May 5, 2021

To Whom it May Concern,

I am writing this letter on behalf of Eunice Demond who has been authorized as a wildlife rehabilitator since 2012.

Like other wildlife rehabilitators, Eunice completed an all day training course that covered topics such as state laws and regulations relating to wildlife, evaluating orphaned animal situations, the do's and don'ts of caring for common mammals and birds found in our state, and how to recognize, manage and control the transmission of diseases found in wildlife. In order to become recognized as a volunteer wildlife rehabilitator who can legally care for sick, injured and orphaned wildlife, Eunice completed a 40 hour apprenticeship with an authorized Connecticut wildlife rehabilitator, got a signed statement and created a partnership with a local veterinarian and passed an examination to prove that she understood the fundamentals of caring for wild animals.

Additionally, Eunice completed a mandatory class focused on the care of Rabies Vector Species (RVS) and got vaccinated for rabies so that she could become an RVS rehabilitator. As part of the RVS requirements, Eunice must have an outdoor pre-release cage that is at least 6 ft wide by 8 ft long by 6 ft high, the structure must have either solid or double wired walls, a solid or double wired roof, wire buried under the floor, a double door vestibule entrance and a locking system to keep unwanted visitors out. This 6x8x6 foot cage is considered by the National Wildlife Rehabilitators Association to be adequate for housing 4 juvenile raccoons prior to release.

Being that Eunice is one of approximately 15 people in the state able to care for raccoons and that 300 or more raccoons are found orphaned each summer, you can imagine that a wildlife rehabilitator receives numerous pleas for help with baby raccoons. On average raccoon rehabbers in small home-based facilities are caring for at least 10 and as many as 40 animals per year and are turning away numerous others. The limiting factor is typically financial constraints and the ability to provide adequate outdoor housing.

I first visited Eunice in the summer of 2015 to review her cages and to talk with her about RVS policies. Like many RVS rehabilitators, Eunice made some stumbled early on and we had conversations regarding improvements that could/should be made. Since 2015, we have talked many times about animal cases and caging, and each time, she has taken my advice and implemented as many changes as possible. Some of the changes included but were not limited to; removing debris, old structures and old cages from her property, erecting new fencing, implementing better cleaning protocols, purchasing a shed to more safely store animal foods and creating an outdoor quarantine area within her outdoor caging complex. The size and scope of her activities has also become more refined and she now limits the number of raccoons she will take in as well as limiting herself to a smaller subset of species.
I most recently visited Eunice on April 9th of this year. We talked about limiting flies and rats which is a challenging task for anyone who houses animals. I suggested she use the green screen that she used on her privacy fence on the outside of her raccoon cage instead of a solid wall or in addition to her wire sides. That may help reduce the number of flies that can easily access the cages. (Caring for an animal that likes to soak its food in water and that is learning to forage and needs food available around the clock makes it nearly impossible to not have some flies but perhaps mesh sides will help.) We talked about removing a few more piles of wood and/or any cages that may be less useful. As a wildlife rehabilitator money is tight and everyone tends to hold onto things that they think may be useful. Eunice is no different, but she is doing a much better job of not piling up materials or scattering them around her yard. I didn’t see any signs of rats or of food being out in the open.

I did see a woman who is passionate and dedicated to her quest to help raccoons and other animals. Her enthusiasm and tireless efforts to provide care for animals is inspiring. I have never known her to be confrontational or unwilling to do everything that she can to meet the constant demands placed upon her. I have worked for the DEEP as the permitting officer for the Wildlife Rehabilitators since 1998 and I have visited numerous facilities and dealt with many rehabilitators who faced violations or similar requests and very few have handled themselves as gracefully and efficiently as Eunice. Whether you like her or not, whether you approve of her efforts to care for orphaned baby raccoons or not, you can’t deny that she is determined and clear about her mission. She has most certainly made herculean efforts to make improvements in order to maintain the privilege of working with wildlife and I believe she will continue to do so.

I also believe she has provided the town of Guilford and the entire region with a unique service. The state receives 2000+ calls each month during the summer from people urgently trying to help injured, orphaned and sick wildlife. We rely upon a network of roughly 300 volunteer wildlife custodians who care for 13,000+ animals each year. Rehabilitators get no financial or emotional support for the many calls at all hours day and night, for the countless number of sick and injured animals that they desperately try to keep alive or worst yet, have to euthanize, or for the many mouths they are feeding and cleaning up after. Being a wildlife rehabilitator takes a great amount of compassion and character. It’s a tireless, often thankless, definitely sleepless endeavor. It requires learning and re-learning diets, formulas, medications, vaccinations, and release techniques. It takes an army of like-minded allies, friends, colleagues and family members to get through each and every season. Guilford is blessed with not just one but several people willing to go the extra mile to help wildlife. Hopefully the town can find a way to help support them and help them make improvements that everyone can be proud of.

Should you have any questions or concerns about the wildlife rehabilitation program or about Eunice’s activities relating to wildlife rehabilitation please do not hesitate to contact me. The best way to reach me right now is by email at Laurie.fortin@ct.gov.

Sincerely,

Laurie M. Fortin
Wildlife Biologist
CT, DEEP