BEAR IN MIND

Vol. 17, Issue 2 Spring 2012

Photo Credit: Bill Lea

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Photo of our fund raising thermometer. To make a donation to help build our new visitor center, log on to www.americanbear.org and use the donate button.

BEAR IN MIND
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BEAR IN MIND (BIM) is published three times a year by The American Bear Association™ (ABA), a 501(c) (3) nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting a better understanding of the black bear through education, observation and experience. The ABA also owns and operates the Vince Shute Wildlife Sanctuary in Orr, MN. To become a member or to learn more please contact us at:

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In this Issue of Bear In Mind

FROM THE BEARS DEN 4
LITTLE FOX FACE *BY CARL RACCHINI* 6-7
LIFE TIME ACHEVEMENT AWARD – KAREN HAUSERMAN 8
WATCH AND LEARN, PATCH - THE MIRACLE BEAR, PART 2 BY KLARI LEA 10-11
THE MERRY MONTH OF MAY AT VSWS *BY KAREN HAUSERMAN* 14-15
A SANCTUARY ROMANCE *BY LIESEL SCHMIDT* 16-17
BECOME A MEMBER 19

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FROM THE BEARS DEN

Our first bear arrived on April 1st and many that I talked to thought I was doing an April fool's joke. This was a big male (identity unknown) and the males always seem to come in first to check things out and then move on. We have trail cameras out year round and with these cameras we see many different four legged critters and an occasional two legged visitor. The last few years we have been seeing more timberwolves in the feeding area, or as we like to call it "the magic circle". One of our Canadian volunteers snapped a picture of a wolf at 11am. He was eating apricots!

We received 12 inches of snow on April 15th and the power was out for two days. Keith D. & Michael T. were at the sanctuary during the storm as many trees broke off from the heavy wet snow. I live 15 miles from the sanctuary and the next day it took me 4 hours to make the trip. A 4 wheel drive pickup and powersaw helped with the trees and snow.

The front cover of this issue was one of the most famous bears to ever visit the sanctuary. He was called Duffy, the gentle giant. Duffy was one of Vince's favorite bears and a picture of Duffy and Vince appeared on the Johnny Carson show. I first saw Duffy when he was a young bear. The white V on his chest made him easy to identify and I still think the V was for Vince. Everyone was sad when Duffy died and even now, visitors to the sanctuary ask about him.

I would like to welcome Keith Doeffler as our new sanctuary manager at VSWS. Keith has been a volunteer for the past 5 years and is very knowledgable on bear feeding and what it takes to manage all things on the sanctuary grounds.

We are always looking for volunteers and this year is no different. If you're interested in volunteering some time to help the bears give me a call. We are looking forward to another great year.

Thanks,
Dennis Udovich
President ABA

DONATIONS NEEDED

To help secure the future of the sanctuary, donations are needed for the purchase of critical habitat. Lands that are major wildlife travel corridors and bear habitat need to be acquired for the security of the bears that frequent the sanctuary. Some of these properties have already been logged off and some are being leased and could be sold at any time. We need your help to fund these major acquistions as they become available for the safety of the bears that visit the sanctuary. Remember the American Bear Association is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and your donation is deductible to the full extent of the law. We will provide you with a document for your tax records

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LITTLE FOX FACE

By Carl Racchini

When people visit the Vince Shute Wildlife Sanctuary they come to see the black bear, but they are likely to see a variety of animals. Red squirrels and eastern chipmunks are commonly observed from the deck along with a variety of birds. These include goldfinch's, rose-breasted grosbeaks, red-winged blackbirds, crows and ravens. Over 55 species of birds have been seen at the sanctuary. On the ride in people report seeing woodchucks, snowshoe hares, white-tail deer, and occasionally a timber wolf.

