

GETTING TO KNOW WILDLIFE

LACKING HAIR BUT NOT ENERGY!



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Even though we no longer do wildlife rehabilitation, the animals we have helped over the years are never far from our minds. In fact, having had the privilege of caring for a wide variety of species, all with special personalities, has reinforced our commitment to reconnect people to nature.

It was late fall and the caller described finding a baby squirrel while raking leaves. They said it was very tiny and had no fur. The caller thought it was a newborn squirrel. Even though some squirrels have a second litter in the late summer, this would be very late in the season for a newborn. However, we had given up being surprised by exceptions to rules where Mother Nature is concerned.

When the squirrel arrived at the Centre we were astonished to see this hairless squirrel was not a newborn, but rather a juvenile red squirrel, that was completely bald. The squirrel was about 10 weeks old, but obviously had endured some serious hardships. Having had a few such experiences with hairless squirrels in the past, the diagnosis was that it was likely a stress induced nutritional deficiency. The course of treatment was a good diet, including vitamin supplements and sufficient time to recuperate, which meant over-wintering at the Centre.

Normally, at this age squirrels would be in a larger cage with a nesting box and lots of fresh branches to eat and climb. But since this little squirrel was debilitated when he arrived, we kept him in a smaller carrier with a heat source. This lasted only a

short time, as he was so full of energy, he needed more room.

We moved him to a large cage in the library with lots of sunshine. We also gave him extra blankets for his nesting box. He could not have been more pleased. We were mesmerized at his ability to dart around the cage at top speeds. It was tiring just to watch him.

Each day we peered into the cage looking for signs of improvement and sure enough one day a small tuft of red fur appeared on the top of his head. From there it took no time at all for him to become fully furred. He teamed up with two other reds and would spend his days pulling the filling from his stuffed toys to make nests in the evergreen tree that filled the cage. The following spring he was released back into the wild, in much better shape than when he arrived.