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**Bear Rehabilitator: A Life's Journey**

By Holly Endersby

Every critter deserves its champion and for bears in Idaho, Sally Maughan of Garden City carries the torch. Sally has been a wildlife rehabilitator since 1978 but in May 1989, the arrival of a bundle of fur named Ruggles channeled her love of wildlife into bear rehabilitation and she's stayed with it ever since.

"I had a magical early childhood," Sally relates. "My parents owned Redfish Lake Lodge outside of Stanley at the base of the Sawtooth Mountains. So wildlife has always been a part of my life."

But when Sally was twelve, her parents sold the lodge and moved to Boise. She said she always told her parents they were crazy to leave the mountains and, ironically, Bear Valley where the lodge and lake reside.

"But Boise was fine and I graduated from high school there and began working right away as a ticket agent at the Boise airport for Bonanza Air," she recalls.

Over the years, Bonanza morphed and was finally absorbed into Northwest Airlines. Sally worked for the airline in Seattle and Salt Lake City. When she returned to Boise, she began a career in the travel agency business. Now, Sally works for Global Travel from a home office, something she says enables her to continue her work in bear rehabilitation.

"The owners of Global Travel are very supportive of my

work," Sally says. "Their flexibility allows me to work and keep up the rehab center as well. I couldn't do it any other way."

Sally says Ruth Melichar, the Bird Lady of Treasure Valley, was her mentor and encouraged her to become active in wildlife rehabilitation.

"Ruth was well known for her work rehabilitating birds," explains Sally. "I loved wildlife but I was worried I would be too emotional to deal with animals. But Ruth just kept encouraging me."

Occasionally, when Ruth had to be gone, she would leave a rehabilitation bird in Sally's care. Still, Sally resisted the call to work more consistently with wildlife. Until a squirrel changed her life.

"One day I found a squirrel in the yard that had been hit by a car. I took it to the veterinarian who patched it up but didn't know if it would make it or not," Sally says. "But the squirrel did make it. I realized then that I really could do wildlife rehabilitation."

Sally says the first year working with wildlife was not easy.

"It's tough when the animal you are caring for dies or has to be euthanized," she explains. "After the first year, you're either in wildlife rehabilitation for life or you're out of it."

Sally soon realized maintaining emotional distance was essential if she was to continue her work.

"I really hardened up that first year," she says.

Even today, Sally is a bit sad when the bears leave her care. She likens the release of an animal back into the wild as akin to sending your child off to college.

"You're sad to see them go, but kinda glad to have your life back," she laughs.

Sally initially worked with coyotes but after her first bear cub, Ruggles, appeared on the scene, she has specialized in bears. The animals come to wildlife rehabilitators from Idaho Department of Fish and Game officers who are called in to rescue an injured, ill, or in the case of young bears, abandoned animals.

"You must have a permit to work with wildlife," she explains. "When I started, the process was fairly simple - you simply told Fish and Game what animals you wanted to work with. Now, you have to apply and build your facility even before you know if you will be granted a permit."

Sally says this change has helped the de-



partment winnow out people who might take in only a single animal every two or three years.

"You have to submit a report every year to Fish and Game on your program and the disposition of the animals in your care," Sally says. "It allows the department to monitor the programs."

Sally funded the bear rehabilitation out of her own pocket the first eight years, but the financial drain was enormous.

"I'd maxed out my credit cards and loan options and was really at the end of my rope trying to figure out what to do with the bears in my care," she recalls.

Then, as if an answer to her prayers, the World Society for the Protection of Animals in London, England called for advice.

"They were planning on opening a bear rehabilitation center in Turkey and called me because apparently I was the only rehabilitator who had consistently and extensively documented the work done with orphaned cubs."

It was during this fateful phone call when WSPA officials discovered Sally was about to leave bear rehabilitation due to a lack of funds. Appalled that the center was faced with closing, the WSPA offered financial support.