There is one resident of the Sanctuary that visitors seldom see, but is commonly observed by volunteers. It is a member of the weasel family called the pine marten. Last season we had a pine marten that was regularly observed right behind the cook shack. We never could determine if this marten was a male or a female. The marten kept us entertained throughout the season. We watched it hunting for voles and chipmunks and occasionally saw it carry one off. We also saw it take advantage of some of the fruit that had been put out for the bears. It appeared to like the dates the most, but perhaps this is because they are larger in size and easier for us to observe.

Martens weigh between one and four pounds with the male being larger. At the sanctuary we have observed several different martens over the years. We have seen all the various color phases of the marten from blond to chestnut brown. Martens have a patch under their throats that vary in size and can be creamy white, but most often orange. They eat a variety of fruits, insects, small rodents, birds, bird eggs, or feed on carrion. The largest animal they are known to hunt is the snowshoe hare. These curious little critters have been know to raid backpacks or tents to get a meal.

Sanctuary Road.

Keith and Michael taking a walk

At times we observed the marten watching us as we passed under a tree it was in. The inquisitive marten would occasionally come closer to get a better look at us and we would get to see its face and think it looked like a little fox rather than a cousin of the weasel. Our little fox face took advantage of an old pileated woodpecker hole in an aspen tree for cover. Whether it raised any young in the hole we will never know.

The pine marten needs mature forests of conifers and hardwoods. The more blown down trees and trees with cavities the better. Martens are the most arboreal member of the weasel family. They will not cross large openings such as fields and clear-cut that are wider than 250 yards. A martens territory size is dependent on the availabity of good habitat and food. Males use territories that range in size from 1500 to 2500 acres while a females territory is 600 to 1500 acres. With the abundant rodent supply at the sanctuary our martens territories are probably smaller than the average.

The species was quite common in Minnesota up until the late 1800's. Unregulated fur trapping and harvesting of timber caused the species decline and by 1920 it was almost gone from Minnesota. In the 1950's it was considered extinct in Minnesota. During the 1970's isolated reports of pine martens came in and by the 1980's the species had miraculously returned. Today the DNR estimates there are 10,000 in the state and the species is extending it's range.

April snow storm Sanctuary Road.

At the Sanctuary we have two predators that are a threat to the marten. One is its larger cousin the fisher and the other is the great horned owl. The owl who is also referred to as the tiger of the sky is the greater threat. As I head to the Sanctuary in a few days I am curious to see if the little fox face is still behind the cook shack.

LIFE TIME ACHEVEMENT AWARD
KAREN HAUSERMAN

Karen Hauserman, left, Klari Lea, right, presenting the award.

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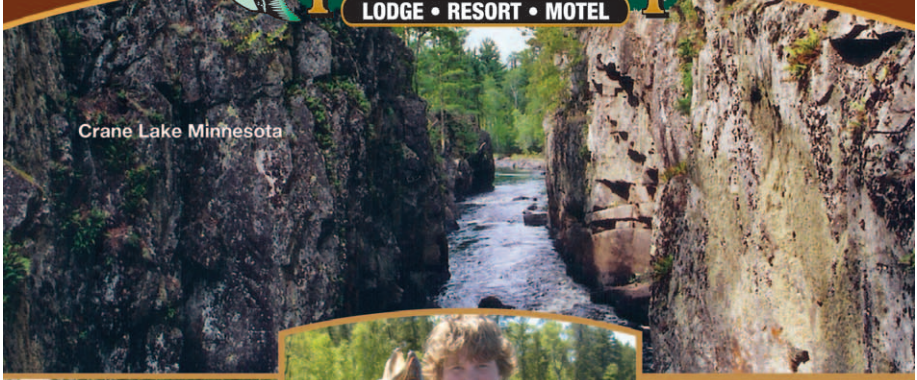

