which have been caught by a fisher, are admitted to our Center, we have the fawn humanely euthanized. Fisher attacks on fawns are seen once or twice a summer and are usually indicated by the bite marks on the back of the neck. In the summer of 2010 a fisher kit in Dover tested positive for rabies so again, always wear gloves when handling any wildlife, even youngsters!

*Elaine Conners Center for Wildlife (ECCW) is a non-profit wildlife rehabilitation center located in Madison.*

*The center is not funded to be a 24/7 emergency care clinic and asks callers to make arrangements to bring animals in during regular hours of operation. For more information about volunteering or donating to the center's work with wildlife, or about ECCW's Butler Education Center, call (603) 367-WILD (9453). Stay tuned for our next article which will talk about two of New Hampshire's buteo hawks, the broad-winged and the red-tailed. You will meet Hunter and Lailah, our foster-education hawks, up close in photos and personality!*



Kathy Ladisheff PHOTOS



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