"WSPA has been there for me ever since," Sally says.

Last year Sally received the largest number of cubs brought for rehabilitation.

"We had 53 bears," she recalls. "Because of the fires and drought there was a lot less food so it was a tough year for bears."

Spring bears arrive anytime from February through May and fall bears typically appear in August through October before bears hibernate.

Orphaned spring cubs have usually been separated from their mother by some kind of disturbance to the den such as construction going on nearby or flooding of dens from winter snowmelt and high water. In the fall, hikers and hunters are often the first to notice abandoned cubs.

"Hunters often find cubs and notify Fish and Game if it appears mom is nowhere to be found," says Sally. "And unfortunately some cubs are orphaned when the mother is killed by a hunter who didn't know she had cubs."

It is illegal to capture a bear cub and only Fish and Game officers, specific IDFG volunteers, and rehabilitators like Sally are permitted to trap



[Photo provided by Sally Maughan]

the orphaned cubs.

"If you find what appears to be an abandoned cub the first thing to do is call the Idaho Department of Fish and Game," insists Sally. "Tell them specifically where the cub is and, if you can, stay there until the officer arrives. If you can't reach IDFG, call me at the Bear Rehabilitation Center and I will get in touch with Fish and Game."

Sally says although the official position of IDFG is to rehabilitate abandoned cubs, the reality of a shortage of personnel and a limited number of live trap cages may mean an animal cannot be rescued right away.

"Once you call Fish and Game, be sure to



follow up with them to find out what happened," recommends Sally.

There continues to be a need for bear rehabilitators Sally says. However, the training involves a big commitment in time, and setting up and maintaining a center is expensive.

"State agencies are leery of giving a bear to someone who hasn't dealt with them before, so it's important for people interested in bear rehabilitation get training from someone already working in the field."

Many wildlife rehabilitators operate alone but Sally says wildlife centers that are supported by communities are also available on a limited basis. Working from her home means she is not set up for a host of volunteers, but Sally welcomes them anyway.

"But volunteers who are going to become rehabilitators have to understand that we strictly limit human/bear interaction," she explains. "We don't want bears to get in trouble when we release them, so we limit our contact."

Sally says volunteers are needed for the mundane chores of cleaning enclosures, rebuilding the deck areas where bears like to

hang out, and collecting donated fruit for the bears.

"And I could sure use a volunteer who coordinates other volunteers as well as someone interested in fund raising," the ever-busy Sally adds.

When September rolls around, the bears are prepared for either hibernation or release.

"We select cubs that are healthy and have adequate weight for release and prepare the others for hibernation by slowly reducing their food intake," she explains.

A few years ago, Sally nursed a badly scarred young female back to health. She says this young bear wanted freedom more than any other animal she has worked with.

"As she got better, all she would do was pace. She would not socialize with the other bears. When she was released back in Nevada where she was found, she literally ripped the door off the metal carrier and took off at a run. She knew she was home and nothing was going to stop her."

Sally says she has been fortunate to work with some wonderful Boise veterinarians. Dr.

Jeff Brouman of West Veterinary Clinic, performed surgery on a cub whose jaw had been shot, exposing almost the entire nasal cavity on one side.

"The bear was brought in by a very nice Fish and Game officer who hoped we could save him," Sally recalls. "Dr. Brouman is an excellent surgeon and after a two-hour operation was able to repair enough of the damage so that the cub was eventually successfully returned to the wild."

Sally says she's often encouraged by the kindness people like Dr. Brouman and the Fish and Game officer show to the bears and she thinks they are a reflection of our society as a whole.

"We are a caring and compassionate society," she stresses. "And many of the cubs are orphaned due to human activity, so it's only right that we try to save as many as we can."

For more information on Idaho Black Bear Rehabilitation Center and an astounding amount of information on black bears in general, visit [www.bearrehab.org/about.html](http://www.bearrehab.org/about.html). ISI