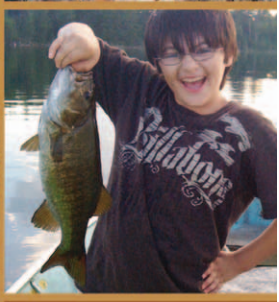

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WATCH AND LEARN

PATCH - THE MIRACLE BEAR, PART 2

By Klari Lea

Note: To recap part 1 in the winter 2012 issue of BEAR IN M IND: Patch, a popular 17 year old bear visiting the Vince Shute Wildlife Sanctuary, became a favorite of everyone. Returning visitors and volunteers, alike, had the rare privilege of learning from and observing his developmental growth over the years from a carefree sub-adult to a contending dominant bear. After incurring serious wounds during a battle with another bear, Patch's fate hung in the balance. Upon his unexpected return to the Sanctuary late the next season and in light of his poor health, volunteers agonized over what to do. Should nature takes its course or should the Sanctuary intervene to help one of its proven "educational ambassadors" survive? With the close of the season, volunteers having to leave for school obligations, and winter quickly approaching, the author chose to stay behind in an effort to give Patch a fighting chance for survival. The story continues…

As weeks passed and winter's chill became ever more evident, I stood vigilant in my watch for Patch from the coziness of my cabin. My time in the solitude and quiet of the Sanctuary was an extraordinary learning experience. I felt humbled by the opportunity to closely observe Patch as he slept, ate, and struggled to maneuver around various obstacles in the woods. I also discovered that the void left behind by the absence of the other bears was quickly filled by a host of different animals. Flocks of migrating birds on their way to kinder wintering grounds often found refuge in the meadow. Pine martens, minks, raccoons and others ambled about in search for any tasty morsel they could find. The deer moved quietly across the field taking time to munch on tasty greenery still available. My nights were filled with mixed emotions as I listened to musical medleys of howling wolves and yipping coyotes. The thought of predators so close aroused nagging concerns for Patch's well-being; was he resting safely in adequate cover? Can he defend himself? Although I understand the sobering role nature plays in defining life and death in the wild, I realized my drive helping Patch was not exactly "letting nature take its course." As time passed I watched him gradually transform from a lifeless figure to a modest and somewhat fit bruin. He finally attained the critical weight to face the next 5 to 7 months without food while in torpor. Satisfaction in his body weight progress was severely dampened by the fact that Patch never regained any semblance of a normal bear gait. He still crawled pathetically with his rump hiked-up in the air and his front quarters resting on his now calloused elbows. As he continued to gain weight he visited the Sanctuary less frequently…some days he even skipped coming altogether. Finally, I understood we did all that we could for Patch and it was my time to leave. I turned over "guardianship" to a wonderful local volunteer who kept up the feedings for a brief time until Patch no longer returned. He was on his own.

I left the Sanctuary with the realization that I would probably never see Patch again. I took solace in knowing we provided him with some comfort and a fighting chance to survive. Our visitors and volunteers all had the privilege of learning so much from watching Patch for the past 17 years. No doubt, he had served as an effective ambassador for all

bears in our educational endeavors at the Sanctuary.

Time seemed to move swiftly during the off-period and before we knew it the 2011 season was upon us. Every year offers different adventures and enormous challenges – thus nothing is ever taken for granted at the Sanctuary. Similarly, the bears' visits are unpredictable and dictated by the availability of natural forage as well as impacts on their ever changing environment. Spring began with the typical excitement of awaiting the annual return of the bears, friends, and new volunteers. Yet on a sad note, the seasonal thaw also revealed the remnant bodies of two of the older bears who frequented the Sanctuary. Their natural time was up and we were grateful for all the wonderful years of learning achieved by observing the behaviors of these two special bears; Joseph and Big Red.

