

Face Time: Wildlife rehabilitator Jennifer Marchigiani

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I have said many times over the years that I consider people who rescue animals to be the rock stars of our community, and Jennifer Marchigiani, who runs Misfits Rehab in Auburn, is among the rockiest of them all.

A wildlife rehabilitator over the past 20 or so years, Marchigiani has saved more critters — and more TYPES of critters — than anyone can count.

She once had a coyote in for treatment. More often it's porcupines, skunks, opossums, squirrels, foxes, beavers, raccoons and birds of various types.

She has a special fondness for bats, does Marchigiani, and will treat an injured one whenever the chance arises.

At Misfits Rehab on Garfield Road, Marchigiani is surrounded by animals of all kinds; dozens of creatures who are on the mend and being prepared for a return to the wilderness.

She launched Misfits Rehab in 2002. Before that, she had been a zookeeper in Ohio for a couple years before moving to Maine where she worked as a vet tech for a while.

In the Lewiston-Auburn area, Marchigiani is part of a core group of people dedicated to the protection and treatment of animals who need that kind of help. Marchigiani often works with the likes of wildlife handler Rich Burton and Drew Desjardins of Mr. Drew and His Animals, Too.



Wildlife Rehabilitator Jennifer Marchigiani with an opossum named Percy which she rescued in 2019. *Russ Dillingham/Sun Journal File*

Earlier in the spring, Marchigiani agreed to drive a dead 500 pound dolphin from Portland to Lewiston in the back of her pickup truck. To say her days have variety would be to commit a gross understatement.

And because Marchigiani is almost always at work in some fashion, we had to be quick to hit her with our questions. Below are her responses.

Do you recall when you decided that you would dedicate your life to the care of animals? My life was dedicated to animals from the start. My parents often still tease me about being the crazy kid who would run outside crying after a rainstorm because the worms were drowning in mud puddles and I would pick them all up and put them back on the lawn. From there I wanted to become a vet until I was old enough to find out that they had to euthanize animals, too. So I didn't pursue that career, but now here I am having to do so many things like a vet without getting paid to do so!

What's the hardest thing about what you do? The absolute hardest part is "playing God." When you get an animal that is broken beyond repair and you have to make that call. Even when you know it is the right thing to do, it does not make it any easier. We have signs around the area, "There are worse things in life than death" and "We can at least release them from their suffering," all things to try to ease the mental trauma of having to take a life that you find so precious. The signs help the mental part, but not the emotional part.

What's the most rewarding? Best thing in the world is "Release Day" when all of your struggles, vet bills, sleepless nights, gallons of formula and tons of food consumed and now you get to watch them scamper off into the forest, into the field, explore the great outdoors in total freedom and return to their natural habitat with a second chance to thrive as nature intended.

Is there an animal you have a particular fondness for? Beavers! Although I am commonly known as the BatGurl with my love and affection for bats. I specialized in bats out of a need in Maine. When I first started rehabbing there was no one who really knew much about bats in this area. So, I took it upon myself to go to Texas and network with bat rehabbers all over and took them on as a specialty since no one else wanted to rehab them. But beavers have totally stolen my heart!

How can people help? People expect me to answer "Give us money!" Since a lot of people don't even realize that we are not paid by anyone. Not the state, not the government, nothing. It's out of our own pocket unless we get a donation from the public. But, while that is great and needed, there are so many other ways people can help. They don't have to give a dime, but they can spread info about tricks on how to humanely evict an animal that may be in your attic space or tell people to wait until late fall before chopping down that tree you no longer want in your yard. When your sheets and pillowcases need to be changed, donate the

old ones to a rehabber. If you think you are interested in helping wildlife, come volunteer. Are you a handyman with a woodworking hobby? Donate some squirrel boxes. There is so much people can do to help. Even on the financial end, people who can't donate directly may have a family, friend or even employer that does monthly, quarterly or annual donations and can recommend us. Doesn't cost *them* a dime but it helps spread the word.

Find out more about Marchigiani and her work at misfitsrehab.org/

In a word: A Hi-C toast to the letter C

Mark LaFlamme: Who wears short shorts? Read on and find out!

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