In spite of the loss of two old ursine "friends," the 2011 season was about to become very memorable. While working in the field on a warm summer day (July 7th) a few of us noticed a large bear in the general vicinity of the meadow. As our eyes struggled to focus on the distant form we offered guesses as to which of the bears was returning. Our excitement heightened as the figure edged closer. A familiar blaze on the bruin's chest evoked a sudden gasp as a few of us suddenly recognized the bear – Patch had returned!! Out of shadows of bittersweet memories arose a miracle; Patch had survived against all odds. Incredibly he was now walking on all four feet! Although he still moved with an obvious limp he appeared much stronger. Patch's significant recovery during his winter sleep was beyond belief. No wonder scientists devote years of research in unraveling the mysteries and processes associated with this special time in the annual life cycle of the black bear. Patch's recuperation certainly was one the high points of the 2011 summer. The season concluded with Patch, a now hardy and confident bear, leaving on schedule with the other departing bears. Will he return next year? We don't know. Regardless of the outcome his life serves as a lasting tribute to the resilience and unwavering resolve of these animals. Most importantly, Patch's story remains as one of those valuable "teachable moments" to be shared with thousands of visitors eager to learn about bears.

There will be a few who read this story and judge our efforts to help Patch – a wild animal. Perhaps some will surmise that we actually did a disservice by working to extend his life especially in light of his physical limitations. A few critics might even point out the irony and ask why did we not allow this bear to die naturally especially given our acceptance of nature's role in dictating the destiny of wildlife. Wildlife rehabilitation and intervening in the fate of injured animals has always been the subject of heated controversy. Personally, I make no apologies for compassion. Assisting any one or any creature struggling and desperate for help comes "naturally" to me. To turn away and ignore the urgency of a situation by rationalizing or by just saying, "Well, that's nature," is NOT natural for me. In addition, I see traits such as sympathy, empathy, caring, understanding, gentleness, and the like as definite character strengths not weaknesses or flaws as some others might contend. At the Sanctuary I believe we "use" the visiting bears as "teaching tools" in our educational endeavors which benefit both humans and bears. With that mission comes a moral obligation to secure their well-being whenever feasible and appropriate. Simply put, we are taking responsibility and "returning the favor" as we all watch and learn from the incredible bears at the Vince Shute Wildlife Sanctuary.

Timber Wolf photo taken by volunteer Ann Klassen at the sanctuary May 6th

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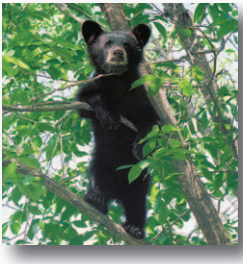

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THE MERRY MONTH OF MAY AT VSWS

By Karen Hauserman

Every year along about March my friends would say to me, "well I guess you'll be getting busy with the bears in a couple of months". What they did not realize was that prepping for the season actually starts in early spring. Also there is always much to do during every month for ABA.

In April the bears start returning, the weather can be very unpredictable, from mild temps and sunny days to howling winds and freezing snow. But no matter what the weather brings there is still work that must be done. And there are always a few hardy souls up there brave and confident enough to take on the tasks, all for the love of the bears. This year on April 16th two of those hardy souls were greeted with 12 inches of snow when they woke up. Ah! another challenge, but no rest for the weary.

As April finishes up and turns to May, temperatures rise, the snow melts, the creek thaws, opens up and runs deeper and faster. Bird migration proceeds, buds start to slowly emerge from the trees. The air is crisp, and skies ever so blue. However at night cold freezing temperatures swoop in and at sun rise the sanctuary is once again like a crystal wonderland.

There are cabins to be cleaned and repaired, mattresses to be redistributed throughout camp. The cook shack, which was totally dismantled in October has to be reassembled. The cabinets need to be washed out, all dishes, pots and pans are rewashed and put away. Chairs and tables rearranged. All laundry and volunteer vests are laundered. The pantry needs to be restocked. Totes of stored books all have to be put back on the shelves, and the reading area set up.

Merchandise for the gift store starts arriving, along with back order slips, out of stock or no longer available notices. So once again the best laid plans must be altered. Every thing that does arrive must be inventoried, priced,and stocked into the store.

Since there is no electricity on site many batteries must be charged. Propane refrigerators, hot water heater, and stoves have to be cleaned, reconnected and fired up. No water also means more work than just turning on the faucets. Water must be hauled in and water tanks cleaned, filled and hoses reconnected.

As all this is going on bears are wandering about and returning. Records are kept to keep track of which bears came in and when. There is a list of possible sows that could arrive with new cubs, this list is compiled the previous year. Also recording which ones do come in with cubs of the year and how many cubs they have. Records are also compared to last years records of what mamas left with cubs and how many, and weather those mamas come in with yearlings and how many. There is great satisfaction as they return knowing they made it through another winter. Even greater than that satisfaction, is the joy of seeing the new cubs and the awareness of the perpetuation of the species.

It is in the month of May that something very, very special happens at VSWS, and without it happening the sanctuary could not go on. May not only brings about better weather and new cubs, it also brings new volunteers to VSWS, as well as some returning volunteers. As the new comers arrive they will go through bear safety classes, learn the policies, procedures and rationale for such. Learn the behavior and ecology of bears. They will acquaint themselves with the land and its inhabitants, as well as each other. For many it will be the first time in their lives that they see a wild bear. They will begin to realize the uniqueness of this very special place, and they will understand why the heart of the sanctuary is often referred to as "the magic circle". They will get closer to the heart of a bear than most people can ever imagine. For many it is a life changing experience.

At the risk of not making this article read like a "to do list" it is impossible to mention all the chores involved. Along with those already mentioned, there are cars and trucks to be readied, there is the work in the pole barn sorting packages of nuts, seeds and fruits, there are trees to be pruned and planted ,a road to be repaired and graveled, it is a never ending list.

In spite of all the work that goes on in early Spring, one can not help but notice the bears keen awareness and understanding of their environment that we as humans will never have. It is a humbling and amazing experience, which explicitly points out that VSWS is clearly their land not ours. Thus as Memorial Day weekend draws near, the story of another season is about to begin.

THE SCOUTS SAY THANKS

The scouts from Troop 427 along with their parents had a great time last year at the sanctuary. The overnight with the bears was a great idea and it helps us all to appreciate and understand the perspective of life from a bear's point of view. We are very excited to do it again this year. We have been promoting it at the council level and are expecting an awesome turn out. Elijah Halverson-Sr. Patrol Leader

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A SANCTUARY ROMANCE

By Liesel Schmidt

I have this friend that finds it necessary to meddle in my love life. Some of you may know her from her time at the Sanctuary – Carolyn Laursen – a former employee with ABA, but her guidance of my personal affairs began long before ABA was ever in our lives. Somehow, she was always much better at choosing men for me than I could for myself; my relationships with her selected suitors lasting longer than any of the fellows I found on my own.

One summer, while I was busy hunting for jobs, Carolyn was volunteering at this remote, north woods place called the Vince Shute Wildlife Sanctuary. She kept telling me how much she enjoyed volunteering there, and mentioned some of the other volunteers, including this guy from Scotland named Michael Tubb, whom she assured me was a fun character. I didn't put much thought into it and neither did she since I had to turn-down her following invitation to volunteer at VSWS with her, as I was far too busy with my job hunt.

The next summer, Carolyn got a job working with ABA and commanded of me "You're coming to visit." That was it – no option to refuse. Well, she was my best friend, after all, and was stuck in the middle of nowhere with a bunch of wild animals (and a few bears and rodents, too!), so I decided to finally visit. I instantly fell in love with the place. Something about the peace and simplicity of it all was a much-needed break from my hectic work life.

That weekend trip to VSWS was always in the back of my mind when I returned to my job in the cities. June and July came and passed, and it wasn't until August that I finally found free time again. "You have to meet this guy Michael," Carolyn was telling me when we chatted online. "Who knows," she persuaded, "you could have a fun summer fling or something." Well, I didn't know whether I could be bothered with any kind of relationship at the moment, but I had some free time, the tranquil woods were calling to me, and Carolyn's track record of being successful at setting-me-up was worth putting to the test once again.

Saturday morning found me in the cook shack on the Sanctuary grounds, eating some fish this 'Michael' guy and some other volunteers had caught and prepared. It was absolutely delicious, and the flavorful fish was a definite point in Michael's favor. But, then he ruined it by opening his mouth to say "even Steeeven." Yet again. It must have been the sixth time I'd heard it in the last 45 minutes. "Annoying," I thought. Definitely NOT a point in his favor. However, throughout the rest of the weekend we talked more and more, and he showed me what he knew about wild berries, wildlife, and life in the woods. Intelligence – a point once more in his favor. The Scottish accent and exciting foreigner appeal wasn't hurting his chances either.

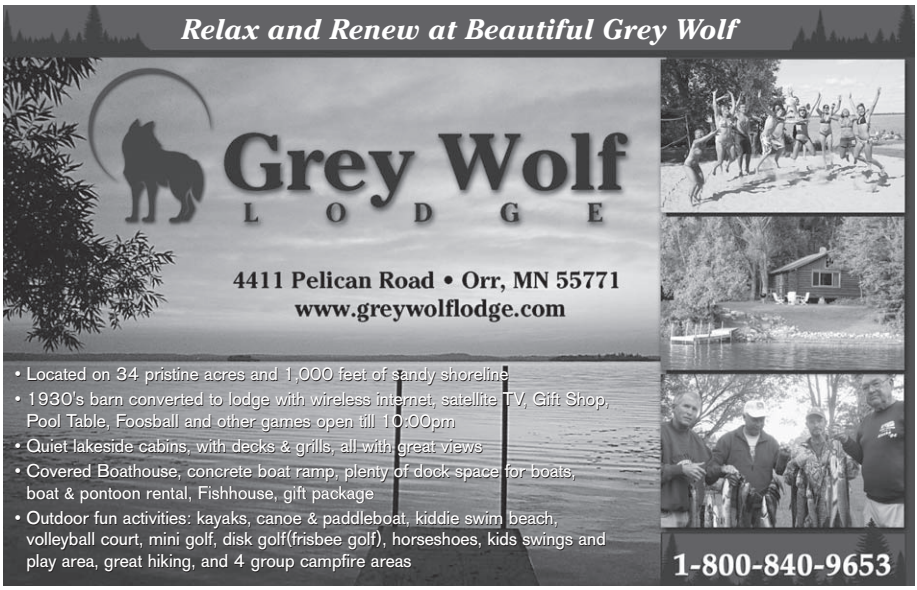
What finally plunged the scales permanently into the positive realm for Michael was the way he interacted with his older friend Karen (you all probably know her as one of ABA's founders). She wasn't able to move around as well as these college-age volunteers, and

Michael was always the first one to offer to help her. There were several occasions when he would plunk himself down on the couch, utterly exhausted, claiming he couldn't move and planned to sleep for days, only to spring up and aid Karen with something the moment the request left her lips, drawing upon energy that shouldn't have existed. His capability for kindness and affection bowled me over, left me reeling, and had me hooked.

The next thing I knew, a week had passed and I had come to realize a few things. Firstly, Michael's constant repeating of phrases was the recalling of an inside joke with another volunteer, and in a remote place with no real sources of entertainment, such silly things are necessary in order to keep one's sanity. Secondly, the more we conversed, the less I noticed the accent and foreign appeal, becoming attracted to Michael specifically for who he was, not where he came from. And finally, I realized that there was no way I wanted this growing bond with him to fizzle out with the summer's heat.

While thinking over these surprising and personally profound things, Carolyn appeared on the road in front of me. She had just returned from a few days away in the cities, and was coming to check-up on things at the Sanctuary. She rolled down her window as she approached, completely surprised to see me and said, "You're still here?! Weren't you leaving four days ago?" I grinned, pointed to Michael and replied, "I decided to stay a bit longer." She smirked, fully pleased and proud of herself. Her match-making had worked on me yet again, and this time – though she didn't know it yet – it was for good.

Nearly four years have passed since that day. Michael and I are married, having spent many months on mountains of paperwork to get here, and although it wasn't always easy, it is well worth it. I have never been so happy, and I have a meddling Carolyn and the enchantment of the woods to thank for it.



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